

The Freethinker

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THE HEBREW BIBLE, our *Old Testament*, begins with the significant words, "In the Beginning the *Elohim* created—." By the term *Elohim* we are to understand the plural—viz. "The gods created." But, as so often in the infallible scriptures, too careless editing the plural serves to remind us that our *Book of Genesis* was originally written by *polytheists*; the explanation proffered by ingenuous—or ingenious—modern theologians that the plural signifies here what is sometimes termed "a plural of majesty," the royal "we" appears at least, highly improbable. The original author of *Genesis* was a polytheist, probably of Mesopotamian origin; our *Genesis* represents a probably much edited text by Hebrew priests who arbitrarily identified the Mesopotamian *Elohim* with their own tribal god, Jehovah, Jahveh, or Yah, as it is variously spelt.

Eastwards in Eden

It is now known and accepted by all non-Christian scholars and probably nowadays by most Christian ones above the Billy Graham-Salvation Army mental level, that the famous story of the Garden of Eden was originally of Babylonian and *not* of Hebrew origin. The name Eden, or Edinna, represented the name of Mesopotamia, or part of it, given it by the ancient Hebrews. According to the late Joseph Furma, the *Book of Genesis* in its present bowdlerised form, dates from about 800 B.C., about two centuries before the traditional date of the Babylonian exile of the ancient Hebrews. The Mesopotamian original has disappeared, unfortunately, but it may still be recovered by the spade of a fortunate archaeologist, just as the Babylonian original of our story of the Flood was discovered a few years ago, to the great discomfort of the Fundamentalists. In its current Hebrew version, everyone knows the famous story of Adam, the first man, and Eve—not to mention that most famous of snakes who was the *fons et origo* of our "First Parents" downfall. In the original Chaldean version, now no longer extant, there seems to have been a panic amongst the *Elohim*, for fear that having eaten of the Tree of Knowledge, the first man and woman would themselves become *Elohim-gods* and then proceed to expel the other gods from the famous garden. Even in our monotheistically edited version, Jehovah displays distinct signs of fear.

Eden—a Stone Age Myth?

Much ink has been spilt by both believers and unbelievers on the religious background to the Eden saga. More recently attention has also been directed to its much less known sociological origins. In most primitive peoples one finds fairy tales which express profound popular discontent with the present and a wistful nostalgia for the good old days of a vanished Golden Age—in what the Greeks called the Age of Saturn; this idea, it appears, was practically universal. In the annals of sociology, the Garden of Eden, where primal man and woman lived in perfect innocence, is only one of many such tales. Sociologists

have seen in such tales dreams of the enslaved classes in a complex civilisation founded on human slavery like all civilisations were, for the primitive Stone Age era, during which mankind roamed the earth in freedom, collecting the fruits of a bountiful nature long before the rise of organised life and labour in cities with its inevitable concomitant slavery for the toiling masses. As and when viewed from the standpoint of sociology, the Garden of

Eden perhaps represents a Stone Age myth or reminiscence, a nostalgic memory of the good old times in which, as so often, distance lends enchantment, when mankind lived without organised labour from hand to mouth on the fruits of the earth. The legend of Eden

arose amongst the dwellers in the Chaldean cities by the banks of the Euphrates and Tigris, one of the first centres of city life and consequent organised labour, in which man was becoming painfully familiar with the curse of Eden—work, and in which he could only exist by "the sweat of his brow." In time it filtered through to the ancient Hebrews, then also emerging from a free nomadic life into the restraints of city life and civilisation whence it has descended to us. If one wished to extend this line of reasoning, one could relevantly add that the sequential story of Cain's fratricidal murder is another dim and mournful memory of social transition when the first wandering herdsmen, represented by Cain in the legend, began to pray on the hitherto peaceful tillers of the soil, and to kill and enslave the peaceful cultivators represented by Abel.

The Garden of Eden and the Gospels

However, sociology is pre-eminently a modern science; such a sociological interpretation of the legend of Eden as that outlined above would have been inconceivable prior to recent years. Historically the Garden of Eden is best known for its connection with the science, or rather pseudo-science of Theology, and however it may have originated in the context of primitive human society, none can deny the vast influence on the evolution both of religion and, through its agency, on mankind. In a certain sense one can say that Christianity, at least as a theological system, began in the Garden of Eden. This is the more curious in that our Gospels, at least, never mention either Eden itself or, as far as the present writer can recall, Adam (except in a genealogy) or Eve, or even the snake. Neither the Jesus of the Gospels nor any of his immediate entourage ever mentioned any of these prehistoric figures. If there was a Jesus Christ, and if he intended to start a new religion, then the story of Eden and the Fall of Man played no part in the recorded teachings of the alleged Founder of that religion.

The Garden of Eden and the Origins of Christianity

By one of the most curious paradoxes this ancient myth of the Garden of Eden ultimately probably derived from vague reminiscences of the nomadic pre-civilised era, came to be the dogmatic foundation of the most powerful religion in recorded history. This epoch-making transforma-

VIEWS and OPINIONS

The Garden of Eden and Christian Theology

By F. A. RIDLEY

tion was, as already noted, not due to the Gospels, which never mention either Adam, Eve or the Fall. It was due to that subtle theological reasoner, the unknown author of the Pauline *Epistle to the Romans*, the first and perhaps the most influential theological treatise ever penned. The author, whoever he may have been, who called himself after the famous missionary of the Acts, Paul of Tarsus, was evidently a trained Jewish theologian familiar with theological speculation. In the course of his reasoning on the new Jewish heresy, as Christianity then was, he hit upon the brilliant idea which linked up the ancient myth of the Fall in Eden with the new Christian Messiah. By so doing he both transformed the new heresy into a separate religion and gave it a firm dogmatic basis.

"As in Adam All Die"

Briefly, the unknown author of *Romans*, the real founder of Christian theology, linked up the cosmic relation of mankind offered by the new religion with the ancient legendary drama of the prehistoric Fall in Eden. "As in Adam

all die, even so in Christ all are restored to life." Here is the dogmatic basis for the vast network of theological reasoning later adumbrated by nineteen centuries of Christian theology; this old speculation proved the effective starting point for the most ambitious theological system that the world has ever known. The nostalgic reminiscence of a bygone age of innocence born by the banks of the Euphrates became by a curious paradox the explanation of the essential Christian dogmas of the Fall and of human redemption by the Saviour who descended on earth to make good the Fall of Eden, dogmas which commanded the allegiance of Western civilisation for eighteen centuries prior to the discovery of evolution. "Fact is stranger than fiction"; one of the strangest in the evolution of ideas is this transformation of Eden into a theology.

[NOTE: The authorship of *Romans* is unknown but the author had certainly been trained in the theological hair-splitting of Rabbinical theology. It could have been Paul himself; as stated in Acts, he really was a disciple of the celebrated Rabbi Gamaliel.]

The Altrincham Affair

By G. H. TAYLOR

UNLIKE Lord Altrincham, the Queen's critic, THE FREETHINKER, is unequivocally Republican and is therefore interested not so much in what Elizabeth II says as in what she is. But quite apart from the Republican issue, we are concerned in defending the right to criticise a public personage, however eminent. We do not believe in divinity, either of gods or persons, and therefore we do not mark off a point above which persons are sacrosanct, and below which they are open to free criticism. Either Lord Altrincham has a right to criticise or we are on the way back to the Middle Ages, and the sufferings of all the martyrs of liberty have been in vain.

As Republicans, however, we cannot see how even Royalists can be deaf to some of the criticisms passed by Lord Altrincham. We are used to hearing such royal expressions as "We are deeply moved . . ." Now, irrespective of the particular sovereign at any given time, it is hard to see how people who condone "sports" in which living animals are ripped to pieces can be "deeply moved" by suffering. The undignified humbug and hypocrisy of it all must be apparent to thinking people if not to Lord Altrincham's critics. And THE FREETHINKER exists for the purpose of saying unpopular things which intelligent people think but dare not say.

To claim that the sovereign should be exempt from criticism because she "cannot answer back" is no argument at all. It is hardly Altrincham's fault, and much less THE FREETHINKER's that the sovereign "cannot answer back," and in any case there are not lacking those who will answer for her!

The reactions of some people to Lord Altrincham's criticism show very clearly how public "opinion" (public prejudice would be a more exact description) is at the mercy of newspaper propaganda. In 1936 we saw how a king whose monumental popularity had been built up by years and years of propaganda when he was Prince of Wales could be effectively wiped out in a few weeks. Starting with an attack by the Bishop of Bradford, who complained that Edward VIII was failing in his religious observances, the campaign was quickly and ruthlessly carried out till he was replaced. Who doubts that the same social forces could just as quickly destroy Elizabeth II if it suited their purposes? She has only to cease religious observances and the powerful social elements, backed up

by their privately owned press propaganda, who now keep the Queen in her position, would make no more protest against Altrincham than they did in the case of that phenomenal Christian intellect, Bishop Blunt of Bradford, in 1936.

The person who assaulted Lord Altrincham claimed to be acting for some group calling themselves the Empire League of Loyalists or some such momentous title. We have never heard of them but if their first argument is a blow in the face of their opponent, we can only assume that they represent the remnants of the Fascist mentality in Britain, and as such it is another reminder of the need for eternal vigilance.

Sensation-mongering newspapers headlined the incident, thus to give uncivilised behaviour a certain public status in the eyes of the more ignorant section of their readers. Are we to go back to the Middle Ages and make the most undesirable types the heroes of society, while treating the honest critic as the outcast?

There is a certain type of newspaper from which we expect nothing better, but in its editorial of August 4th *The Observer* disappointed all who were coming to regard it as being ahead of the field in matters of good taste. We should have thought a paper like *The Observer* could have made it crystal clear that Lord Altrincham or anyone else has full right of free speech and criticism, without having to run the gauntlet of social pressure or any other manner of persecution. We scarcely expected *The Observer* to join in the undignified howls against the Queen's critic.

THE FREETHINKER will continue to stand for free speech; we should like to think we stand with many friends of similar outlook who may differ from us on the religious issue. We should like to think we stand as one of many, but if that cannot be, we stand alone.

TEACHER: And God condemned the serpent to go on its belly for the rest of its days.

BOY: How did it go before that?

—NEXT WEEK—

FRED HOYLE, MATERIALIST

By G. H. TAYLOR

What is Rationalism?

By ARTHUR B. HEWSON
(Editor, *The American Rationalist*)

To ME, Rationalism is a method of approach to the realities of Life from a scientific base.

It is not a philosophy in itself. It is simply the means whereby each individual may develop a satisfying personal philosophy for himself. These individual philosophies may differ in detail according to the varying combinations of circumstance which make up the experiential background of each person. Nevertheless, they all will remain sufficiently alike for wholehearted co-operation between open-minded individuals holding to them and should generate a strong sense of togetherness.

The Rationalist approach can be most rewarding to the well integrated adult. However, to garner these rewards he must have an imagination that is under the firm discipline of a mind which has developed a capacity of evaluating the facts which present themselves.

After thrusting aside all the fantasies that have been woven, the crude hypotheses, the uninformed speculations and theorising of primitive minds which have been handed down from the childhood of the race, a Rationalist finds himself confronted with but one fundamental, basic fact of which he may be sure. He knows only that he is here on this, the planet, Earth. That is the sum total of his knowledge. Beyond that, he finds himself before a seemingly impenetrable barrier, which, so far, has successfully guarded the answers to the riddle of human existence and its purposes. Like Dr. Cook, who falsely claimed to have climbed Mt. McKinley and to have discovered the North Pole, many have claimed to have surmounted the barrier and found the right answers but all have been as false as Dr. Cook's.

A person matures under the impact of his study, his observations and his daily personal experiences. In the process, if he is alert of mind, he learns many things. For example, he finds that the principles of morality and ethics which have become more or less accepted standards of our society, have been wrought out of the bitter trial and error of humanity over many centuries in its efforts to work out a pattern for intelligent harmonious group-living. How much has been added to their structure by clerical preachments is highly debatable.

The maturing individual learns also that the orthodox religious institutions, ostensibly designed to serve him, in reality largely have served, instead, those whose interest it was to thwart the development of Man's awareness of his own inherent powers. They have placed their great emphasis always upon Man's utter dependence upon some great mysterious Deity and upon Man's great need to pray to that great Deity for powers which, in the nature of things, he already possesses.

Those sensitive to reality through a disciplined mind soon learn that all the gods of all the ages are simply fantasies born out of the human imagination. Furthermore, they have arrived at the inevitable conclusion that Man's ego merely substituted these fantasies for the answers he was unable to supply because he has been unwilling to admit that he does not know the answers.

The true Rationalist has a tremendous respect for the precious gift of life and, contrary to his detractors, he has no desire to defile or degrade it during his brief span of consciousness. He has an imperative within him which demands the maximum of integrity if he is to live up to his ideals. He needs no threat of punishment nor lure of reward in a mythical future life to frighten him or cajole

him into observing the requirements of human decency.

Beyond this also he is imbued with a sense of awe and wonder before the mighty Cosmos of which he has become aware. Without a doubt, this mighty Cosmos has a Something behind it all which keeps its myriad parts in perfect balance as they hurtle through apparently limitless space. This is indisputable, yet there is no need for him to be afraid of it, for is not he, himself, part of it?

All of the great world religions are based upon the moral and ethical teachings of men outstanding in their own time. These represent nothing more nor less than the ideas of their day and generation, which may or may not have any application in our day. The teachings of Confucius, Zoroaster, Buddha, Jesus, Mohammed and others all had to do with personal conduct and one's relations with one's fellows. In each case, priestcraft corrupted and distorted these teachings beyond recognition and erected structures of wonderful nonsense in connection with all of them. They all stand for cultivated ignorance and thus are an intolerable drag on human progress.

What we need most in this day and age is the development of adult education in the realities of life, putting the past largely behind us. This can be accomplished only through youth centres and adult fellowships, or both in conjunction, where Rationalism can be taught in continuity from the cradle to the grave—combined with fun and good comradeship, of course.

The orthodox Churches have failed their people by stubbornly clinging to ideas out of the dead past which have ceased to have meaning. For them, as for King Belshazzar, the hand again has written upon the wall those mysterious words, *MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN*—which Daniel translated as meaning, "You have been weighed in the balance and found wanting. Your kingdom is given to another." The Christian era draws to a close and the Freethought era dawns.

2,500 years ago the Greek philosopher, Pythagoras, said: "Man is the measure of all things," and so let's sound the trumpets for Man's greatest advance under the banner of Freethought.

It Occurs To Me

Wooden chalices and golden priests have evolved into golden chalices and wooden priests.

* * *

The road to ruin is always in good repair: Salvationists pay the expenses.

* * *

The Pope is never in a dilemma: he has only to cover up one of his faces.

* * *

The clergy make a living by the sweat of their vows.

* * *

Most Christians believe they are thinking when they are merely rearranging their prejudices.

* * *

Atheists sometimes debate a question without settling it. Christians settle it without debating it.

* * *

The old parson gives good advice to console himself for his inability to give bad example.

D.S.

This Believing World

For once, the questions asked the other Sunday at the TV's "Christian Forum" were such that the three eminent Christians, Canon Raven, Canon Collins and Mr. Joyce were almost, if not quite, unable to answer them. The questions came from the Royal Air Force at Yatesbury, and they must be congratulated on their "militant" Freethought. None of the Christian experts was able to answer the question "Who or what is God, and where did he come from?" All Canon Collins could say was that he didn't know, but Christ was the best answer he could think of. Canon Raven mumbled on about the wonder and the mystery of the Universe — but he obviously felt this was no reply.

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Then the experts were asked about the Problem of Evil — but gave it up. They simply did not know why a good God allowed a baby to be born blind or deaf — to say nothing of even worse evils. Of course there *was* an answer — only they didn't know it. Again all Canon Raven could mumble about was something Paul said — but he wasn't very enthusiastic of the redoubtable Paul. For the rest, we are sure the questions would have been far too militant even for our reverent Rationalists.

★

After nearly 2,000 years of hopeful expectation, we are delighted to proclaim that Jesus Christ is about to return and begin his eternal rule of the world. We give this wonderful news on the authority of the Rev. Billy Graham, one of God's elect, and as such, he ought to know. Of course, the actual date of the Second Coming is a closely guarded secret kept piously away, not only from blatant infidel journals such as ours, but even from such a highly religious and hot-on-the-news national daily like the *Daily Express*, which, incidentally, would gladly pay out thousands for any "story" from Heaven which was truly authoritative.

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Strange as it may seem, even the ineffable Billy rather dismally upsets the hopes and fears of his many adorers by insisting that, "He may not come in this generation," a most gloomy prediction. One can easily visualise the wonderful reception "our Lord" would receive even from this generation—banquets galore, to say nothing of speeches at the airport on his arrival, and TV and ITV appearances, the rivals no doubt sinking all differences to get such hot shows over. Let us hope that our well-informed Billy is wrong, and that Jesus *will* come in all his glory and astronomical fireworks to *this* generation.

★

That there is some hope we are really going "soon" to see Jesus, we are assured by a Barnsley gentleman—a Mr. I. Cooke. He has sent us a flaring red leaflet with an enormous heading "Warning," and it appears that instead of the world receiving "our Lord" with open arms of joy (so to speak), most of us are going straight away to "the lake of fire and brimstone." And what with being "tormented day and night, forever and ever, weeping, wailing, and gnashing our teeth," refusing to acknowledge before Christ Jesus our sins, and "drinking the wine of God's wrath," we appear to be in—except for a few people like Mr. Cooke—for what is vulgarly called a heck of a time. But some of us surely would prefer to enjoy the weeping and wailing in Hell than sit with Mr. Cooke, even at the right hand of Jesus, in Heaven.

★

The religious articles published recently in the *Sunday Times* have now been published in book form under the title of *The Great Mystery of Life Hereafter*—though the

most unintelligent believer as well as the most intelligent, would have to admit that the "Great Mystery" remains as great a mystery as ever. Even the Rev. L. Atkin, reviewing the book in *Empire News* and flamboyantly telling us what "I believe," can only repudiate the "hell-fire" sermons of his youth without in any way solving the mystery.

★

Mr. Atkin, who is described as "one of Britain's most outspoken preachers," was asked by the Christian wife of a "well-known Atheist" to officiate at his funeral because it wouldn't seem right "without a parson"—and of course it "was one of the largest attended funerals at which" he had ever officiated. It is a pity that Mr. Atkin is so shy of giving us the full name of "Fred the Atheist" who was so "well-known." In any case, even though poor Fred was an Atheist, he now is "immortal despite his Atheism." He "would live on whether he wanted it or not despite what orthodoxy might say." That's all very well—but where? In the Hell of gentle Jesus where there is eternal wailing and gnashing of teeth?

Chapman Cohen Said:

If Christ was God can what happened to him be any indication of what will happen to us? On the Christian hypothesis he belonged to an altogether different order from that to which we belong. His resurrection may prove that Gods will not remain in the grave, it has no bearing upon what will happen to man. And he did many things that are beyond our power. To commence with, he got himself born without an earthly father. How many of us can accomplish that? He fed thousands with a few loaves and fishes, and had more food left at the end of the meal than he had at the beginning. Not even the Government Food Controller can do that. He walked on the waves, stilled the tempest with a word, cast devils out of men and women, converted water into wine. How many of us can do these things? And if we cannot imitate him in these things why should we be able to imitate him in rising from the dead? His end matched his beginning. Both are equally reasonable; and the man who begins by crediting the one has naturally, no difficulty in accepting the other. If he was a God his example is useless to us. If he was a man, his birth, life, and resurrection are, in the light of reason a tissue of fantastic absurdities.

(THE FREETHINKER, April 14th, 1918.)

A Magician On Spiritualism

During the past thirty years I have read every single piece of literature on the subject of Spiritualism that I could. I have accumulated one of the largest libraries in the world on psychic phenomena, spiritualism, magic, witchcraft, demonology, evil spirits, etc., and I doubt if anyone in the world has so complete a library on modern Spiritualism, but nothing I have ever read concerning the so-called Spiritualistic phenomena has impressed me as being genuine . . . in thirty years I have not found one incident that savoured of the genuine. If there had been any unalloyed demonstration to work on, one that did not reek of fraud, one that could not be reproduced by earthly powers, then there would be something for a foundation, but up to the present everything that I have investigated has been the result of deluded brains or those which were too actively and intensely willing to believe.

—H. Houdini, *A Magician among the Spirits*

THE FREETHINKER

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

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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.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park).—Every Sunday, 7.30 p.m.: Messrs DAY, CORINA, and SHEPPARD.

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

Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street, Kingston, Surrey).—Every Sunday, 8 p.m.: Messrs. J. W. BARKER and E. MILLS.

London (Tower Hill).—Thursday, 12-2 p.m.: Messrs. D. TULLMAN and L. EBURY.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every weekday, 1 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, FINKEL, SMITH or CORSAIR. Sunday, 3 p.m. (Platt Fields) Messrs. WOODCOCK, MILLS, etc. Sunday 8 p.m. (Deansgate Blitzed Site): Messrs. WOODCOCK, MILLS, SMITH or WOOD.

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: Messrs. L. EBURY and A. ARTHUR.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Sunday, 11.30 a.m.: R. POWE. Thursday, 1 p.m.: R. POWE. Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY and R. POWE.

Wales and Western Branch (The Downs, Bristol).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: D. SHIPPER, A Lecture.

West London Branch N.S.S.—Every Sunday, at the Marble Arch, from 4 p.m.: Messrs. L. EBURY and A. ARTHUR.

Notes and News

WE ARE VERY pleased to note that one of the veteran stalwarts of Freethought, Mr. P. G. Tacchi, and Mrs. Tacchi, are celebrating their Diamond Wedding, and we heartily wish them many more years of happiness together. The *Somerset County Gazette* has a long illustrated article on "the genius of Mr. Tacchi (aged 83)" detailing with his many-sided accomplishments, in particular his many engineering and other inventions. Mr. Tacchi has worked in South Africa and in China, and on defence work in the First World War. His latest invention is a motor cycle engine designed to give greater power without increasing weight, and which he considers will well meet the present demand for lighter machines. His daughter, Mrs. Tacchi-Morris, has always, like her father, been identified with Freethought, and she attended the last NSS Conference. Her special interests have been education and the theatre, and she has lectured all over the country on the ballet.

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £234 14s. 3d.; Anon, 4s.; A. H. Briancourt, 10s.; A. Hancock, 2s.; T. Yelland, £1; D. Stratton (U.S.A.), 10s.; N. Cluett, 2s. 6d.; J.T., 5s.—Total to date, August 9th, 1957, £237 7s. 9d.

PROFESSOR G. D. H. COLE has reached retiring age, and with his retirement, says Mr. A. J. P. Taylor (*New Statesman*, 27/7/57), an epoch ends at Oxford. Professor Cole, he continues, "had to contend with the heavy enduring conditions of Oxford. He carried the day merely by ignoring them. He treated Oxford simply as an academic institution for the promotion of learning, instead of (as it is) a social mechanism for the corruption of the young." Mr. Taylor describes how Professor Cole, when presiding at dinner at All Soul's, "walked in, stood at the head of the table, and sat down sternly without mumbling the theological formulas which other unbelievers still swallow." What a pity our academics haven't the courage of their convictions! Mr. Arthur Hewson, of *The American Rationalist*, tells us it is just the same in the U.S.A.: conformity is the rule.

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UNBELIEVERS at Oxford may—as Mr. A. J. P. Taylor tells us—mumble grace before meals and generally pay lip service to a creed they do not hold. Christian lecturers, on the other hand, never seem to lose an opportunity to propagate their religion. Miss V. Wilkinson, lecturer in the Department of Education, chose "Religion in School" as her subject at the department's summer conference at Lincoln College during August Bank Holiday weekend. Church or chapel attendance for younger boarding-school children should be compulsory, she said. "It is a social duty, even if a doubtfully religious one," she added. (*Manchester Guardian*, 5/8/57.) To our mind, she got things the wrong way round; to be true the statement should read: "It is a religious duty, even if a doubtfully social one." Miss Wilkinson was tolerant enough to allow "some freedom of choice" for older children, this freedom to be "progressively increased to the top of the school." Indeed, she thought that for seniors "complete freedom about churching was the only sound foundation for a thoughtful attitude to attendance in later years." For all her talk about "freedom" Miss Wilkinson's thesis is basically that of Loyola, which we may express colloquially as: the child may have its freedom of choice after we have done our stuff!

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LORD ALTRINCHAM is in trouble! The reason? He was rather beastly about the Queen. Writing on "The Monarchy Today" in the current issue of the *National Review*, he described her broadcasting technique as causing "a pain in the neck," and the personality "conveyed by the utterances which are put into her mouth" as that of "a priggish schoolgirl, captain of the hockey team, a prefect, and a recent candidate for Confirmation." Everybody knows that this is perfectly true: we have all felt this particular pain in the neck, but few writers have the courage to admit it in public. That is why Lord Altrincham's remarks have caused such a sensation. We hope they will be noted at the BBC, where sanctimoniousness about the monarchy is nauseating. Dare we even hope for an end to those early morning national anthems... "Today is the birthday of..."; "loyal greetings"; and all the other sugary nonsense? We hardly think so: Lord Altrincham has appeared on ITV news since he wrote his article, but we haven't seen or heard him on the BBC.

On Militancy Again

By H. CUTNER

THE DIFFICULTY I have in meeting Mr. G. I. Bennett and Mr. Royston Pike on the question of militancy is that they are so vague in their objections to it. Mr. Bennett, it is true, tells us that he occasionally sends some of his acquaintances copies of *THE FREETHINKER*, and they tell him "frankly" that they are put off "by the tone of the articles it has carried." But what did he expect? We surely cannot hope that Christians or even indifferent Christians will go over at once to a journal which is "anti" to most of their cherished beliefs? Even the most apathetic Christian still believes that there is "something" in Christianity, that Jesus is still, if not actually the Saviour of the world, at least the greatest of all teachers. If only the world would follow "our Lord" . . . has not Mr. Bennett heard that often enough? In the matter of sending our journal to friends, one has to have a sense of proportion. They have to be in some measure prepared. I have friends who are quite unbelievers in miracles, but I would never dream of sending them copies of *THE FREETHINKER*. They belong to the large number of indifferentists who will tell you, also quite "frankly," that while they personally do not believe, or hardly believe, in religion, it is a very good thing for the "masses"; it keeps them in order; and *THE FREETHINKER* is wasting good paper in publishing articles which, while true, upset so many good people.

Mr. Pike is a particular example of the kind I am referring to. He singles out my little article on Christ and Krishna, in which I show that there is nothing original in the story of Christ—and I wrote it especially for some of "the younger generation" who are taught that "our Lord" is "unique." It is obviously gall and wormwood for one who has written a book on the world's religions which, in his opinion, should all be reverently treated, that the truth should be told and not piously hidden.

Mr. Bennett—as I suspected—would not trouble to deal with believers in Hell and the Devil. If he were asked to meet, let us say, Lord David Cecil and Father D'Arcy, S.J., who are both confirmed believers in a personal Devil and in a real Hell, his "short answer" would be that he wouldn't. We need not be surprised that such beliefs persist when even Freethinkers are afraid to question them. But these people are not content merely with refusal. They want those of us who are active in opposition to such silly beliefs and dogmas to stop attacking them—at least, not with the weapons of irony or satire or wit (where possible), but with carefully considered and particularly solemn argument, if we do attack them. It would be best not to—best to allow, for example, that stout defender of Eternal Flames for naughty babies, Fr. J. Furniss, S.J., to go along on his sweet way unchallenged. But if it has to be done, let us be scholarly and dignified and under no circumstances hurt the feelings and destroy the hopes of all those good and kind people who still believe in Hell Fire.

Mr. Pike is, of course, quite right when he tells us that the approach of the late Charles A. Watts was different from that of Foote and Bradlaugh. He was a very keen publisher, and he recognised, as any keen business man would have recognised, that if the Rationalist Press Association was to make any headway, its approach would have to be different from theirs. He saw—and it is to his great credit that he did—that there were many exceptionally fine works published during the latter half of the nineteenth century which could have a bigger circulation if published in the then popular 6d. paper-backed editions.

This brought many Freethought classics to the "masses," and no doubt lots of people were surprised to learn that such Victorian celebrities as Huxley, Tyndall, Spencer, Mill, Renan, Matthew Arnold, Haeckel, Darwin, G. H. Lewes, and others were such out-and-out Freethinkers. True, they did not all use the weapons of Bradlaugh and Foote, but there was room for many ways of attack—and, if I may be allowed to say so, most of these more (or less) respectable Freethinkers were allowed thus to attack Christianity because men like Robert Taylor, Thomas Woolston, G. W. Foote and others went to prison for blasphemy, and the authorities were not too keen on blasphemy prosecutions towards the end of the nineteenth century, especially if the blasphemers were famous scientists and men of letters.

All the same, Charles A. Watts, with whom I had many years of friendship, told me he was an Atheist, but the word Agnostic helped the R.P.A. better. Even John M. Robertson, who was as much an Atheist as I am, used the word Rationalist to describe himself and wrote an excellent book in its defence. But in actual fact, he was the most terrible enemy Christianity faced at the beginning of this century. In proclaiming that Jesus Christ was a myth, he hit the Christian religion so hard that even to this day there are reverent Rationalists, like Mr. Pike, Mr. A. D. Howell Smith and others, rushing to defend Jesus from such an outrageous suggestion.

Mr. Pike tells us that "facts are sacred and never more so when they are those hallowed by religious association." When we talk about a "fact," we mean something that is true, and only in that sense is it "sacred." Neither I nor any writer in this journal has ever poked fun at or attacked the truth as Mr. Pike well knows. What we do attack, and what I hope we shall continue to attack, are the stupidities associated with all religions, and these are certainly not "true" in the sense we—and people like Huxley, Darwin, Spencer, and the rest—oppose them.

Mr. Pike gives us the names of Rationalists with whom he takes his stand. Very well then, let us take one of them—Sir Leslie Stephen. So reverent was he that he wrote *An Agnostic's Apology*, and if he meant by the word "apology" what we all mean, then I can only say I am sorry he had to apologise to the world for being an Agnostic. But Stephen also wrote *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, and in it he dealt with Woolston and Paine. Did he treat these two great Freethinkers in that solemn, cultured tone which we militants are urged to use so that Mr. Bennett can send our journal to his friends without being rebuked by them for our levity, and Mr. Pike can feel that we are at last with him in the company of "the Holyoakes and Watts and Goulds," etc.?

As far as the life of Paine is concerned, Stephen went to the "biography" written by James Cheetham, an unmitigated liar and libeller. For this, Stephen very lamely apologised many years later in the *National Reformer*—forced no doubt to do so by Moncure Conway's splendid *Life of Paine*. But he did not apologise for the language he used in describing the *Age of Reason* and other works—language which the word "militant" could only mildly describe. Here are some passages:

Good Englishmen expressed their disgust for the irreverent infidel by calling him Tom, and the name still warns all men that its proprietor does not even deserve posthumous civility. Paine indeed is, in a sense, but the echo of Collins and Woolston;

but the tone of the speaker is altered... the early deists wrote for educated men. Paine is appealing to the mob... His ignorance was vast, and his language was brutal; but he had the gift of a true demagogue, the power of wielding a fine vigorous English, a fit vehicle for fanatical passion... Paine... reproduces the objections to the Bible which occurred to him on a hasty reading, or which had reached him through the diffused scepticism of the time... His reasoning, indeed, though defaced by much ribaldry, is simply the translation into popular language of a theory expounded by more accompanied critics... He is apparently ignorant that anything of the kind had been said before... The *Age of Reason* indeed sometimes amuses by the author's impudent avowal of ignorance...

No doubt Mr. Pike will agree with everything said by Stephen; but for me I can fancy nothing which, as Mr. Bennett's friends would say, could put me off more the gentle, cultured and reverent Sir Leslie Stephen.

It is true, of course, that we "militants" like to poke a little fun at many things deemed by Christians sacred. But I would be greatly surprised if either Mr. Bennett or Mr. Pike would protest in the same way if we joked a little at the absurdities of the Greek and Roman Gods which their adorers have written about them. Would they refuse to see "Orpheus in the Underworld" because Offenbach ridicules the Olympic Gods? Does Mr. Pike hide his head in shame at the pictures which great artists have painted of Leda and the Swan (Jupiter)? I find that our reverent Rationalists in the main only object to our joking about *Christian* imbecilities—never about pagan ones.

The vigorous Freethought initiated by the R.P.A. in its early days when it was led by J. M. Robertson and Joseph McCabe has, of course, gone; in its place we have a pale reflection now called "Humanism," which forms part of every reform for mankind. It is not, no matter how passionately argued for, the prerogative of Freethought, but forms part of the creed of modern Christendom, of Buddhism, and even—with some of its supporters—of Communism. Religion, complains Mr. Pike, is no joking matter. After sixty years of reading about it, I think it is—the biggest joke in the world. Can anything be funnier than the solemn, pious and reverent attitude of millions of people to what we *know* is something based on myth, on miracle, and, above all, on fear?

By the way, would Mr. Pike give us a few examples of the "militancy" of Bradlaugh to which he takes exception? Where did he "sneer" and "abuse"?

The Myth of the 'Moovies'

[*The Making of Moo*, by Nigel Dennis: Royal Court Theatre.]

NEVER in the history of English drama has religion been held up to ridicule so brilliantly as in *The Making of Moo*. And I suspect, quite apart from being attracted to it for freethought reasons, that this play is one of the best of the 20th century in the language. Shaw himself, who would have been delighted by it, could hardly have bettered the dialogue: it runs evenly at a high level and any weaknesses are in one or two of the cast rather than in the play. None the less there were, on the other hand, several excellent character interpretations.

The sub-title is "A History of Religions." Half a dozen volumes of Comparative Religion and Anthropology are epitomised in the plot; and a thousand volumes of Theology are exploded in the scintillating commentary as it unfolds. Religious people for years to come are going to be very angry with this satire, but some of them will benefit by looking into the Great Mirror held up to their offended eyes.

A native river-god, Agar, having been "destroyed" by a dam-building operation, the white governor finds it nec-

essary to manufacture a substitute god in order to restore order. His idea is a personified code of good discipline. Its actual name is the least important thing about it: anything will do and as soon as this small problem arises a nearby cow supplies the answer. Hence the title.

But there is not much emotional content in a Highway Code of Morals. You can't play it to music, for instance, and one of the white party would only co-operate if he were allowed to compose hymns for Moo; another had a flair for writing his theology in a Book of Revelation. Gradually Moo's character and requirements began to emerge. Should he have a body or no body? At the risk of a possible schism later, it was left to Revelation to cater for all tastes. Not to have a body is rather *distingué* for a God, so "slip in a few lines for the intellectuals saying He's hot air."

Moo gradually gets an elaborate ritual including human blood sacrifices, an opposite number corresponding to Satan (Agar, the dethroned God), a Church for the Moovies, a form of Eucharist and Confession, High Priests, Martyrs and Saints, and, as the years go on, immense riches, which in turn bring out the Puritan.

With the passing of years the primitive cannibalism ceases. "Civilisation steps in and says 'Stop!' Stop eating their bodies and be content with gnawing away at their minds." Finally we see religion as an iceberg mostly "submerged in grief, on which we build this sunny uppercrust."

It is good to have on the 1957 stage the sort of witticism which characterised the writings of the founder of THE FREETHINKER, G. W. Foote. We do not, we hear, need God ourselves but He is a good thing for others, this constituting the difference between God and a pound note. As for religion, it is best learnt when young: one is more inclined to believe it then. "I've no time to come to Church," explains the rich patron of Moo, signing his cheque, "so I'll be generous instead." "God" is where the telescope hasn't reached, and as the telescope advances God retreats. And so it goes on, the tempo of the play maintained right from its sensational beginning to its philosophical end.

It is to be hoped freethinkers can do something towards getting more publicity for this play. It has excellent TV possibilities and the BBC is at a loss for plays. Here is a superb one, but of course it will not be put on. Religious influences will see to that. The BBC, it seems, hasn't two ideas to rub together for a presentable play. Here is one made to measure and its chances are nil. Even a good provincial run is speculative; the West End is pretty broad but will it take this?

The Making of Moo has just finished but it will reappear again somewhere sometime, and let us hope soon. In a climate more congenial to truth, decency and good taste it would be having successful long runs in several cities of the world.

G.H.T.

The Church in Yugoslavia

ARTICLE 25 of the Yugoslav Constitution contains the sentence: "The State can offer material support to religious communities," and much financial support is offered. Before the war marriage was completely in the hands of the Church, but now, Article 26 states: "Only marriages concluded before competent state authorities are valid." Also, "All litigation emanating from marriage relations comes within the competence of people's courts." Pre-war, six areas of the country had six different systems of civil law which were often contradictory. Matrimonial affairs were even more confused as there were eight different types of ceremony and divorce cases presented many complications.

Registrations of births and deaths are similarly now a matter for the State. Religious weddings are permitted (the civil ceremony *must* be proved first) but have *no legal significance*.

Article 133 of the Criminal Law asserts: "Persons interfering with, or preventing religious ceremonies and practice will be fined or sentenced up to one year in custody," but the official book *Yugoslavia — the Church and the State* claims: "Reasonable scientific criticism of religious beliefs or criticism of the work of individuals, including clergymen, is allowed providing that such criticism abides by the general provisions of the law, including the law of libel." Much here depends on the definition of the word "reasonable."

In 1953 statistics gave the Serbian Orthodox Church 3,063 chapels and churches, 141 monasteries, and 2,631 priests.

The R.C. Church, (smaller numerically), had 6,354 chapels and churches, 135 monasteries, 3,508 priests and approximately 3,000 nuns.

The Moslems had 670 mosques and 1,653 priests. Some smaller sects are the Rumanian Orthodox and various Protestants. There is a total (in the main denominations) of 7,858 priests catering for a population of approximately 16½-millions. The Serbian Orthodox Church shows a ratio of one priest for every 3,076 citizens. The R.C.'s one to every 1450.

The State offers considerable financial aid to the churches, as it is empowered to do so in Art. 25. The money allotted to the R.C. Church is disproportionately large, as it is numerically weaker than the Orthodox.

There is a Social Insurance scheme for clergymen, some money for this coming from the Churches, but most being provided by the State.

The R.C. Church has seven *national* newspapers (plus many local papers). Serbian Orthodox, Moslem and Catholics all issue magazines or papers, and many religious books, pamphlets and calendars. My last figures covering clerical influence in government listed 74 priests sitting on peoples committees in Serbia and seven priests as deputies in the Serbian National Assembly. Although these statistics could be continued enough has been given to show that this dialectical materialist State provides ample support to religion.

With a small percentage of this money devoted to an independent Freethought society, the Yugoslav Government might find their religious financial obligations decreasing considerably in the course of a few years.

D. SHIPPER

CORRESPONDENCE

CHRISTIAN UNITY

The Christians are giving a really typical example of their unity in Scotland at present. At a recent meeting on the burning question of Bishops to help to boost the decline of the Scottish churches, one minister said the question would "split the Church from top to bottom"; another referred to the "vicious letters" from his "opponents"; another referred to "perversion of the truth." Above their heads was a large banner with the words, "All one in Christ."

MAY A. WATSON.

FROM THE U.S.A.

It was Mr. H. Cutner who first introduced me to the august, hard-hitting, always pertinent pages of THE FREETHINKER. I had read his *Jesus—God, Man or Myth?* book and that it was the most refreshing, most astounding book on the Jesus "problem" I've yet to read may be ascertained from the fact that in the two and a half years since I first got it, it has been read *eight* times! Naturally, after the first reading, I wanted so much to write the author and thank him quite, quite a bit, to put it mildly. So I secured Mr. Cutner's address, wrote him a letter expressing my thanks, and he has helped me considerably since then. He wrote me about

THE FREETHINKER and when I was able to subscribe, I did. I have him to thank for not being disappointed at all.

To my way of freethinking, THE FREETHINKER displays a quality that I wholeheartedly take delight in: its sense of humour. Week after week, when each copy is read, I find more good, wholesome, down-to-earth humour in its pages. I can only say, Keep it up, and perhaps some day we might just laugh out of existence that stupid nonsense known as Religion, in *all* its deluded forms.

DANNY PEZZE (New York)

JOSEPHUS

Rev. R. H. Mayer in his letter published on July 5th quoted Flavius Josephus in support of the Historical Jesus, and to date his remarks seem to have gone unchallenged.

Perhaps I may ask Mr. Mayer, what he makes of the following quotation from Origen, who had a few very revealing things to say about Josephus: "The wonder is though that he did not admit our Jesus to be the Christ, he none the less gave witness to so much goodness in James." Now in the "standard" *Works of Josephus* we find the following sentence: "He was the Christ."

Origen then could not have known about this sentence when he wrote his remarks on Josephus in A.D. 250 and that fact, is only one of many that have led Mr. Mayer's contemporaries to drop Josephus as a historical witness in this matter. The Slavonic Texts of Josephus, with their very different story to tell, have in my opinion finally settled the doubt and shown that Christian forgers were at work between A.D.254 and A.D.340 turning the Jew Josephus into an apparently unbiased witness for the wonder worker.

P. G. YOUNG

IS MATTER A MATTER OF MIND?

It is all very well for Mr. Cutner to suggest that I ignore his "confusion" and to evade the issue, i.e., the validity of his criticism of Chapman Cohen's "Materialism," by asking an irrelevant question, but it won't do.

Against Mr. Cutner, I maintain that Chapman Cohen cannot be accused of Berkleyan Idealism, which is in fact specifically repudiated by him in his *Primitive Survivals in Modern Thought*, pp. 75 to 78.

Furthermore, and in the same context, I object to Mr. Cutner's misuse of the generalisations "Matter," "Mind," and "Life," as though they were entities. It is irritating to the informed reader and misleading to the uninformed reader.

Since "Matter" and "Mind" are methodological concepts, any specific conception of "Matter" is irrelevant to a consistent philosophy of "Materialism," and Mr. Cutner's insistence on the temporal priority of the physical over the mental is, in this context, valueless as criticism.

W. E. NICHOLSON

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