

# The Freethinker

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Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

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ONE OF THE OUTSTANDING DEVELOPMENTS of Roman Catholicism in the post-Reformation era, and particularly in the present century, is found in the cult of the Virgin Mary. The virgin birth of Jesus, whilst obviously unknown to the authors of the *original* Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Luke, is certainly an ancient doctrine, going back to at least the middle of the second century. It was then already accepted by the orthodox Church, according to Justin

Martyr, though still rejected by some Jewish Christians. Its corollary, Mary's "perpetual virginity," was established in medieval times. Modern theology, however, has pushed both the theory and the practice of the cult of Mary to lengths unheard of in previous ages. Beginning with the publication of St. Alfonso Liguori's *Glories of Mary*, we have in 1854 the solemn proclamation by Pope Pius IX of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary. The present decade has seen Pius XII proclaim the Dogma of the (bodily) Assumption of the Virgin. Now we may, it seems, expect the further declaration that Mary is "co-Redemptrix" with her Son, of the human race. This would transfer her from her present ambiguous status of half human, half divine, into the class of pure divinity: the fourth person of the trinity, in theory, as she has already been in fact in most Catholic lands.

When one notes these developments, along with the parallel cults of Lourdes (1858) and Fatima (1917), where the Virgin is alleged to have appeared in person to her worshippers, one recognises the force behind the statement of a contemporary Roman Catholic theologian: "Our century glories with good right, in being the century of Mary."

## An Important Book

This powerful and still evolving cult forms the theme of an important book by the Italian Protestant scholar, Professor Giovanni Miegge, whose more recent book, *Religious Liberty*, I have already reviewed in THE FREETHINKER. Whereas the later book was only a popular outline—though a very good one—*The Virgin Mary: the Roman Catholic Marian Doctrine* (published in Italian in 1950 and issued in English by Lutterworth Press in 1955) is a much more ambitious work. It is an important book: a contribution of permanent value to the study of the most influential—and sensational—of modern religious developments. It is not surprising that such a book should be written by an Italian Protestant, since it is amongst the Catholic nations of Latin origin that the cult has reached maximum intensity. This seems to have been recognised by the Virgin herself, since her major appearances have been in Latin lands. Prof. Miegge, as a more or less orthodox, though scholarly, Protestant, does not deny the existence of Mary; apparently—like most Protestants—he accepts the Virgin Birth, though not the later Catholic developments of the cult. This prevents him from turning his critical apparatus upon the Virgin Birth itself. The more surprising in that he actually quotes an early MS. of

Matthew which states explicitly: "Joseph begat Jesus!"

If ever there was a religious dogma with a feeble foundation, it is that of the Virgin Birth. Only two N.T. books mention it, and both (Matthew and Luke) prefix it with (contradictory) genealogies, tracing Jesus from David through Joseph. This surely indicates that the original Gospels knew nothing about any Virgin Birth. It is not mentioned elsewhere in the N.T. and, as Bishop Barnes admitted, John—who must have known of its existence by the time he wrote his gospel—goes out of his way to call Jesus the son of Joseph and Mary.

## The Christian Isis

Like so many Protestants, Prof. Miegge turns a blind eye on gospel discrepancies;

when no longer scrutinising the Gospels, he recovers his critical sense, and his learned study of Catholic developments of the Marian cult is masterly. It should be read by all who are interested in Roman Catholicism or Comparative Religion. It shows how intimately the cult was bound up with the virgin goddesses of the Mediterranean: in particular the Egyptian goddess Isis, ancient "Star of the Sea." In the "bleak and frozen north," where the cult of goddess-mothers never reached the same proportions, Mariolatry has never developed extensively, even among Catholics. The great majority of the petitions addressed to Rome in support of the proclamation of the Dogma of the Assumption have come from Southern, Latin, Roman Catholic lands. For Prof. Miegge, however, Mary is an historical character; in his opinion, later developments in her cult can be traced to paganism.

## Mary in Catholic Theology

He details the successive stages of development, and it makes an intriguing and stormy tale. A highlight was the controversy in the Eastern Church over the title ascribed to Mary at the end of the Fourth Century: Theotokos, the Mother of God. The Byzantine heretic, Nestorius, was condemned for asserting that Mary was only mother of the man Jesus, not the Divine Word, Christ, and this highly abstract distinction led to the creation of a Nestorian Church, which still exists. In the West, Dominican and Franciscan theologians disputed furiously in the Middle Ages over the Immaculate Conception. In the opinion of the great Freethinking historian, Joseph Turmel, it was the powerful influence of St. Thomas Aquinas and his Dominican order which delayed the official promulgation of the Dogma from the 13th to the 19th century. In general, though, it was the monks who were the most ardent proponents of the cult of Mary—for reasons which we leave to the psychologist (or pathologist!). St. Dominic invented the now universal Catholic practice of reciting the rosary of the Blessed Virgin, and the Jesuits have been strongly for the cult. As Prof. Miegge shows, Mary has now a recognised department in Catholic theology. And, rather curiously, Marian theology is justified by Cardinal Newman's famous theory of Dogmatic "development," by which the Church in successive

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

## The Virgin Mary

—By F. A. RIDLEY—

ages can "unfold the deposit of Faith" unknown to the early Church. This is held to answer Protestant criticisms of modern Catholicism.

As Solomon Reinach reminded us years ago, a new trinity has effectively superseded the official one in modern Catholicism. It is J-M-J: Jesus-Mary-Joseph, for the last-named is now on the upgrade. Prof. Miegge shows that the Marian cult is not ended: the co-redemptress phase is still

perhaps to come. He thinks it will, and he ends with the warning: "On that day it will be said that within Catholicism, Christianity has given up the field to a different religion." But a non-Christian may argue that Mariolatry was implicit in Christianity from the start. However, this doubt does not diminish our gratitude to a learned Protestant scholar for his book, which covers the ground far more competently than any other available in English.

## The "Rule of Law" in Portugal

By D. SHIPPER

THE October bulletin of the International Commission of Jurists (which has consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council) contains an article on "The Rule of Law in Portugal."

Although the National Assembly is elected every four years "there has been only one occasion on which *any* Opposition candidates have stood. No Opposition member has ever been elected to the Assembly."

Since 1926 Dr. Salazar, the Portuguese dictator, heads the only political party, all others being dissolved in that year, and only religious associations and a monarchist society sympathetic to the government are permitted to organise.

Portuguese propaganda magazines sent me from Lisbon consistently comment favourably on the "peaceful political atmosphere" prevailing in the country." The "evils" of a "liberal democracy" are thus avoided. A vast improvement — for Salazar!

The Jurists affirm that "the constitution appears to guarantee freedom of association but in *practice* no society, association or organisation is permitted to exist unless it is one which the Government approves."

The bulletin of the Jurists, naturally non-political and concerned only with legal rights, gives us some idea of how human rights are curtailed under a benevolent (?) Catholic dictatorship.

"Security laws are numerous and far-reaching. Political police are given wide powers to ban meetings and gatherings, to close public performances and 'to search residences of individuals supervised.' Powers of the political police are being extended and now enable them to keep men and women in prison *indefinitely* after conviction. Under these laws many have been arrested by the political police and kept in prisons or deported without trial for periods of years to Portuguese deportation camps in Timor (East Indies) and in Portuguese Africa or to the Concentration camp of Tarragal in the Cape Verde Archipelago.

The Constitution provides for writ of *habeas corpus*, but in practice it is not in fact granted."

When maltreatment of natives in Portuguese colonies is raised in UNO, Portugal claims that her overseas territories are not colonial possessions, but integrated parts of Portugal, and that natives of Goa, Macao, Mozambique, etc., have the same legal rights as the ordinary citizen of the motherland — rights which, when they exist at all, exist in *principle*, but not in *practice*! Therefore Portugal is able to shelter behind Article 2 (7) of the UN Charter which states that the internal affairs of each nation are its own, and no-one else's, concern!

Whether the Portuguese can retain their overseas possessions for many years is a matter of speculation. Goa is already feeling the combined pressure of dissidents within and democracy without. Macao wriggles uncomfortably under the covetous gaze of Red China.

Residents of East Indian territories are comparing the liberty of the former Dutch possessions with their own position. Natives of Mozambique and Angola are still ever-ready to exchange the "full civil rights" of their "integral part of Portugal" for the right to labour in the apartheid-polluted atmosphere of South-Africa.

In the overseas territories then, an uneasy atmosphere prevails and the Portuguese must become steadily more repressive to retain control. In Portugal itself, years of indoctrination have taken their toll of liberal thought, the Decline and Fall of the Hitler and Mussolini Fascist Empires have been duly noted by the propagandists who seek to perpetuate *their* rule, and Franco's Spain provides, at present, a comforting cushion between Portugal and the Western world.

If Spain were to plunge once more into civil war — a possibility at some future date—Dr. Salazar may well find that beneath the cushion is a bed of nails.

## The Freethinker Bound Volume

SOME OF OUR READERS make the above an annual addition to their libraries. Others may wish to begin the habit, and the bound volume for 1957 seems an excellent one to start with, covering a year full of incident from the freethought angle.

The year opened with the Hungary controversy very much in the news, while other topics that were being aired were the Dead Sea Scrolls and Virgin Births. News from (to date) thirty-six countries in respect of their freethought organisations has helped readers to form more reliable estimates of the strength of militant freethought in the world today and of the local problems facing our comrades in various parts in the world.

During the year the N.S.S. was protesting against rate relief for the clergy. The Republican issue came to the fore with the Altrincham affair. Mrs. Knight's debates and meetings were also reported, and there was also her appearance on TV in the company of three Christians. The World Union of Freethinkers held its Congress at Paris; many of the papers read were reproduced in our columns.

Among other topics dealt with during the year were the alleged "conversion" of Prof. Gilbert Murray, Lourdes "miracles," the International Geophysical Year, the Blasphemy Laws today, Disendowment of the Church, E.S.P. experiments, euthanasia, spiritualism, Space Travel, etc.

Two lengthy interviews on American TV with Joseph Lewis were fully reported.

These are some of the reasons for hoping the 1957 volume will be making new friends as well as keeping old ones. An advertisement will follow in due course.

G. H. TAYLOR

# Evolution and the Fall

By LEO DESMOND

MANY CHRISTIANS do not seem to realise how closely related are such dogmas as the Incarnation and Vicarious Atonement to the doctrine of the Fall and Original Sin.

The traditional Christian view of man's nature and destiny is that he is a creature who in Adam fell from grace, as a consequence of which all mankind is born in Original Sin, a state of deprivation of grace and impairment of a nature that would otherwise have been more generously endowed. All mankind, that is, with the exception of the mother of Christ, whom Catholics believe was conceived immaculate not merely because, so they maintain, the son had no human father, but because by a special dispensation of providence she did not inherit the taint of Adam through Ann, her mother. Such a conception was indeed immaculate.

In defence of this orthodox viewpoint, apologists usually cite examples of what they more accurately describe as "actual" sins, and logically, if there are actual sins, there must have been an original sin, so it would seem. Even without the gift of a divine revelation, Ovid spoke of man seeing the better course of conduct, yet choosing the worse. This failure to live up to the best one can envisage, this sense of moral conflict between man's "higher" and "baser" natures, constitutes for such apologists ample evidence for their beliefs even if God had not deigned to reveal them. Even so, they usually concede, there stand two supreme mysteries—why a self-sufficient God should create anything at all, and why, if He does create, He should create anything that is not perfect. But such mysteries need cause no dismay, we are told, for denial of the existence of such a God still leaves one with an equal mystery why anything exists at all.

Strictly speaking, it is not correct to equate such mysteries. It might be that no adequate explanation of the fact of existence could ever be furnished, that we should just have to accept it as a brute fact and console ourselves with the thought that non-existence is inconceivable. Whereas if such a God exists, He must know why he created as He did and why He does not choose to extend His self-revelation to cover this problem, not even to the extent of hinting why He will not thus reveal more of Himself. The former type of mystery, if such it be, would be inevitable; the latter bafflingly unnecessary.

Now, very obviously, if man is a risen brute rather than a fallen angel, to speak very loosely, belief in the Fall and Original Sin as traditionally presented is by no means indispensable. On the contrary, the more such a dogma as the Fall is considered in the light of an evolutionist viewpoint, the more absurd and untenable it seems.

Modernist theologians like the late Bishop Barnes attempted to reconcile their scientific knowledge with their religious beliefs by regarding the Fall as an occurrence during man's ascent from a more brutal level. They may have succeeded in reconciling their religious belief with the fact of evolution and what is known of man's primitive history, but even they cannot pretend that such arguments as are usually presented any longer necessitate belief in the religious dogmas involved.

Catholic apologists have tended to fight shy of such modernistic attempts, if only because they realise, at least subconsciously, the very real dependence of the whole theological superstructure upon these dogmas, and that remains true even when they refuse to admit such a dependence. The mystery of existence at all, so they say,

becomes neither more nor less of a mystery if we believe that God created the world or made Adam at one pop or if we believe that it all happened gradually and through a long family tree. "If we are descended from green slime in accordance with certain biological laws, it still remains a mystery why the green slime ever existed and why the laws are as they are."

"Indeed," as one writer put it, "if you are not a Lamarckian but a Darwinian evolutionist, you have added a further mystery. For the Darwinians offer a reason why the fittest species survive but they offer no reason why species vary so that some of them are fit and some of them unfit."

A Marxist might argue that although Darwin established the fact of evolution, his hypothesis of natural selection by survival of the fittest was drawn from reflection on his "laissez-faire" economic environment of cut-throat competition. We know mutations can occur. We may even have grounds for believing that most mutations are disadvantageous, a minority advantageous to "progressive" evolution. Whether we accept the dialectical view of how changes occur as expounded by Marxists, or some other view, is not really vital to the religious issue. For whereas it may be a mystery why the laws of change are as they are and not otherwise, it is an even greater mystery if they have a God as their author. Why should an infinitely powerful creator create by such a wasteful process of trial and error, with more errors than successes? Why should the end products, e.g., an organ like the eye, still be so imperfect compared with what is easily conceivable if an almighty Creator is responsible? And why should God be the author of natural laws involving, for instance, the possibility of cancer and spastic children? These are mysteries in which the rational mind cannot rest, because they make it difficult to conceive such a God at all. Atheism does not resolve all mysteries; it does, however, prevent the necessity of turning intellectual somersaults to make one's views tenable at all.

In the last analysis it is not a choice between equal mysteries. It is a choice between a combination of ultimate mysteries and mysteries that are soluble at least in principle on the one hand, and mysteries which ought to be soluble but for which no hope of solution is proffered on the other.

If we suppose Original Sin to be true, if we assume there was a Fall, it is hard to see how such beliefs can be retained if analysed in greater detail. For original sin must be transmitted via the body, or directly via the "soul," or by both combined. Now Christian theology asserts that God creates each individual soul directly, the body indirectly via the instrumentality of the parents. If original sin exists in the soul, it would seem we impute it to God, who creates each soul directly. How it could be transmitted then is inconceivable. If transmitted through the body, then in what sense does it exist in the "soul"? Besides, on the view that each soul is directly created, how account for the obvious fact that men inherit more than physical characteristics only?

By some curious illogical process believers may manage to reconcile these strange beliefs with what they know of scientific attitudes and accounts of man's nature and origin. They can scarcely pretend surprise that others do not find their beliefs so self-evident or tenable as they do themselves.

## This Believing World

Needless to say, of course, the Churches had this Christmas about the best publicity boost in their history on the radio and TV. The story of the Babe of Bethlehem in all its Fundamentalist glory poured out in undiminished splendour on every possible occasion, with all the power unlimited singing of angelic carols could give it. All the Angels mentioned were as real as the Star of Bethlehem itself, and the Magi, instead of being of the same stuff as the magicians in the *Arabian Nights*, were given by all the Churches exactly the same historical existence we give to the Queen. It was fantastic.

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All the critical examinations of the Gospels, even those by Christians themselves, were tossed contemptuously aside. God Almighty came to us as an Incarnation in the Babe of Bethlehem; it was the greatest event in the history of Mankind, and it took place exactly as described in Matthew and Luke. Following that great religious national journal, the *Daily Express*, even *John Bull* featured "The Day Christ was Born," as if there wasn't the least doubt about it. The Angel Messenger of the Lord to Mary was as genuine and real as the one who appeared to Joseph in a dream. Although the famous Star of Bethlehem was completely unknown to everybody except the compilers of Matthew, the *John Bull* writer believes it to be as historical as the Battle of Waterloo.

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Not all believing Christians are as completely credulous, however, and it is most intriguing to find how some of them manage to get out of tight critical corners. For example, we have the Rt. Rev. Dr. G. MacLeod, who gave the third of his Advent talks just before Christmas. Faced with the undeniable fact that other Saviours like Mithras, Krishna, Buddha, Osiris, and many others were born more or less like Jesus, he coolly told his listeners that their stories were "pagan poetry" and they proved how God had "prepared the way" for Jesus. He did not give their names, of course. That would have been too dangerous; but the fact that he hinted that similar stories to that of Jesus were well known in the pagan world proves that at last something like the truth is beginning to dawn even in the Christian world.

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We can't understand why there should be a body called the Churches' Fellowship for Psychological Study—unless it is to prove how the Churches want to have a finger in every pie. The great Christian slogan is "Everlasting Life," that is, absolute Immortality, and which is to be had by everybody who acknowledges Jesus as the Saviour. In other words, every Christian must be in full agreement with every Spiritualist who declares that nobody ever dies—he merely "passes on" to another world. If he has been a good boy, then Christians insist that he is for ever safe in the arms of Jesus. If he hasn't, then down he goes to the fiery furnace where the gnashing of teeth never stops. But he lives on. Does this Fellowship actually doubt Immortality or what?

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In any case, both Christians and Spiritualists can be found who believe that there are actually "Venusians," real people from the planet Venus, keeping close watch on us as well as on the un-formidable Sputniks. A gentleman called Robert Ewing, who lives in Florida, is in constant touch with Venus, its spaceships and flying saucers, and tells us that all Venusians believe in God, and live from 400 to 500 years. Disease on the pleasant lands of Venus is unknown, and the people there appear to have no econo-

mic problems whatever. All they are now concerned with is to prevent us from manufacturing H. bombs and the like. Venus looks suspiciously—to us—like a variation of the dear old Christian Paradise.

## From Trinidad

*The General Secretary of the National Secular Society has received the following encouraging letter from the San Juan (Trinidad) Branch of the National Secular Society:*

19 Saddle Road,  
San Juan, Trinidad, B.W.I.  
9th December 1957.

Dear Mr. McCall,

I am very glad to report that we had a very successful year. Thanks for the very generous gift of books and pamphlets from the Executive Committee. We have made good use of them, having sold some, given away a few, and kept the remainder for the Society's use.

Our President, Mr. S. Gustavus Stephen, gave us a series of talks on some of the subjects (science, philosophy, religion, etc.) that, as secularists, we must know something of; we also held discussions on these and other subjects. And as young secularists I think we are travelling at a fairly substantial rate.

At our last committee meeting it was decided to give the parent body a little donation as an appreciation for the splendid work that the Society is doing. And I am enclosing Postal Order for 21s.

We are prepared to combat superstition in all its phases and, with your kind guidance, the thought of the background we have as members of a tried and militant organisation which has stood the test of time and is still the leader in the field, we go forward with confidence, upholding the objects and principles of the National Secular Society.

Again we of the San Juan Branch send our hearty good wishes to all officers and members of the parent body, for the forward march against "Godism" throughout 1958.

Yours truly,

(Signed) JAMES BIRBAL (*Secretary*).

## The Croydon Case

WE REPORTED last week a case in which the successful applicant for a public appointment had answered favourably a question about his religion during the interview. There are two developments.

A local press controversy has been going on, in which the freethought case has had good publicity, particularly by the letter-writer "Humanist," who is in fact one of our readers.

A motion has been put by a Croydon councillor, thus:

"When an applicant for employment in the council's service is being interviewed in connection with an appointment, no question as to the applicant's religious, denominational, or political beliefs shall be asked, unless the appropriate committee have specifically resolved that there are exceptional and compelling circumstances which make such a question indispensable."

I am informed that this item is on the agenda for the Croydon Council meeting of January 27th. G.H.T.

## "IN ITS PLACE"

But what shall be substitute in its place, say you? What? A ferocious animal has sucked the blood of my relatives. I tell you to rid yourselves of this beast and you ask me what you shall put in its place? You put this question to me—then you are a hundred times more odious than pagans.—VOLTAIRE.

# THE FREETHINKER

41 GRAY'S INN ROAD, LONDON, W.C.1.  
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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 welcome during normal office hours.

## TO CORRESPONDENTS

Mr. CUTNER writes: "I regret two slips in my article on the New Year. Muhammed fled from Mecca to Medina in 622 A.D.—not 522 A.D.: and the word 'Hejira' actually means 'flight'."

## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Room 4, International Centre, 83 Suffolk Street).—Sunday, January 12th, 7 p.m.: S. M. CAINES, "The Negro and Religion."

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics Institute).—Sunday, January 12th, 7 p.m.: E. THOMPSON, "Pioneers of Freethought."

Central London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, 5 minutes Edgware Road Tube).—Sunday, January 12th, 7.15 p.m.: D. HENDERSON, "God and Mr. Hoyle."

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, January 14th, 7.15 p.m.: I. O. EVANS, "Science Fiction."

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, January 12th, 6.30 p.m.: C. G. SHUTTLEWOOD (Leics. Astronomical Society), "The Moon."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Hall, Upper Parliament Street).—Sunday, January 12th, 2.30 p.m.: J. PECK, "The Next Labour Government."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, January 12th, 11 a.m.: MAURICE BURTON, "The Rights of Animals and the Rights of Man."

### OUTDOOR

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

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

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every weekday, 1 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, FINKEL, SMITH or CORSAIR.

Sunday, 8 p.m.: Messrs. MILLS, WOODCOCK, SMITH or WOOD.

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).—Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

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

DESPITE considerable opposition from the local Churches, Perth Town Council decided by ten votes to nine that the Playhouse Cinema be allowed to open on Sunday evenings for an experimental period of three months. "How can we teach our young people to remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, and then confront them in the evening of that day with the glare and blaze of an open picture house?" asked one clergyman. "If the Sunday cinemas are permitted, we will be obliged to discontinue evening services in our church," said another, because of the noise made by cinema queues and persons parking cars. A third believed that "People asking for an evening of worship would get no peace at all," but did not elaborate in *The People's Journal* (14/12/57), from which our information is obtained. The cinema, it must be said, went some way towards meeting the objections of the clergy by inviting them to come to the Sunday performances and speak, but, at the time of writing, it isn't known whether the offer has

## The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £283 15s. 6d.; Wm. McKee, 11s. 3d.; A. Hancock, 2s.; A. Addison, £1; A. Stephenson, £1; A. Pigott, £1; A. H. Deacon, 10s.; R. C. Bossomaier, £2; W. J. Bennett, £1; Mrs. E. Goldsmith, 5s.—Total to date, January 3rd, 1958, £291 3s. 9d.

## OBITUARY

PROF. SIR ERNEST LAWRENCE KENNAWAY

READERS will share our regret in learning of the death of Prof. Sir Ernest Kennaway, one of Britain's leading medical experts and a declared opponent of Christian doctrine. Only a month ago he wrote an article specially for THE FREETHINKER, describing his experiences as a patient in hospital; this appeared in our issue of December 16th. Professor Kennaway was 76. For some years he had been concerned with the work of St. Bartholomew's Hospital on lung cancer research. In 1946 he won the prize awarded by the British Empire Cancer Campaign.

A tribute from Mr. C. Bradlaugh Bonner will appear in our next issue.

been accepted. But, as time goes on, perhaps the clergy will brave the "glare and blaze" and bore cinemagoers as they do congregations.

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ALL praise to the *Manchester Guardian* Television Critic, who wrote (27/12/57): "There was a religiosity about the BBC's introduction and conclusion to the Queen's speech which was extremely displeasing. Believe it or not, immediately after the Queen's face had been faded out, we were shown an altar. The ITA apparently was content with the exterior of Sandringham House." Christian readers didn't like this criticism. One thanked the BBC for "maintaining Christian standards." "It still means a lot to many of us," she added. Another exclaimed: "Surely this is a Christian country and as such it is surely right," etc. A third repeated the current catchphrase: Perhaps this is another occasion "where Christmas has very foolishly become involved with religion." Two points stand out: first, the Christmas broadcast was intended for the Commonwealth, which is not Christian (even if Britain is); second, many Christians still need simple lessons on the Winter Solstice. The *Guardian* has published a letter from the N.S.S. General Secretary on the matter.

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DURING the last weekend in August 1958 (August 29th to September 1st) the World Union of Freethinkers will be holding a social reunion in Brussels. There will be a special dinner—always a happy occasion—and a visit to the Brussels Exhibition, which is to be held this year. It is hoped that British Freethinkers will make the most of this opportunity to meet their colleagues in other lands for a friendly get-together. Those who would like to join the party are asked to write the General Secretary of the National Secular Society as soon as possible. And don't worry about language difficulties: there are always plenty of willing interpreters.

## NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY 52nd ANNUAL DINNER

*followed by a Dance*

SATURDAY, 15th FEBRUARY, 1958

ALL WELCOME at the MECCA RESTAURANT

11-12 BLOMFIELD STREET, E.C.2  
(Near Liverpool St. and Broad St. Stations)  
RECEPTION 6.30 P.M. DINNER 7.0 P.M.

Vegetarians Catered for Evening Dress Optional

Guest of Honour: STEPHEN SWINGLER, M.P.

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

## Was Jesus a Freethinker?

YES: By C. G. L. DU CANN

IN THAT PART of his "Epistola," formerly called "De Profundis," Oscar Wilde has some pregnant passages upon Jesus Christ as an Artist. There is also an American Christian sect of faith-healers with branches in England which delivers dreary lectures upon Christ as a Scientist.

"A man so various," in Dryden's phrase, as Jesus is depicted as being in the Four Gospels may well be depicted by those who expatiate upon him in differing guises, or disguises. But while it may be conceded that Christ was, as Wilde declared, an Artist amongst other things, it is impossible to proclaim him a Scientist in the modern sense of that word without doing violence to its meaning. For my part, however, I am prepared to classify Jesus Christ as a Freethinker.

"It all depends," as the late Dr. Joad used to say, "upon what you mean by a Freethinker." Well, what is a Freethinker? Often the term is limited to intellectual freedom upon religious thought alone; but though this is sometimes convenient, it is an undesirable limitation. For if we accept it, what are we to call those "esprits forts" who think for themselves in other fields such as politics and sociology? Or what are we to call such men as carry their freedom into every sphere of thought?

I should define a Freethinker as a person who repudiates all fetters upon thought, whether forged by authority, custom, convention, prejudice, instinct or any other inhibition, in relation to all subjects and objects presented to him, and who thinks, not with other people's heads but with his own, following his thought fearlessly wherever it may lead him.

That is difficult indeed, from the very constitution of the human mind. The mind is prone to easy acceptances, its health and vigour varies, and it will not think for itself unless it is forced to do so by some strong compulsion. Inevitably, even the saints of Freethought, such men as Bernard Shaw and Earl Russell, for example, have sinned and fallen short of the glory of Freethought on occasion. As for the rest of us, you and me, it hardly bears thinking about. None the less, the definition stands.

And by that definition, Jesus Christ was a Freethinker, a deeply religious, mystical Freethinker it is true. For freedom of thought does not lead all minds to atheism or agnosticism. It leads different minds to different journeys' ends, as when it led Voltaire to a kind of Deism and Shaw to Vitalism.

Certainly the freethinking proclivities of Jesus are not uninteresting. They dated from childhood. His precocious cross-examination of the learned doctors in the Temple showed him to be that detestable sort of boy, thoughtful beyond his years, priggish and serious, whom English public-schoolmasters instinctively hate. At an age when he should have been thinking of cricket, football and the old school, he had "swotted" up the Law and the Prophets in order to confute his elders and betters.

A sad spectacle for the orthodox then, as now. Nor did this unboyish boy shrink from "answering back" his distracted mother. For his words: "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business," was a reproach and a rebuke to her as well as a naughty side-smack at his supposed father, Joseph. This was a departure from the Fifth Commandment.

Indeed, the constant rudeness of Jesus to the Blessed Virgin Mary, his mother, his urging that parents should be deserted and even hated show the freedom of thought

of an extremist. This was dead against the teaching of his day.

On Monarchy, Jesus was also a Freethinker. While approving the institution for himself to be "King of the Jews," he treasonably called the reigning King Herod "that fox." In this he went much further than the Lord Altrinchams and the Malcolm Muggeridges of our day, who never called our Queen Elizabeth "that vixen" or anything of that kind. We may be sure that Jesus was heard with horror by all respectable and "right-thinking" citizens.

Again, upon the sacrosanct Fourth Commandment, which enjoins such strict Sabbath-keeping that we are to do "no manner of work," Jesus thought and expressed himself freely, uttering the new and anarchistic phrase: "The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath." He was no adherent of our Mr. Legerton and his Lord's Day Observance Society in Fleet Street. Indeed, from the evidence of the Gospels, he would have repudiated their claim to be his followers as impolitely and forcibly as he repudiated those other religionists, the Pharisees.

Further, on the question of free trade within the Temple precincts, Jesus was in armed conflict with the received opinion of his day. He committed assault and battery upon respectable live-stock dealers, and called tradesmen thieves. This is in line with what the Press of our day would reprobate as "the worst excesses of Communism"; and if there had been a Jerusalem Chamber of Trade in those days it would have passed resolutions saying that crucifixion was too good for this seditious agitator.

It was not a conventional process of thought that led Jesus to prefer the bad to the good, the publicans and harlots to the lawyers and rabbis. His freethinking led him to a transvaluation of values, the very opposite to that generally accepted. If he liked the poor, it was not for their poverty, as foolish people are apt to think, for there is nothing but evil in poverty itself, but because their poverty freed them from adherence to the kingdom of this world and did not stand between them and the kingdom of God, as riches often did.

On the subject of marriage, his thinking never got down to the bedrock of the problem and his utterances are so confusing that Christendom has never been able to agree on the meaning of what Gibbon has called justly "the ambiguous word of Christ." On human beings his outlook was so elementary that he could divide humanity into unreal divisions of black and white, good and bad, sheep and goats, heaven-fodder and hell-fodder—and nothing else! On political problems, his "Render to Caesar" solution is not above the intellectual level of an Inland Revenue tax-demand.

There is no Omniscience in the thought of Jesus (as reported to us by the Four Gospels), which seems to have been confined to the subject of such religion as was known in the Palestine of his day. But in religious thought there is good ground for saying that Jesus was a resolute and convinced Freethinker inhibited by nothing but the genuine conclusions to which his own independent and emotional thinking drove him.

As to the way in which his thinking led him to behave: that may be truthfully summed up, not in the picture of the English hymn of "Gentle Jesus meek and mild" but as "Raging Jesus, stern and grim"—as his many opponents often found him, and this, not in the Temple incident alone. (Imagine his reactions in Westminster Abbey today.

where picture postcards are being sold and vergers take tips from sightseeing Americans!)

In short, it can be seriously claimed that Christ was no Christian in the modern English sense of that word, and that Western institutionalised Christianity would have stunk in his nostrils. Just as he preferred the publicans, harlots and other sinners of his time to the religionists and other saints, so he might find the Freethinkers of ours nearer to his own way of thinking than the Churches which profess to claim him for their Lord and Master.

**NO:** By H. CUTNER

MR. DU CANN is not the first Christian by a long way who wants us to believe that Jesus Christ was a genuine Freethinker. One of my earliest discussions in this journal was with a lady who had exactly the same silly notion, and I have come across references to Jesus as a Freethinker in many articles—just as I have come across other articles where Jesus is described as the greatest Gardener, or Poet, or Carpenter, or Business Man, and so on, who has ever lived. There is no limit to the credulity of the average Christian.

Of course, Mr. Du Cann would disclaim any responsibility for such fantastic notions, for he is not an average Christian. He, no doubt, belongs to those millions of Christians who are always protesting that they will have no truck with "Churchianity"—that they are followers of the "true" Christianity initiated by Christ Jesus, and that the Churches have betrayed the Saviour—the Christ. To say—as I do—that the truth really is that the Churches have *civilised* Christianity is looked upon with horror by these people.

Mr. Du Cann, to my very great surprise, for he is a barrister, has tied himself into a complete knot by his definitions of the word "Freethinker," and has completely confused himself and the issue. He appears never to have heard of the words "free thinker."

Chambers defines "Freethinker" as "One who rejects authority in religion. A Rationalist." Nothing could be clearer. On the other hand, a "free thinker" admirably defines what Mr. Du Cann has surely in mind—"a person who repudiates all fetters upon thought, etc."

The people who call themselves Freethinkers are opposed to all religions—including that of Jesus. But as far as I can see, almost anybody can be a "free thinker," including, of course, Jesus. Anybody who thinks for himself has a right to call himself a free thinker. Thus, although Mr. Du Cann is always protesting that he is a true Christian, yet, as he has his own ideas about the Church or Churches—I do not know whether he belongs to any—as soon as he criticises them, he automatically becomes a free thinker. Anarchists, Communists, Socialists, Malthusians and anti-Malthusians, Pacifists, Tories, and so on, may be free thinkers. Jesus attacking his mortal enemies the Pharisees—or, for that matter, lawyers, as Mr. Du Cann very well knows—was a genuine *free* thinker. So he was when he was what Mr. Du Cann calls being "rude" to his own mother. Most Jews "honoured" their parents—as they do to this day. When Jesus told his followers that they had to "hate" their fathers and mothers, he was exercising his right to think freely; in short, to be a free thinker. But he was never, and could not be, a Freethinker.

What I find so amusing about Mr. Du Cann is that when he is writing on literature or secular subjects in general, he deals with evidence like a lawyer. Yet as soon as he gets bogged in the Christian morass, overboard goes

the horrid word "evidence," and he is as credulous as a Salvation Army lassie.

He actually quotes the story of Jesus at the age of twelve pulverising mature Jewish rabbis in argument—though he must know that for this particular story there is not a scrap of evidence. It was told of other "Saviours"—like Buddha, for example—and in any case, the idea that Jesus could beat men grown old in study, at the age of twelve, is as fantastic as the idea that Jesus was the Greatest Business Man the world has ever seen. Surely Mr. Du Cann, if he really reads THE FREETHINKER, should have outgrown this naïve nonsense?

Whether Jesus attacked the institution of Monarchy as such, or did not, is a matter of evidence, and is of no consequence whatever. Indeed, most of his ideas on such subjects as economics or war or almost anything else are infantile. He once told a rich man to sell all he had and give to the poor. That is, he simply advised transferring the riches to some other person or persons, and thus did not alter in any way whatever the problems of poverty faced by the poor. He seemed to have an idea that to give the poor some money without their working for it was so marvellous a solution of poverty that nothing else mattered. And Christians still with bated breath point out the *magnum opus* of the teachings of Jesus—"Love thy neighbour as thyself"—which, in any case, he lifted from the Old Testament. Of course, this divine teaching is unadulterated nonsense. Why should I be asked to love my neighbour if he is a child or animal torturer, a swindler or wife beater? Jesus was certainly a free thinker in giving such teachings, and I am a free thinker in rejecting them.

Jesus was no more of a Freethinker than the head of Jehovah's Witnesses. He was a thorough believer in religion, and a particularly silly religion at that. He believed in miracles, and performed them regularly. He believed in Devils as much as any Devil worshipper. He said (Matt. 5, 17): "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets; I am not come to destroy but to fulfil." If those words have any meaning, Jesus came to fulfil everything in the Hebrew Old Testament—though he only knew it in its Greek translation. A Freethinker is one who rejects religion—not fulfils it.

Jesus's favourite prayer—and I am sure that Mr. Du Cann must have solemnly uttered it hundreds of times, and possibly still piously intones it—is that known as the Lord's Prayer, and it begins with "Our Father which art in Heaven." Here again, if words have any meaning, Jesus believed in a "Father" residing in Heaven and he meant, of course, that this "Father" was (and is) God Almighty. If Mr. Du Cann as a Christian can give us any other meaning, I hope he will do so. Most readers of this journal are always pleased to learn and go on learning.

Mr. Du Cann insists that "it can be seriously claimed that Christ was no Christian in the modern English sense of the word." He says this because of his own peculiar ideas of what Christianity really is. I insist that Jesus was exactly what the Churches have made of him, "meek and mild" or "stern and grim," a Man of Sorrows, or anything else whatever. There is a very wide choice. But however much Jesus was, like Mr. Du Cann, a free thinker, thank Heaven (say I) that he was not and never could be a Freethinker.

—NEXT WEEK—

**INTERPLANETARY THEOLOGY**

By F. A. RIDLEY

## CORRESPONDENCE

### SHOULD FREETHINKERS CELEBRATE XMAS?

The early Christians were poverty-stricken wretches who expected the world to go up in smoke at any moment at the express command of its Maker, Jehovah, who held a monopoly in manufacturing universes from nothing in six days.

After the holocaust they would be wafted to Paradise, to be regaled with plum pudding and wine made from water, for ever and a day. For entertainment, massed Jew's-harp bands, with the assistance of trumpet solos by the angel Gabriel would delight their ears, the while they sat gloating over their former hated governors, who would be shrieking for water in the fiery furnace down below. It didn't work out that way. Their expectations of soon joining Jesus in Heaven while Mother Earth was being consumed, were doomed to disappointment. Later on, however, they struck lucky. A Purple Emperor took them under his left wing. The Cross became triumphant. The Gentle Jesusites subjugated the Sun-worshippers, and instituted Son-worship, by deeds so foul as to be almost unbelievable.

But the past held the Christians in its grip. Custom prevailed. Despite efforts to alter them, the feasts of the deposed pagans, of necessity, had to be celebrated on the old dates.

Traditionally, Christians should celebrate Xmas in sackcloth and ashes, moaning Woe! Woe! Woe! But, as C. G. L. Du Cann contends: "There are no Christians." It is the Freethinker who should rejoice. Atheistic science has showered benefits on mankind, and Christians very wisely take full advantage of them, just as they ensure their survival by conforming to science.

Good food, choice drinks and health to enjoy them depend upon atheistic science. Ergo: Freethinkers should celebrate Xmas wisely and well—but certainly well—and throw all the antispasmodic tinctures to the "demnition bow-wows."

H. IRVING.

### HIS BLUNDERS TO PEPFORM

After the terrible recent train crash there appeared on TV a Salvation Army officer who said he and others went to help on the scene of the disaster, and talked to the poor unfortunate people about God. I was just disgusted. Why don't they use their brains? What was their God doing to allow such a disaster? Who, for goodness' sake, ever wants to meet an "all-powerful and loving God" who allows such things—or does he do these things with a purpose in mind? Perhaps they were all wicked people, not fit to live in this world full of peaceful and loving people!

What human being who was near, with any feelings, could help giving his time to relieve suffering wherever possible? Atheists would do it, but they wouldn't be asked to talk on TV, of course. When mentioning all this to a Christian I was told God has his reasons—well, I wish he'd state them—he keeps so quiet about everything, so you can't blame me for not seeing any reason behind it all. Can it be that he is kept busy helping the godless Russians to launch successful Sputniks and blowing up godly Eisenhower's goofnik?

KATHLEEN TACCHI-MORRIS.

### BURNS

I was very surprised to see the statement in Paul Varney's letter of December 16th, where he says that Robert Burns died drunk. I don't believe it. I have read every Life of R. Burns I could lay my hands on, also every fragment I have ever seen in any publication. If he died drunk it certainly did not mention that in any Life I have read. Even if true, that is no argument against Sunday opening. I can take him around Keighley, where I live, and he would not find any fights or rows one Sunday in fifty. The thing is to clear the slums; then, as always, there will be less drinking when the people are housed decently. Nor do I believe that Scots are more prone to violence than English or Welsh. My reading about Burns suggests that in the years when he was so ill, this precluded him from drinking to excess. Mr. McCall is as a rule sure of his facts before he writes his article.

JANE GLYDE.

James Barke states in his book, *The Well of the Silent Harp*, that Burns died of rheumatic debility brought on by years of toil in unproductive farm work.

T. L. PEERS.

### QUOTABLE

It will be of interest to Freethinkers to learn that Aldous Huxley holds the secularist view of the universe. I quote from John Atkins' *Literary Study of A.H.*, published last year: "His fundamental assumption is that life on this planet is valuable in itself, without any reference to hypothetical higher worlds, eternities, future existences."

ALFRED D. CORRICK.

### FIRST THINGS FIRST

I feel sure that many readers of THE FREETHINKER must be in general agreement with the article, "A Humanitarian View on Space Travel" by G. I. Bennett, in your issue of November 29th.

No doubt, as time proceeds, space travel will help us to under-

stand many things that are at present mere conjecture, and all further knowledge is to be welcomed. Nonetheless, there are other matters that ought to concern us with much more urgency. When we read that more than half the world's population lives either on or even below the starvation line, that hundreds of millions are still illiterate and that there is virtually always a war, big or little, going on somewhere on the earth, it would be more beneficial to mankind generally if we attempted to make this world a better place before we put so much energy into discovering the mysteries of outer space.

As for the use of animals in scientific experiments, I would not cut this out altogether, but a very great deal might be done to alleviate the suffering of such creatures. It would appear that their treatment before and after the experiments leaves much to be desired, and anaesthetics, genuine ones, should be much more general. By "genuine" I mean anaesthetics that abolish pain instead of, as in so many instances at present, merely paralysing the animal to keep it still, but leaving its sense of feeling fully active.

Further, is it necessary in the days of cinematography to use animals for a *repetition* of experiments for demonstration purposes? A picture, once taken, could be shown again and again; in fact, it should be preferable to the actual experiment, in that it could proceed more slowly if required or stopped now and then for explanations to be given.

Let us, then, make our first concern the alleviation of suffering, whether for human beings or those dumb creatures which, though branching off on to different lines, are of the same origin as ourselves and thus are closely related to us.

W. G. SCHOLES.

### THAT CHRISTMAS FEELING

G. H. Taylor's article took my mind back to Christmas Eve 1950 and President Truman's world broadcast. In it he declared that the world's most powerful weapon was neither the A- nor the H-bomb—it was "just a little old baby in a little cot"! Within hours of that, General MacArthur had destroyed 8,000 Korean homes with napalm to celebrate the birth of the Babe of Bethlehem! At a later date "Doctor" Graham told thirteen million listeners that the U.S. Army in Korea was the most religious army in history—whose officers "were guided and illuminated by the power of prayer"! The havoc Graham saw was the handiwork of the "Liberators," inspired by the Unholy Trinity of Bluster, Billy, and the Los Angeles Ghost!

THOMAS DAVIDSON.

## OBITUARY

### TRAGIC DEATH OF JAMES KIRKHAM

It is my painful duty to announce the tragic death, just before Christmas, of the National Secular Society's oldest Canadian member, James Frederick Kirkham. Seventy-five years old, Jim Kirkham was a janitor in Toronto, and he was beaten to death with a crowbar when he surprised a burglar and struggled with him. A man has been charged with the murder.

Jim was born in my own birthplace, Barrow-in-Furness, in 1882, and his frequent and quite unique letters often referred to his Lancashire upbringing. His many correspondents will know his style and the familiar "Bye! Jim Kirkham," with which he ended them. These pen-friends will join me in sending sincere regrets to his only relative, his niece, Mrs. C. Drake, of Preston, who is also a member of the N.S.S.

C.M.C.

## FOR NEWCOMERS

### AS AN INTRODUCTION TO FREETHOUGHT

#### THE HISTORICAL JESUS AND THE MYTHICAL CHRIST by Gerald Massey.

#### ROME OR REASON? by R. G. Ingersoll.

#### THOMAS PAINE by Chapman Cohen.

#### MARRIAGE: SACERDOTAL OR SECULAR

by C. G. L. Du Cann.

#### ROBERT TAYLOR by H. Cutner

#### WHAT IS THE SABBATH DAY? by H. Cutner.

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