

The Freethinker

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Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

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IN THE PREFACE to his book, *The Necessity of Atheism* (Freethought Press Association, New York, 1933), Dr. D. M. Brooks quotes Havelock Ellis as saying that "The man who has never wrestled with his early faith, the faith that he was brought up with . . . has missed not only a moral but an intellectual discipline. The absence of that discipline may mark a man for life and render all his work ineffective. . . He is, for the most part, condemned to live in a mental jungle where his arms will soon be too feeble to clear away the growths that enclose him, and his eyes too weak to find the light."

To me these words are interesting, not merely as an expression of one man's opinion, but as a statement of considerable truth. How many people are there, in middle or late middle life, who cast off the religious beliefs of childhood? Few, to be sure. By the time middle age is reached it is very difficult to do so—perhaps impossible for all except the most intellectually vigorous and disinterested.

Difficulty in Renouncing Religion

A man in middle or still later years may have become disillusioned with many things that fired his youthful imagination and seemed to fulfil his early idealism. A movement, a mission, a school of thought—political, philosophical, æsthetic, cultural, or what not—that once appeared to him worthy of personal dedication does not appear so any longer. He may have simply lost interest in it; or he may (this is not infrequently the case) have come first to doubt and then to disbelieve in the principles, the tenets, the ideals on which it is founded. He may once also have belonged to a Church and abandoned that, too. There are many backsliders. But will he ever abandon the religion on which it is based, and which it exists to propagate, beginning by doubting and ending by disbelieving in its dogmas and articles of faith? It rarely happens. And I think the reason is that, while in most other matters there is enough independent thinking encouraged, or at any rate permitted, to make it impossible for a person not to be aware that he holds one of possibly several views for each of which there is at least something to be said, this is not so in the case of religion. One is taught at school, and often even earlier in the home, about God and Jesus, and the Life Everlasting that shall be lived with them in Heaven as the reward of faith and virtue here on earth. And this, one learns, is the supreme all-important truth, to be accepted implicitly by the whole of mind and heart. So it is hardly to be wondered at that very few people ever abandon altogether the religion of the Church to which they nominally belong, and which possibly they once attended. To do that would be to exchange the role of backslider for that of freethinker.

It is not often a freethinker renounces unbelief to become a theist; but to my mind it is easier for him to do this than for the theist to become a freethinker. A freethinker in his last years, in loneliness, sickness, and failing

strength, may return to the religion of his childhood; but few theists there must be who have heart enough to become atheists after youth has left them. "Not one in a thousand," cried Coleridge, "has either goodness of heart or strength of mind to be an atheist." I do not know about goodness of heart; but as to strength of mind I agree. A person who has not been used to fearless thought and the critical examination of personal beliefs cannot, I think, attain intellectual freedom in later life. Cannot, that is,

short of some emotional or psychological impact which, if too violent, may set him at defiance with the world and pitch him, it may well be, into unbelief, but without that reflective liberty of mind inseparable from genuine freethought.

One sometimes hears it

said of a man that he is born an artist, a musician, a linguist, a leader, or whatever it might be. Certainly there are individuals who from infancy or childhood onwards reveal marked aptitude in a particular field of human endeavour. Mozart, in showing unusual musical ability at the age of four, is an outstanding instance. Music, art and literature appear to run in families in much the same way that high intelligence or dull-wittedness does. The Brontë sisters, here in my native Yorkshire, all displayed quite early in life an extraordinary literary bent independent of any outside influence, and without any encouragement from their clerical father—who was, indeed, supremely unaware that his daughters' evening writing habit was anything but a passing and insignificant form of self-amusement. Even their brother Branwell, the waster of the family, had considerable artistic ability.

But what may be true of the arts is not, I think, true of freethought, which is of a different order. No one is born a freethinker, but he may be called to freethought as his interest in the world about him enlarges and he becomes an inquiring spectator of the drama of life. Thinking has never been easy, and independent or unorthodox thinking is usually embarked upon in face of the heavy tide of a hostile world. Thus it is hard to achieve one's intellectual destiny, and countless good reasons suggest themselves why one should, after all, take the path of least resistance and accept the shallow but comfortable opinions and prejudices of the herd. But if it is laborious and difficult to think as an individual, and not parrot the clichés and dogmas of the common run of men, it is nevertheless highly civilised.

Wider View of Freethought

There are people who take an unnecessarily narrow view of freethought. They are encouraged in this by the dictionaries, which generally define freethought simply as a rejection of religious authority and all traditional religious beliefs. That, of course, is the essence of freethought, but I think by no means the whole of it. Freethought, surely, is the attitude of the questing, open mind; an attitude of basic intellectual humility face to face with truth, as truth is conceived. And if this is so, it can hardly be too strongly

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

The Value of Freethought

G. I. BENNETT

emphasised that a freethinker is not an anti-theist, an anti-cleric, at whatever cost. He is rather, it seems to me, one who has arrived at a condition of unbelief (or absence of religious belief) as a consequence of unfettered inquiry into all that lends itself to philosophic speculation concerning the phenomenon of existence. And if, in the same spirit of inquiry, applying the same fundamental rationalism, he were led to quite different conclusions, he would be willing to abandon even unbelief itself in the interests of truth. This is freethought.

Where freethought is, there cannot be authoritarianism. Freethought, in its original specific sense of theistic unbelief, is the key to freethinking—or free thinking—in all things. Herein lies its great value. For a man who is prompted at some time or other to examine, and after diligent consideration reject, so personal and fundamental a thing as religious faith is capable of the widest, most critically intelligent non-conformity. Eternally at war with prejudice wherever it finds it, freethought throws upon the individual the imperative of looking at the world afresh and with his own eyes. It is a philosophy for an active mind that will not blindly and without good reason follow the persuasions of the multitude.

Present Position and Future Prospects

The Christian Church, it may be, is on the decline nowadays; but does that necessarily mean that freethought, or free rational inquiry, is gaining or will gain ground? If the *milieu* of present-day England is any guide, I see no real likelihood of this. There are many indications that the sturdy independent thinker in the spheres of politics, religion, philosophy, ethics, and education is becoming an increasingly "rare bird." Our modern rush age with its intellectually shoddy press, its cheap moronic periodicals, its trashy salacious literature, its high-powered mind-con-

ditioning advertising, its tradition-guarding radio programmes and cinema-screen slush, is producing—what? Not discriminating culture and lively, vigorous intelligence, but a state of mind full of conventional notions, vulgar in its tastes, wretchedly ill-equipped to think for itself about anything worth the name, extraordinarily gullible and slavishly dependent upon what those in authority say. A man is better—far better—without such educationally corrupting media. An unlettered shepherd in the quiet and lonely hills, cut off from radio, newspapers, and other mind-conditioning agencies, and therefore chiefly dependent upon himself for his mental formulations, is at a considerable advantage. His thinking and his impressions may be erroneous and ill-informed, but at least they will be largely his own based upon his first-hand observations and experience of life.

It seems to me that until we again produce, if ever we do (for in a large complex society like ours the difficulties are enormously greater), an intensely critical culture such as in rare moments of history and in small areas of the world has obtained—one thinks of the civilisations of ancient Athens and Renaissance Italy—we are not likely to create an environment favourable to freethought. Freethought, I say, is more than a mere affirmation of the truth of agnosticism or atheism. For all I know, a materialist—or, if the word is preferred, an atheistic—approach to life may be taught in the schools in Russia, but I am not aware that freethinking in that land is a notable social characteristic. Though one dogma may be truer than another, the fact of its being unconsciously and unthinkingly assimilated precludes that exquisite balancing of different points of view or theories, in order to select the one considered most in accord with truth, which is freethought at its best.

Review

THE GREAT NORWEGIAN DRAMATIST, Henrik Ibsen, whose philosophic and social plays hit the British public in the 'eighties and 'nineties of the last century, stirring to emulation Mr. Bernard Shaw, used to say that his sympathies were with the under-dog in three great revolts. These were the working-man against his employer; the woman against the man; and the coloured folk against the whites. I do not recall any specific reference by Ibsen to a revolt of man against his gods (which man, in the first place, made) but there is little doubt that the disposition to revolt in one section against established idols promotes criticism in more than one section.

For this reason the Freethinker and Secularist must necessarily have much sympathy with critics of other challenged institutions. The National Secular Society has in its long life played a foremost and honoured part in women's struggle for freedom of action and opinion in a man-made world. The women members of the N.S.S. have been prominent in securing the final triumph of being granted the useful and pleasant-reading handbook on women's struggle for recognition as responsible and, indeed, human beings in Great Britain will attract the attention of readers of THE FREETHINKER. Such a book has recently been published by MESSRS. Watts: *Go Spin, You Jade!* by Mrs. D. L. Hobman. The book is subtitled *Studies in the Emancipation of Woman* and costs 15s. net.

Mrs. Hobman enquires to what extent women suffered before they attained equality of citizenship with men; how far-reaching their influence will be on future society; and, lastly, how this immense change has been brought about. Her main purpose is to answer the last question. The

answer, in brief, is that the change has been brought into being by the influence of the Renaissance, a going-back to civilised antiquity, and by a going-forward to a machine age, the Industrial Revolution, which lessened the importance of man's superior strength.

By far the larger portion of this book is, however, devoted to English women writers for the last three hundred years, summarising their pleas and teachings. One brief section is devoted to the militant Suffragettes. This section seems to the reviewer the weaker, perhaps because the women mostly concerned were of working-class origin, not writers, only prisoners. There is a welcome index, but the exuberant (Mrs. Hobman's demure term) Aphra Behn was not at the court of Charles I. Some might personally prefer in this connection more about Annie Kenney, the mill-girl of Manchester, than this courtier of the Merry Monarch. Both were imprisoned: Annie for "Votes for Women," Aphra for debt; but to adapt a popular saying: It takes all sorts to make a Movement.

BAYARD SIMMONS

Modesty in Spain

ONE ASPECT of Catholicism and modernity will be found in the 12-point "Code of Feminine Modesty" drawn up by Spanish Cardinal Enrique Pla y Deniéle and reported by B.U.P. Clothing must not be so tight-fitting as to reveal the body "in a provocative manner," and must cover the leg to below the knees. Plunging necklines are gravely sinful. Elbows, too, are provocative, so sleeves must go beyond them; stockings should be worn. Even little girls can be provocative—to priests, it seems—and their dresses must reach the knees. Similarly, little boys' thighs must not be exposed.

The Man after God's Own Heart

By F. A. RIDLEY

THERE APPEARED IN LONDON, about 1762, an anonymous pamphlet which made an international sensation. The title of the pamphlet was taken from the Bible: *David, the Man after God's own Heart*, and it administered a resounding slap in the face to the rampant Fundamentalism which characterised the England of the 18th and 19th centuries. The pamphlet was translated into French by Baron D'Holbach and was praised by Voltaire himself. The authorship remains unknown today. Voltaire ascribed it to Peter Annet, a leading Deistic critic of Christianity, who endured savage persecution on account of his heterodox opinions. But this appears to be ruled out by a comparison of the pamphlet with Annet's own writings, e.g., the hostile attitude taken up by Annet to Christ is in striking contrast to that of the author of *David*, who writes respectfully of Christ as opposed to his derogatory account of David. The catalogue in the British Museum Library ascribes the pamphlet to John Noorthouck, an antiquarian and bookseller, but this also appears improbable on grounds of chronology, since according to the *Dictionary of National Biography*, Noorthouck was born about 1746 and would then only have been in his early youth when the pamphlet appeared. Whilst its actual author remains unknown, however, the pamphlet itself is masterly and a most effective attack on the fundamentalism of its day. Written with punch and characterised by wit and irony, its utility was recognised not only by the Deists of the 18th century, but by their more advanced 19th century successors. Richard Carlile reissued *David* in his paper, *The Deist*, in 1820. Thanks largely to the ridicule poured on it by such critics as Carlile and the anonymous author, Biblical Fundamentalism is no longer the force that it once was; yet a reissue of this version of the life story of the man after God's own heart would still be timely, though one fears it would not get a very favourable reception either from Christians or perhaps still less from the now numerous people so aptly described as "reverent rationalists." In the present State of Israel, where orthodox Judaism has now restored King David, the reissue nearly two centuries after its initial appearance, would be particularly useful, if perhaps dangerous to the printers and publishers on account of still current Zionist fanaticism.

The author informs us in his preface that the reason which induced him to put pen to paper on this theme was a sermon preached by a famous Dissenting minister of the day, the Rev. Dr. Samuel Chandler, with whom its author subsequently engaged in controversy. In this sermon, preached after the death of that dull nonentity, George II, King of England and Elector of Hanover, Dr. Chandler had compared the deceased Hanoverian monarch with King David, the point being that the Anglo-German monarch who died in 1760 after a reign of reputedly the same length as David's—33 years—was also a "man after God's own heart." George, I seem to recall, introduced the still prevalent habit of standing during the singing of the Hallelujah Chorus in Handel's *Messiah*, composed during his reign: an act of piety presumably pleasing to Jehovah! He was, also, the last British monarch to fight personally in the interminable wars of the period—another point of comparison since David had, at least, some military merits. George is said to have assured his dying wife, who urged him to marry again, that he would never do so but would have mistresses instead! I doubt if Dr. Chandler

mentioned these points of resemblance in his sermon. But he could well have done so. It was left to the unknown pamphleteer to point out what a very doubtful compliment Chandler and Co. were paying the Hanoverian by comparing him with the Biblical David, whom Old Testament historians convict of murder, theft, adultery, tyranny and pretty nearly every crime which an ancient Oriental monarch could have committed.

The author—whoever he may have been—went to the "historical" books of the Bible for his sources; indeed, to indict his "hero" thoroughly, he had no need to go to any other, since David is unknown to history outside our O.T. narrative and the later Jewish historians such as Josephus, who merely copied them. As such, they have neither more nor less historical authenticity than any other of what that not so "reverent rationalist," the late Dean Inge, once acidly described as the "patriotic legends of a tribe of wandering Bedouin." From the fact that the names of several of David's successors as Kings of Israel and Judah are mentioned on the Assyrian monuments where the rabbis could hardly have interpolated them, one must suppose that Kings of such names must have existed. Perhaps David also? But if the relevant Biblical narratives have any sort of authenticity, David was a bloodthirsty and lecherous old ruffian whose character and reign were stained with crime. There does not appear anything in the Biblical narratives relating to his gory career, either to justify the later elevation of David to the status of a national hero and the ancestor of the Messiah—or even to distinguish him from the average bloodthirsty little despots of his era.

The Jewish national hero—"the sweet singer of Israel" and reputed author of that very mixed collection, the Psalms of David—is a very different figure, with scarcely any resemblance to David, the murderer and adulterer of the books of Kings and Chronicles. Here posthumous influences have been effectively at work—those of the later priests and prophets of the cult of Jehovah—to create the legend of the national hero, the divinely inspired author of the Psalms which actually range from the sublime to the ridiculous, and the ancestor of the Messiah. Actually, what may be termed the evolution of the Davidic legend from the killer of Uriah into "the man after God's own heart" constitutes one of the most interesting chapters in the story of comparative religion. It developed with the cult of the tribal god of Israel, Jehovah, whose character also improved as time went on. Unfortunately, to trace it in any detail lay beyond the capabilities of the 18th century author, since the idea of evolution including religious evolution was still quite unknown. Today, a more detailed study of the legend of David would constitute a valuable contribution to the science of comparative religion. But any Israeli edition which may appear among David's descendants in the land over which he is reputed to have ruled and where he is still the national hero and the man after God's own heart, had better follow the example of its 18th century predecessor and remain anonymous.

—NEXT WEEK—

TO MY FELLOW SECULARISTS

By ARTHUR B. HEWSON

This Believing World

Headed by the Bishop of Exeter, a parson, a layman, and an M.P., ITV gave us the other Sunday an animated discussion on the terrifically burning question of marrying divorced people in church. The Bishop said "our Lord" laid it down once for all this was quite impossible, the parson said nobody was sure what "our Lord" meant, the M.P. (who was just as reverent towards the Bible and "our Lord" as the others) wanted a more tolerant attitude and the layman appeared to be thoroughly bewildered but just as all-believing as his Christian comrades. And nobody is a penny the wiser. What a complete farce is this kind of "discussion"!

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Believers in the Design Argument should do their utmost to reply to Dr. H. Lillie who, in the *Sunday Pictorial*, is doing his best to show the way Man is destroying "the balance of nature." How? Well, by preventing what has been called "Nature red in tooth and claw." We have no right, for example, to prevent timber wolves hunting down and eating deer who have been "over-populating" a particular area. This "adjusts nature's balance." If we destroy the "natural" enemies of rodents, these will increase and do untold harm by destroying crops; and if we spray trees for harmful insects, the birds who enjoy meals of insects will die of the poison—and so on.

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But, as any good sportsman would tell us, as it is necessary to kill deer, what better method could be devised than have them torn to pieces after a long chase either by wolves or dogs? Deer and foxes just love to be chased this way. And if we are not allowed to let rodents and similar animals die an awful and lingering death in a trap, is there anything to beat vivisectioning them either with or without anaesthetics? Besides, solid believers in the Design Argument would tell you all this is necessary to keep numbers down either for the good of humanity in general, or for the good of the animals in particular.

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The Bishop of Lichfield is delighted that in one of the ITV series, *Emergency—Ward 10*, the hospital chaplain was shown co-operating with the surgeon in an urgent operation; and he added that this representation and others have "greatly helped the work of the Church." Of course, anything which brings in the Churches on the radio or TV is bound to advertise them to their advantage. In fact, both the Bishop of Chichester and the Bishop of Coventry welcome the revival of "religious drama," and even a "religious ballet," for "dancing can be deeply religious." It is obvious that the retirement of Lord Reith, who also was "deeply religious," was a heavy blow to leadership in the BBC and TV.

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But if one considers the problem on its merits—exactly how does a hospital chaplain helping at an operation add to the truth of Christianity? After all, an operation is a "secular" operation, and has no more to do with Angels, Devils, Virgin Births, Resurrections, etc., than it has to do with chocolate almonds. And how is a religious ballet going to prove that Jesus Christ was an incarnation of the Jewish God Jahveh?

★

A religious play was put on the ITV the other week—it dealt with little Bernadette, to whom a beautiful young lady called the "Immaculate Conception" appeared in a grotto at Lourdes, and later found to be the Virgin Mary

herself. It was written by H. R. Williamson—a convert to Catholicism—and he took the part of the, at first, unbelieving priest. His object was to give his viewers the "truth"—that Bernadette was not a liar, not suffering from hysteria and imagining things, and that therefore her "vision" was literally true, and the "miracle" of Lourdes was born. Was his religious message accepted by our Protestant bishops? Or by Protestants in general? And is this the kind of religious play they are all pining for? What have our Bishops to say?

From China

I HAVE JUST RETURNED from a two months' trip into the People's Republic of China, where we made three short films. We seem to be the first British film unit to enter China since the Liberation.

At the moment we are very busy finishing off the films we photographed. They are *Inside Red China* (a two-reel documentary) and *Wonders of China* in colour, which shows the Forbidden City, the Great Wall, the Temple of Heaven, the ancient astronomical instruments, the traditional Chinese Puppet Theatre, the people of the Minorities with their colourful costumes, the village life in a typical village and the art of the Chinese lantern.

The former film starts with life on the lowest level and shows what has been done for the depressed people of the Pearl river who formerly had no schools, no medical help, not even clean drinking water. Their lives have been vastly improved under the new People's Government.

We show the tremendous activity in building everywhere; schools, colleges, institutes of civil aviation, coal mining, agriculture, etc. We go into the back streets of Peking and show how the ordinary man is faring. We show inside a department store. We show how the sale of beer and spirits is unrestricted and in every shop selling soft drinks, yet there are no drunkards. There are no beggars, no touts, no prostitutes, and no one will take a tip in trains or hotels. We show that there is religious freedom. The churches are open, but without money from overseas, and with shops, theatres, and sports grounds open all day Sunday, the competition is too fierce and they are slowly dying. The Catholic Cathedral is running half-hour services from 7.30 a.m. to 10 a.m. in an effort to meet people who want to spend the rest of their only holiday in the week, elsewhere, yet the priests admit their numbers are falling off.

In some Catholic churches the service is being conducted in Chinese for the first time in history, and the Catholics have formed their own Chinese Catholic Patriotic Society. I understand without the approval of the Pope. The prize paradox comes from Shanghai, where the spire of the Catholic Church was damaged by a cyclone, and repaired by the Chinese Communist Government! In all the colleges of the Chinese Minorities Institution the various religions, Christian and others, have their own chapels.

The people of China are making astounding progress. The standard of living is low compared with ours, but the people are adequately clothed and appear to be adequately fed. The great palaces of the Chinese Emperors are now museums thrown open to the people to enjoy. Likewise the racecourse at Shanghai, where the only horses now are little wooden ones ridden by children. The infamous Red Light area in Shanghai is now occupied by workers' families. The notorious "Great World" is now an amusement centre for working people, where you can see seven theatrical shows for one shilling.

RUDALL HAYWARD.

THE FREETHINKER

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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.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Room 4, 83 Suffolk Street).—Sunday, February 23rd, 7 p.m.: J. WHITBURN, "Some Contradictions of the Bible."

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics Institute).—Sunday, February 16th, 7 p.m.: A Lecture.

Bristol Rationalist Group (Co-operative Education Centre, Prewett Street).—Wednesday, February 26th, 7.30 p.m.: DAVE SHIPPER, "The International Freethought Scene."

Central London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, 5 minutes Edgware Road Tube).—Sunday, February 23rd, 7.15 p.m.: Debate on Marx.: W. M. CARLTON and S.P.G.B. Representative.

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, February 25th, 7.15 p.m.: Prof. T. H. PEAR, M.A., "Gossip."

Glasgow Secular Society (Central Halls, 25 Bath Street).—Sunday, February 23rd, 3 p.m.: O. C. DREWITT, "My Years as a Monk."

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, February 23rd, 6.30 p.m.: Alderman E. C. REDHEAD, M.P., "British Freedom in Danger."

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Wheatsheaf Hotel, High Street).—Sunday, February 23rd, 7 p.m.: A Lecture.

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Hall, Upper Parliament Street).—Sunday, February 23rd, 2.30 p.m.: R. DAIN, "Why I believe the Bible to be the Word of God."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, February 23rd, 11 a.m.: Prof. H. J. EYSENCK, B.A., "Is Conscience a Conditioned Reflex?"

West Ham and District Branch N.S.S. (Wanstead House, The Green, E.11).—Thursday, February 27th, 7.45 p.m.: Mrs. E. VENTON, "Woman and Religion."

Wales and Western Branch N.S.S. (Bute Town Community Centre, Cardiff).—Tuesday, February 25th, 7 p.m.: C. WILLIAMS, M.A., "The Jew."

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 and CORSAIR.

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

ON SUNDAY at 3 p.m. Glasgow Freethinkers will be able to hear Mr. O. C. Drewitt's interesting lecture, "My Years as a Monk", which was so well received in London. As an ex-Dominican priest, Mr. Drewitt speaks with authority on the monastic life. To this, he adds a critical, yet sensitive understanding, and we can promise his hearers a most rewarding afternoon in the Central Hall, 25 Bath Street. The meeting has been arranged by Glasgow Secular Society and the Glasgow Branch of the Rationalist Press Association.

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £307 0s. 3d.; A. Hancock, 2s.; S. R. Hitchcock, 2s. 8d.; N. Cluett, 2s. 6d.; North London Branch N.S.S., £1 1s.; J. Barlow (Canada), £1; Mrs. M. Rupp, 5s.—Total to date, February 14th, 1958, £309 13s. 5d.

PAMPHLETS have always been a splendid and easy way to spread the Gospel of Freethought and editions of them are usually bought up and rarely reprinted. At the moment the Pioneer Press has a number which would do exceptionally good work if given away to friends, as follows: *St. George and the Dragon* by F. A. Ridley, price 1d.; *Social Catholicism* by F. A. Ridley, price 1d.; *The Religious Revival* by G. H. Taylor, price 1d.; *BBC, ITA, and Atheism* by Colin McCall, price 3d.; *Problems of Church and State* by F. A. Ridley, price 4d. The postage on each of these pamphlets would be 2d.—which seems excessive at least for a penny pamphlet; so we feel that there must be a good many readers who would like them all, thus saving postage. The price of the six pamphlets is 11d., but we would send them all for 1s. (including postage).

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THE newly formed Humanist Society at University College, London, held a most successful opening meeting at the College on Tuesday, February 11th. A Brains Trust comprising Mr. H. J. Blackham (Ethical Union), Mr. Hector Hawton (Rationalist Press Association) and Mr. Colin McCall (National Secular Society) dealt most competently with a wide variety of questions put by members of the large audience. It is hoped that Miss Marghanita Laski will accept an invitation to address the Society, which has an enthusiastic and attractive secretary in Miss Susan E. Kahn.

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THANKS to the efforts of Mr. Dave Shipper and his Wales and Western Branch N.S.S., Cardiff Central Library has agreed to take THE FREETHINKER for a trial period. If there is sufficient demand for the paper it may become a permanency.

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READERS continue to do good work writing to newspapers in many parts of the country. Recent successful correspondents include Mr. F. E. Papps of Redditch, Mr. R. Morrell (Nottingham) and Mr. J. Davies (Porthcawl). And, during a holiday at home in Wales on leave from Ghana, Mr. Davies's son joined his father in a bombardment of the local press. Mr. Davies, senr., by the by, wonders if he is entitled to wear the green turban, having visited Mecca!

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WRITING in *The Observer* (February 9th), humorist Mr. Paul Jennings allowed his fancy to roam on a *Times* personal column advert. Among other qualifications, the advertiser was a "very experienced public orator and lecturer" and a rationalist. Mr. Jennings gave us, therefore, Lucas Pickering "on his stand outside the Corn Exchange every Saturday night." It was, in fact, Mr. Jennings at his best, but with, alas, one unfortunate slip. That Lucas Pickering might be "declaiming passionately" from Herbert Spencer or Ingersoll, we might accept. That he should utilise a railway guide, we cannot. Yet in addition to the two distinguished Freethinkers mentioned, appeared the third name, "Bradshaw." Our fancy roams in turn. Is Mr. Jennings's writing illegible? Did he speak indistinctly into the dictaphone? Or was it merely a display of ignorance on the part of sub-editor or compositor? To whomsoever it may concern, the name is Bradlaugh.

An Old Enigma—Free Will

By T. M. MOSLEY

CAN ANYTHING NEW BE SAID ON the Free Will controversy? Whose problem is it? The philosopher's, the psychologist's, the ethicist's, the sociologist's or the theologian's? The latter started the argument in the first place when he invented the "Free Will" theory as a cover for God's shortcomings!

God, being all-perfect, could not be the creator of Evil. Therefore man, by being endowed with the Divine Gift of free will, abused this gift and so created evil. In other words, God "permitted" evil. He was thus an accessory before the fact.

But the experts in each department relegate the problem to others. The disputants were once known as the Libertarians (for free will) and the Necessitarians (for causation) but in the nineteenth century J. S. Mill adopted the word "Determinism" instead of "necessity," the latter term implying a fatalistic implication. Is the dispute a verbal one as Hume suggested? Do the indeterminists say a man of strong moral character is "free" to "choose" at any moment a heinous crime? No. Then do the determinists contend that we are all passive beings moved merely by external forces? That we are no more than machines or puppets? No. What, then, is it all about? Einstein, a determinist, said he was unable to understand what "freedom of the will" actually meant. Is there an act of volition without an antecedent cause? If we assume the will is free, then *from what* is it free?

I got interested in these questions over fifty years ago, as many of my generation did. In 1906 Blatchford wrote *Not Guilty: a Defence of the Bottom Dog*; first appearing in article form in *The Clarion*, it was read with interest by thousands. A clever Methodist, the Rev. F. Ballard, wrote a reply called *Guilty* and somewhat shook Blatchford's final conclusions. How we young men argued and argued! Dr. Ballard filled eight pages with parallel contradictions from Blatchford, some only verbal, but others making Blatchford's case seem illogical. Although I was a hard-headed determinist, I had a feeling that Blatchford's conclusions were faulty and impracticable for social life. I stared at the statement in *Not Guilty*: "No man is answerable for his own acts; as he did not make himself he has no responsibility for anything he says or does." "I base my case," wrote Blatchford, "on the self-evident fact that man has no part in the creation of his own nature."

Yet was it really self-evident? Nearly a century before, Robert Owen had written *Essays on the Formation of Human Character* (1813) and had told the early Socialists that "Man's character is formed *for* him and not *by* him." A glance at the Owenite journals, and Holyoake's *Reasoner* and Bradlaugh's *National Reformer*, shows how the battle raged for the human "will." G. W. Foote, editor of THE FREETHINKER, then exposed a few of Blatchford's fallacies. Said Foote: "The author knows the case for determinism up to a certain point, but when he enters the regions of psychology he is hopelessly lost and the further he gets the worse he gets; he throws morality to the winds and makes a science of ethics impossible. And this, I claim, is harm done to a cause [Secularism] I represent." Foote was President of the N.S.S. and intended a book on the subject, but died in 1915 before he could attend to it.

However, Chapman Cohen's *Free Will or Determinism* cleared the air for thousands who had read *Not Guilty* and *Guilty*. I have yet to see a book which answers it. I sent copies to Blatchford but he would never review it or even

refer to it! Mr. Cohen once told me he had found the problem of "free will" buried under a mass of verbiage and had to clear this away as a first task.

Cohen analysed the meanings of choice, freedom and responsibility and so made the problem understandable. Determinism can be no more than universal causation, but too many have taken it to mean universal *compulsion*. Causation and compulsion are not in all circumstances the same thing. Cause and effect are linked in the same phenomenon and it is we who separate them. It is not a case of the one compelling the other. There is no point where "cause" ends and "effect" starts: causality is continuous. In the processes of nature we find some uniformity; a combination of causes produces an effect and, if repeated exactly, the effect is the same. The idea that outside natural happenings there are iron laws that drive us hither and thither is false. The average man who does not know of the age-long dispute, believes he knows what he means when he talks about his free will. He is conscious that within limits he can "do as he likes." And he is nearer the truth than is the word-spinning philosopher who raises a cloud of dust and then complains that he cannot see. Locke, Hume, Hobbes and Voltaire have all thought of freedom as the absence of external coercion, a state in which we can choose, decide and prefer for ourselves without being forced.

Some determinists have swept away such words as choice, freedom and responsibility, but to do so is to play into the hands of the opposition. Such words have a valid meaning in the study of mental processes. Determinism is too often wrongly identified with fatalism. It was always the debating custom of Christians, in opposing Bradlaugh, Holyoake, Foote and Watts, to represent the determinist as a fatalist. To re-read those old debates is most interesting.

In a "free will" world morality would be in chaos. Causation is the working basis for the training of character for freedom and responsibility. It is a pseudo contradiction to pose the problem as Free Will versus Determinism. The opposite to freedom is compulsion; the opposite to determinism is chance. Wading through quite a number of books on the subject, I have been amused at the painstaking and wordy "free will" philosopher peering unsuccessfully into the recesses of the mind trying to find an uncaused first cause—"free" will. He may be likened to the proverbial blind man searching in a dark cellar for a black cat that isn't there.

Chosen Question

By G. H. TAYLOR

THE FOLLOWING two related extracts from recent letters raise a point which is also brought up frequently in our spoken propaganda. One says:

IS THE FREETHINKER concerned with "free thought" or with Freethought? How many other things besides religion do you claim as your province? There have been articles on what seem to be rather outside concerns—republicanism, animal welfare, capital punishment and so forth.

Mr. M. Byrn (Eire) writes:

In a former article Mr. G. H. Taylor distinctly stated that the Freethought movement is Republican. If decisions on homosexuality, capital punishment or even letters about Suez may pass as "free thought" attitudes on life or events (what have they to do with Freethought?), then the acceptance of republicanism against monarchy is political. If not, *what* is it? As an

old subscriber to THE FREETHINKER an unambiguous answer would oblige.

There is a criterion, easy to apply, by which we may judge whether a subject rightly comes within the field of Freethought. I am taking Freethought in its specific context as liberation from superstition, religious or otherwise. The criterion I would apply (and no other secularist is necessarily bound by my interpretation, which is not given as an official declaration) is to ask whether a given subject is tied up in any way with religion or superstition.

For instance, monarchism is an aspect of godism. God-making and king-making are tied up anthropologically. It is no use saying today's monarchy is refined and civilised. It is not. It is spectacular, vulgar and superstition-spreading. It reeks of godism and encourages servitude and mental prostration. To say it is "functional" is irrelevant. An upturned bucket over your head in a rainstorm is functional. Republicanism comes well within the field when we attack religion.

The N.S.S. Principles also enjoin the "extension of the Moral Law to Animals." I don't know what "the Moral Law" is but I endorse the sentiment, however badly expressed. And here again we are faced with a Christian Bible in which living creatures are treated with callousness and cruelty, as though they were no more than inanimate objects. Secularism can show a more humane outlook and so expose Biblical barbarism. Here is another subject which I suggest is thoroughly tied up with Freethought.

Another is obviously the treatment of homosexuals. The religious attitude here has often been to brand the homo as "wicked." His "soul," confronted with "Right" and "Wrong," has chosen Wrong and is therefore destined to the punishment of damnation. Only in contemporary times is the law beginning to take a more humanist, and therefore less religious, colouring, and, of course, the opposition of some religious elements has been bitter.

At the moment of writing the question of fatherhood by a donor is being strenuously opposed by the Archbishop. One would have thought this was a private matter between consenting parties (the mother, her husband, if any, and the medical agency securing the unknown father). But no: the Archbishop, with the traditional colossal impudence of his ridiculous status, considers it is the business of his Church. After all, his Church is bound by the Bible, and there was nothing like it in the Bible—except on one rather confused occasion when the Holy Ghost took a hand. Jehovah would not approve of the idea of donors, and so the Archbishop, now supported by some Nonconformists, says artificial insemination is taboo. Here, then, the Secularist could add yet another "Immediate Practical Object" to his list, perhaps in place of one or two which rather tend to "date" the Society's Objects.

Birth Control is another obvious cause closely connected with Freethought. The religious idea that life is "sacred" or "God-given" is a notion that birth control reformers have had to fight everywhere. The wise regulation of births, not only in individual families but in nations and in the world as a whole, is an extension of birth control knowledge and practice and a proper field for our activity.

Marriage Law reform and the Abortion problem are other matters which eminently fit the struggle to liberate man from superstition. The view of marriage as a "sacrament" is the religious setting which has to be changed if reforms are to be made.

I conceive part of our task also to be the exposing of astrology, palmistry, head-reading and suchlike frauds. Purely political matters, I believe, should be strictly excluded: they could only be touched at the cost of causing splits in our ranks.

A Methodist on the Myth Theory

By H. CUTNER

A READER kindly sent me a copy of the *Bristol Evening World* for December 7th, 1957, with a short article by the Rev. Kenneth Waights (who is the Superintendent of Bristol Methodist Mission) in it—a reply to my reader friend. It was actually a reply to Bertrand Russell's book, *Why I am not a Christian*, in which the famous author said that "religions do harm" and that "they are untrue." Mr. Waights's article is headed "Christianity is not a lie," and in proof of this he points out how it has been believed in by countless people for nearly 2,000 years, that it has always done good—"Christ has made men (in the prison cell, in hospital, in the street) better citizens, straighter men." Mr. Waights adds, "The evils of our day in this country are not due to religion, they are due to its denial."

We on this journal have heard all this so many times—it is about as original as the ABC—that I need not answer such ridiculous claims. However, we get new readers and they simply do not know the answers. Some of the most monstrous criminals, torturers, and murderers, in history believed in Christianity quite as fervently as does Mr. Waights, and I would have great pleasure in giving him names. And in any case, in the Precious Word of God he is constantly quoting, we have gentle Jesus spluttering, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels," and, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother . . . he cannot be my disciple," and "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" and similar beautiful sayings and teachings. It is astonishing how few even of our Methodists know their Bible as I have often found when in their company.

But Mr. Waights is foolish enough to make a statement on the Myth Theory, which he thought so important that he put it in bold capitals. He asked, "Did Christ exist?" and answered his question thus:

I think that all critics would agree that this matter has now been solved and has been settled since the beginning of the century. The evidence is that he did live. The reader will notice that Mr. Waights makes no reservations. *All* critics agree here, and the problem has been "solved and settled" now for over fifty years. The only thing missing from his statements is what all Christians shrink from, and that is, "evidence." What evidence has he that *all* critics are agreed that Jesus did live?

As a matter of fact, I can name forty more or less eminent writers, many of them writing this century, who are quite convinced that Jesus is a myth, writers like Dupuis, Volney, Gerald Massey, J. M. Robertson, Dr. P. L. Couchoud, Arthur Drews, W. Benjamin Smith, Eduard Dujardin, George Brandes, among them. The question is naturally quite settled by Christians—otherwise they wouldn't be Christians—and by a number of reverent Rationalists and Humanists. But these last can see in Jesus nothing more than a man, a little ahead of his times in ethics, *perhaps*. Some will not go as far as that. They would hotly repudiate any idea of making Jesus into a God, whether God Almighty, Jehovah, or any other God. And they ridicule the "Incarnation" and the miracles. Mr. Waights can have what they believe—it is precious little when all is said and done. For Jesus Christ outside the New Testament is quite unknown.

For the rest, it is a question of reading the right authorities and weighing the evidence for oneself. If I have accepted Robert Taylor and John M. Robertson, and am

quite convinced by their arguments, it does not mean that other Freethinkers have to be. But I can stress one thing and that is, that unless Jesus is seen as one of the Gods—Jupiter, Osiris, Chrishna—as a myth, articles like those of Mr. Waights, will be always welcomed, and Christianity will take longer “a-dying”—a consummation not devout-ely to be wished.

CORRESPONDENCE

WHY I AM NOT A RATIONALIST

For many years I have been a reader of THE FREETHINKER and I believe that anyone, gifted with intelligence, can find no argument with the exposure of the contradictions, frauds and deceit of the so-called Christian faith, or, for that matter, any other well-known dogma. The whole position can be summed up by an historian as follows: From the time the human race depended upon sunlight for food and rain to fertilise the seeds, then a certain section of the community, more wide awake than others, could read the weather signs, knew the eclipses and changes of the sun. From these arose the priests and kings, claiming a false divine authority, duping the common man down the ages.

My disagreement with THE FREETHINKER is this: Our parents and grandparents, truly misled by the Churches, did have a faith, they believed in something, and it helped them to have this spiritual anchor. Science has destroyed the myths, made the foundations of many faiths untenable, but I become aware that all is destructive criticism and there is no alternative faith of inspiration. You may quote Humanism, or faith in Man, but this is less likely than faith in God. At least one can escape making admittance of failure in the latter by claiming it was not His will but Mankind. Who can have faith in human nature if he is an historian; fickle, bloodthirsty and foolish, little changed from the mob of ancient Rome?

Lack of a spiritual anchor is seen in the present generation; it has brought everything from despondency to Teddy Boys, and Rationalism cannot give an answer. Rather would I subscribe to thoughts as given by psychology that there is a universal life force behind all natural laws, a force that, like ourselves, evolves towards perfection, that to obey the laws of life and love bring rewards in health and spirit. To those who argue there is no intelligent life force I would echo the words of Wren—Go out into the sphere of Nature and look around.

(Dr.) WILSON JONES, PH.D.

THE MAHOMEDAN YEAR

While thanking Mr. Huxley for his kind letter, may I point out that Harnsworth's Universal Encyclopedia in its article on the Calendar says: “The Mahomedan calendar is dated from the Hejira or flight of Mahomet, July 16th, A.D. 622.” If Mr. Huxley does not agree with this, would he be kind enough to give me one or more authorities who declare that this is quite wrong?

H. CUTNER.

RELIGION AS A FENCE

Mr. Lewis, in his interesting interview with Mr. Gordon (THE FREETHINKER, December 20th), need not have denied saying that “Experience has shown that persons profoundly versed in sex are usually safe against religion.”

An organised religion is a collection of people who are herded together in a common faith or creed, and to keep them from straying there must be a fence. This fence is similar to the modern electrified wire fence used by farmers, in that the inquisitive member of the flock who tries to pass it feels a painful twinge, not a physical one, but a twinge of conscience. The electric current in organised religion is created by the accumulated guilt and disparagement which has been thrown around one of the great instincts of our species. In Christianity this is certainly true of sex, and even after nearly 2,000 years the enormous pile of guilt and prohibitions made by St Paul in this connection still creates a high enough voltage to cause great suffering to wanderers and even death. It is useless to try to charge this kind of fence; the libertine is as much a captive as the prude. The only solution is to turn off the current, and here knowledge of sex is certainly not enough.

To counteract St. Paul's dangerous current an animal-like innocence of attitude to all the fundamental instincts is necessary. Organised religion is an enclosure, and one can only remain safe against it, and free, when one understands the fence and can make it harmless, and so can pass outside.

It would be an interesting study to discover what methods are used to fence off the followers of other big religions, and to see what mighty instincts have been manhandled in the process. We are fortunate in our time in having men like Bertrand Russell and the psychologists, Freethinkers and many others who are at work on these fences, and gradually setting people free, but this is no easy matter after so many centuries.

RUTH POULTER.

VIVISECTION

Perhaps Mr. Bennett or one of the many others who have written supporting his views on the suffering caused to animals in vivisection would explain to me how we could ever have obtained our knowledge concerning the properties of living tissue without experimenting with the real stuff. Should they be ill enough ever to require a blood transfusion, would they refuse it on the grounds that experiments on animals were necessary before we discovered the Rhesus factor.

The passing of the Cruelty to Animals Act in 1876 has provided British Medical Science with an enviable record of both humaneness and achievement. Inspectors from the Home Office have the authority to visit unannounced any research establishment at any time, and to bring any violators of the Act into court. A Royal Commission appointed in 1912 issued a report favourable to vivisection.

Scientists at New York's Sloan-Kettering Institute in their attempt to conquer cancer, have grown three kinds of human cancer in chicken's eggs. By the time the chicks hatch, the human tumour has invaded their livers, hearts, kidneys and other tissues. These cancer-bearing chickens are one of several biological tools developed to aid in the research effort to understand the disease. I, for one, find no difficulty in accepting these experiments as worth while and in the interests of humanity.

JOHN THOMSON, junr.

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THE THINKER'S HANDBOOK. A Guide to Religious Controversy. By Hector Hawton.

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