

The Freethinker

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THE MOST INTRIGUING as well as the most mysterious of the canonical Books of the New Testament is undoubtedly the last, the Apocalypse, or Book of Revelation. This strange and terrifying book which was only accepted into the official canon of the New Testament after much controversy and hesitation, has also been the subject of much modern speculation, some of it of a very curious kind. Did not even the great Sir Isaac Newton spend a substantial part of his long life in poring over its pages? And one has only to consider how many modern scourges of mankind have been identified with the sinister figure of the anti-Christ of Revelation, including Napoleon and even Hitler.

A New View of the Apocalypse

The most recent theory of the authorship of this unique book was put forward twenty years ago by perhaps the most learned of modern Freethinkers, Joseph Turmel. In an interesting book published in Paris in 1938, Turmel propounded what appears to be an entirely new view of the Apocalypse. According to him, the original book was of Jewish, not as hitherto supposed, of Christian origin at all. It dates, in Turmel's opinion, from the period of the last great Jewish revolt against Rome under the Messiah, Simon Bar-Cochba; and it is him—and not Jesus—who is the Christ to whom the Book refers. It is Bar-Cochba whose throat is cut by the Romans, but who eventually returns from Heaven leading the tremendous cavalry charge of the Horsemen of the Apocalypse, which wipes out the Empire and the City of Rome. The vision of the Heavenly City with which Revelation ends is exclusively Jewish. Only Jews are admitted. Not only is the Apocalypse a Jewish book—according to Turmel—it is violently anti-Christian: the "synagogues of Satan" referred to by John in his opening letter, refer to the Christians, "who say they are Jews but are not." Turmel thinks this letter was addressed to the Seven Synagogues in Asia, and to the most faithful of them, that of Thyatira, John promises "the morning star"—that is, Bar-Cochba, the "son of the star." During his brief reign (132—135), the "42 months" referred to in Revelation, Bar-Cochba struck coins depicting the star of Jacob shining over the temple. Similarly the "Two Witnesses" whose dead bodies are exposed by the conquerors of the Jews, are actually Bar-Cochba and his spiritual colleague, the famous rabbi Akiba, who are known to have been killed and treated in this manner by the Romans. They were exposed, declared John, "in that great city which is spiritually known as Sodom and Egypt," that is, on the Roman Town of Ælia Capitolina which had been built (sacrilegiously in the eyes of all pious Jews) on the ruins of Jerusalem, after the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70. The original Apocalypse, though since "edited" by Christians—who have added some references to Jesus and his twelve apostles—was thus a product of the Messianic revolt of Bar-Cochba—"God's Christ," the "Lamb slain since the Foundation of the World," the

"Bright and Morning Star." It is the hopes and fears of this revolution that are described in glowing, and often terrifying, language.

A Hymn of Hate

It is a hymn of hate against the Roman Empire, great oppressor of the Jews. Turmel is in line with earlier commentators when he writes: "The Apocalypse announces the approaching destruction of pagan Rome." It was the Rome of the Caesars, not the future Rome of the Popes—as heated Protestants have suggested—that is described picturesquely as "The Great

VIEWS and OPINIONS

A New View of the Apocalypse

By F. A. RIDLEY

Harlot," "The Beast with seven horns," etc. The "great Babylon" is situated on seven hills, pointing unmistakably to Rome. Turmel is also not original in seeing in the anti-Christ the Emperor Nero, who ended his spectacular career in A.D. 68. "The Beast who was, and is not, and is yet to come" can only be Nero. Why "is yet to come"? Because in the year 88 persistent rumours were circulating that Nero was not dead, but had taken refuge in the east among Rome's Parthian enemies, and was about to return. Revelation refers to his approaching invasion which has been divinely assisted by the drying up of the Euphrates, which the invading Parthian army would have to cross. It is along these lines that Turmel makes his initial calculation of the date of the book. It was written after 88. It describes a terrible armed conflict fought in Palestine between the Jews and their pagan oppressor, obviously Rome, in which the Jews are finally defeated. Now, says Turmel, there were only two such wars in Christian times: those of 66—70, described by Josephus, and Bar-Cochba's, A.D. 132—135. (There were other revolts but not in Palestine.) The detailed reference to Nero's return with the Parthians makes the first impossible; therefore it must refer to Bar-Cochba's rising. This is Turmel's starting point and, to a critical amateur like myself, his subsequent reconstruction sounds extremely plausible.

An Anti-Christian Book

Revelation, then, is an anti-Christian book, containing the sort of accusations one would expect from a fanatical Jewish follower of Bar-Cochba, who savagely persecuted the Jewish Christians during his short reign (one of his letters has been recently excavated among the Dead Sea Scrolls). The Jewish Christians represented a religious heresy and a Roman political fifth column. But Revelation seems to consist of two editions: one written early in the rebellion when terrestrial victory still seemed possible, the second after the failure of the revolt. Here the author pins his hopes on celestial intervention—on the descent from Heaven of Bar-Cochba and his cavalry! Christ is represented as a lamb with its throat cut—as Bar-Cochba's probably was—not as crucified—as Jesus presumably would have been. The book ends with the millenium; a purely Jewish one. We even learn from an early Christian critic (cited by Turmel) that in his day the text actually described the Heavenly Jerusalem as the scene of carnal

pleasures—passages which its shocked Christian editors have long since removed.

Well, that is the new view of the Apocalypse put for-

ward by the French scholar. True or not, it is perhaps the most intriguing of the many speculations on this most mysterious of Bible books.

The Failure of Scholasticism

By LEO DESMOND

IDEALISM asserts that all our knowledge is the knowledge of our own mental states. Material objects exist in our consciousness, and we cannot affirm the existence of anything without an implicit awareness of it in thought. A chair exists in my thought of it. If I go away, unless it is removed (which seems to indicate the external reality of other humans), I expect to see it again on my return. Had I been there, I could have been aware of it. In any event, someone else who is present may be aware of it. And if no other human is present, it still exists in the living mind, for in God all things live and move and have their being.

From a religious viewpoint, idealism bristles with as many difficulties as it appears to resolve. For if all that exists be God and His ideas (inclusive of us and our ideas), that still leaves unsolved such problems as why these "ideas" should be as they are if God is as He is portrayed.

Thus, if only God and His ideas exist, evil cannot exist even as an idea, unless we attribute an evil idea to God, which is absurd. Yet if religious apologists assert that the very name God implies a real Being designated by the term (shades of Anselm and Descartes), how account for the name evil if no evil exists and there is in fact no relationship to be thus designated? They cannot have it both ways!

What does emerge quite clearly from a consideration of idealistic arguments is that one is no more justified in assuming the correspondence of different men's ideas (e.g., when they all say they see a fish) is due to a God—as Berkeley suggested—than a materialist is in assuming that any such thing as a fish exists or can be proved to exist apart from our sensations of it. For if a man cannot prove he knows anything other than his own sensations and his reflections thereon, he can no more prove that a God really exists outside his own consciousness than he can that material objects do. And it is at least arguable that there may be better grounds for making the materialistic assumption than the idealistic one.

The first really effective onslaught on Thomistic theism came from David Hume. He shows that (a) there is no logically necessary contingency of one being or another. Even empirically, so he argues, the necessity lies not in the world of experience as such, but in our minds; and (b) our ideas of cause and effect are derived empirically, from experience. Hence we cannot thus prove God's existence, because it is obviously impossible to prove by induction (i.e. empirically) the derivation of finite effects from an Infinite Cause, or rather, we cannot by empiricism establish that a sequence of finite effects must have had an anterior Infinite Cause. Nor can we infer such a cause logically, because (a) it is not logical to trace finite effects to an Infinite Cause, and (b) the laws of cause and effect are themselves empirically, not logically, ascertained.

One may, of course, jump the gap from induction to deduction and assume what one wishes to prove. But assumption is not and cannot be proof. And there are many reasons which tell against making the kind of assumption theism presupposes.

It follows that those theists who still attempt to demon-

strate God's existence by recourse to the outworn traditional arguments, rely on their hearers being ignorant of Hume or of those tenets of modern philosophy which are a subsequent development from his work. Which also explains why believers think the sceptic merely quibbles, for to understand the scepticism involved one needs to understand the point Hume made, which they do not, else they would not continue to accept such "demonstrations" as it refutes.

Those modernistic clergymen who have abandoned such lines are therefore to that extent wise. They tend to fall back upon arguments purporting to show that sound ethics necessitate a moral Lawgiver, God, hence the preoccupation of humanists like Margaret Knight with expounding the possibility of "Morals without Religion." In any case, the two so seldom go together in fact.

Closely allied in the view of idealists to the belief in God is the belief in an immortal soul, immortal because it is a simple entity which is not liable to decomposition, proved by what they describe as abiding personal identity.

Their argument is that what we call mind (or for Hume our perceptions) cannot be localised spatially. This is what distinguishes mind from matter, their viewpoint supposing that spatial extension is a necessary property of matter.

Hume ridicules the futile acceptance of the view that thought can never be caused by matter. Few philosophers could now deny that matter can be a cause of thought. They might still say rather that matter cannot itself think, meaning by matter something localised in space.

But if it once be conceded that matter is a cause of thought, then to some extent thought is dependent on matter (as its cause). Material changes and changes in thought are related. To prove the possibility of thought after the dissolution of the brain it will not suffice to show—if that be possible—that what thinks is not matter; one would need to show further that thought is still possible in the absence of material changes as predisposing causes, and in the absence of material memories. Writers like Fr. D'Arcy have unsuccessfully attempted this.

Hume may be unduly severe on ordinary judgments when he discusses absolute identity. But at least for the sake of proving personal survival after death, it is absolute identity that is required, because that alone is potentially indestructible by decomposition. For if our personalities comprise thoughts which change with material changes, however continuous our mental histories may appear, it seems obvious that sufficiently radical material changes may obliterate thought altogether. At least there is nothing in a more relative concept of identity to make that *ipso facto* impossible. Finally, what we know empirically (e.g. of brain physiology) lends support to such a view.

—NEXT WEEK—

JOSEPH LEWIS ON
AMERICAN TV AGAIN

To My Fellow Secularists

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

(Concluded from page 67)

The principles set forth in these encyclicals were never implemented to any substantial degree in Europe because of the resistance of the ruling classes. The Roman hierarchy in each country followed a distinctly opportunist policy with the result that in Europe and South America no effective moves were made to translate papal words into realities. Spain, of course, is the classic example.

However, ever since the rise of the labour movement in the United States, and particularly in the last 25 years, the Roman Church has paralleled the Communist Party. It consistently competed with Communism in an attempt to infiltrate and control American labour unions in the interest of its eventual domination of American government. It is a battle royal between the black and the red totalitarians; both enemies of human progress.

Nevertheless, in spite of the Machiavellian plots of the Vatican in its outreach for power, we must recognise that among its priesthood are many honest and sincere idealists who are really striving for the benefit of their fellow men. Many of them are actually unaware of the menace of democracy which is entailed by their allegiance to a power, which in their eyes, stands above the government of their country. They are as confused as their communicants by the double talk of their superiors.

The hierarchy has hundreds of these devoted men who are specially trained for ingratiating themselves with labour union membership as allies in their fight for a fairer share of the fruits of industrial production as they interpret them. These priests sit in labour conferences at both the local and the national level and it has been said that, on occasion, they pick up the check for the drinks! They maintain a system of schools in industrial centres for developing Catholic workmen as articulate labour leaders who are amenable to Catholic direction. They are in the thick of the fight for slum clearance and public housing. They are in our courts to assist their adherents in all kinds of legal difficulties. They provide training schools for wayward girls and boys. They touch every facet of human life.

I only lift a corner of the curtain to let you see what goes on in a few sectors of Catholic Action backed by the immense prestige and wealth of one of the most efficient organisations in the world. What are we doing to counteract its outreach for power but shout invectives at it?

Where are our Secular organisations to undertake the social services mentioned? What are we doing to replace fantasy with reality and to re-establish moral and ethical standards on a common sense basis of decency for decency's sake? If Secularists failed to organise their potential majority it would be as heinous a crime against humanity as any perpetrated by the Roman Church.

As people leaving the Church become more numerous and the power of the Church to control them has become less and less, what have Secularists done to organise them? The unchurched still remain inert and leaderless. Even with the possibility of economic reprisals which once threatened them, reduced to negligible proportions, they still have no encouragement to stand up and be counted or to move toward organisation for the advancement of human understanding.

There is a reason—a logical reason—why this vast majority, comprising more than half our population, takes this attitude. That reason lies in their unwillingness to be identified with a small coterie of individuals who have

made the Freethought movement intellectually disreputable in their eyes. Otherwise, they would be sympathetic and inclined to join the battle of reality against fantasy in the field of religion.

Unfortunately, this misguided group sincerely consider themselves the only "real" Freethinkers. Too long have they provided a negative sort of leadership which has discredited the Secular cause and led us exactly nowhere. They are not "Free" because they are strait-jacketed by their obsession, Atheism, which they trumpet as though it were important. Neither can they be called "Thinkers" for certainly no man is a thinker who denies that some coherent, realistic, evolving pattern for purposeful living is as necessary to the whole normally-minded man as the very air he breathes.

Instead of organising and setting up institutions for adult and juvenile education in the fundamentals of intelligent living, our negativists exhaust themselves in activities which are completely and entirely futile and unrewarding. Until we can cast aside all this sterile "anti-ism" in favour of an affirmative programme of education in Secular principles, principles which have been hammered out on the anvil of human experience aside from all supernaturalism, we are absolutely nothing. If we do not, what have we to offer the bewildered who have wandered out of the orthodox fog?

Our philosophy must be grounded in the inculcation of self-discipline as against the orthodox discipline grounded in fear. We do not want men to be "God-fearing."

There are certain moral and ethical standards which society has developed down the centuries. These standards have gained acceptance through social usage in our attempts to live co-operatively for the benefit of both ourselves and the society of which we are a part. It is doubtful if priestly influence had much to do with shaping them, for human beings eventually seem to settle these matters in their own way independent of the clerics. A modern instance is American Prohibition.

Our moral and ethical standards represent the mean of conduct required of the individual which will enable him to maintain his self-respect and, at the same time, enjoy the respect of his fellow men. These standards cannot be frozen into a rigid pattern but must change with a changing world. For this reason, the code of Hammurabi, Moses' decalogue, the Sermon on the Mount, the Canons of the Roman Church are all inadequate in today's world. Society's requirements change with the growth of human understanding from age to age.

These moral and ethical principles are all there is to religion. In fact, they *are* religion. For religion is nothing more nor less than a way of life designed to bring the greatest mutual benefit to the individual living it and to the society of which he is a member. Supernaturalism is mere surplusage—simply a power leverage for the priest.

If Secularism is to live and our society is to prosper ethically, we must not only combat the menace of the black dictatorship but we must also teach our principles to our children. Otherwise they will grow up without the benefit of society's experience over thousands of years. They will have little character anchorage. They will be like ships without compasses and the rise of juvenile delin-

(Concluded on page 77)

This Believing World

Converts are almost invariably "plus royaliste que le roi," so it was not at all surprising to find that three of them, converts to Roman Catholicism, Miss Pamela Frankau, Miss G. B. Stern, and Mr. Hugh Ross Williamson, in a local Brains Trust in Hampstead, were all in favour of Dictatorship in a State—providing, of course, the Dictator was "a good man." This meant, of course, providing that the Dictator was a practising Roman Catholic—like Dr. Salazar of Portugal, for example. In any case, it is just impossible for a genuine Catholic to be anything but in favour of Dictatorship, for what else is Roman Catholicism itself?

★

Mr. Williamson was asked about the various "visions" of "our Lady" like those which took place at Lourdes, and he had no difficulty in pointing out that "our Lady has appeared particularly in times of great stress, to lead us to our Lord." Now the most interesting thing about "our Lady" appearing is that the one thing she never did—as far as we have read—is to lead us to "our Lord." She never mentioned her glorious Son once to poor little Bernadette, or to the other little girls who saw her in "visions." Jesus has to be dragged in at all costs into the story, but the fact remains, whenever "our Lady" spoke she appears to have left Jesus completely out.

★

The hallmark of converts to Roman Catholicism is a blind and abiding faith in everything the Church puts out, and though Lourdes does not mean a Papal "dogma." Converts believe everything written about it by other Catholics. It is not surprising therefore to find Group Capt. Cheshire, v.c., solidly in the ranks of converts, and the *News of the World* published his story, "I saw a miracle at Lourdes," the other week, in which he definitely asserts he saw a "miracle" just as if we said we saw someone drinking a cup of tea. This does not mean that the Church will accept it as a miracle—but only that he himself does, for "it points to the fact that God exists." Which God? Why the God of the Roman Church *only*, of course.

★

Our Sunday schools appear to have come out rather badly lately according to many reports in our newspapers. For example, there is a young and very religious Sunday school teacher who was caught by a policeman behaving most "improperly" with a twelve-year-old schoolgirl on Wimbledon Common—behaviour more or less often repeated. According to the *News of the World*, he always commenced proceedings with prayer. The young lady had "implicit faith in this man because his actions were a mixture of pseudo-psychology and religion." The girl was put "under supervision"—which did not mean either under "religion" or under another Sunday school.

★

Then we have a report of two eight-year-old boys who threw pepper into a baby's face as it lay in a pram. Both boys were perfect Cubs in the Boy Scout movement, and both went regularly to Sunday school. "Because you are both Cubs, both go to Sunday school, and both have good school reports," said the Chairman of the Juvenile Court, "we are giving you a conditional discharge."

★

The Ecclesiastical Commissioners have lost no time on the new Rent Bill. According to the *Sunday Express*, in one of the finest agricultural lands in the country, they have doubled the rent of twenty farmers—"pay up or get out" is the slogan. Needless to say, when the Church insists on any money question, it nearly always gets its way. Religion

—charity—justice—mercy—often take a back place when money is concerned. They are merely *words* in a book—the Bible—and the law has almost always been behind the Church where cash is the object. The farmers will have to pay up—or get out.

★

One would have thought that after nearly 2,000 years of incessant Christianity, everybody would know "what is a Christian?" Our ITV thinks otherwise and it has got a number of speakers to tell us, as it were, for the first time, what really is a Christian, beginning with Canon Southcott of Leeds. This gentleman was helped by a shop steward engineer, who affirmed how Christ made it possible for him to get on both with workers and management; and thus both speakers were able to assure us what really constitutes a Christian. It was a valiant contribution to the "About Religion" programme and must have astonished viewers no end—either because of its crass stupidity or because it told millions of people something they already knew.

Was "Christ" a Myth?

By H. CUTNER

MOST READERS, I hope, will feel with me that it would be useless to deal lengthily with Mr. Du Cann's article, "If Christ be Myth . . ." Not content with urging us to accept Jesus as a Freethinker, he now wants us to accept him as "Christ"—that is, as the Messiah, the Anointed, even if he never existed!

Of course, if we Freethinkers really were able mathematically to prove that Jesus never existed whether as God or Man, that would *not* necessarily mean that immediately Christianity would dissolve away. We have shown that the old Palestinian God El, made by Jews into Elohim, and later given another name, Jehovah or Yahveh, is nothing but a pagan myth—but we haven't killed Judaism, and Allah—the word is a combination of El and Jah—is quite as much of a myth as El, but Mahomedanism still flourishes. You can't kill any religion merely by showing its particular Deity never existed. All Deities, whatever their names, are non-existent. Prove as clearly as you like that Mrs. Eddy was a silly old woman, and that there is not a scrap of evidence that the sheer nonsense in *Science and Health* ever cured anybody, and it would not kill Christian Science. Tell the truth about poor, fraudulent Joseph Smith, and will that kill Mormonism? Get astronomers to show the utter impossibility of "conjunctions" of stars having any influence whatever on human beings and events, and you won't yet kill Astrology.

Of course, Jesus lives as a "literary" character. So do Moses and Noah and Jonah and Father Christmas and Jack Sprat. And what about Robin Hood and Pickwick and Micawber? Once you have "personified" verbal expressions, and put them in books—of course they are alive and will live. Nobody can ever kill Hamlet, though the author actually did kill him in the play.

But as far as Jesus is concerned, he was killed by ordinary Rationalism as soon as the whole idea of an incarnated God, blessed with a Virgin Birth and a Resurrection, was exploded. As soon as it was seen that Jesus was not a "Christ," that is, not a Messiah or an Anointed, he was killed stone dead. And as far as Freethought is concerned, he will never be resurrected.

That is why there is no need to say any more in criticism of Mr. Du Cann's desperate attempts to bring Jesus back to life as a Freethinker and as a Messiah, even though he never existed!

THE FREETHINKER

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

TO CORRESPONDENTS

G. S. BROWN.—C. E. M. Joad said his wart was charmed away by an incantation of some quack at a country fair!

J. MCCARNEY.—The difficulty in publishing any new book or even pamphlet is the high cost of printing. We hope, however, to print a few articles on Lourdes shortly in these columns. As for Foote's *Bible Romances*, we share your high opinion of it, and it may be possible to reprint it in paper covers as you suggest.

R. NORTH.—We are sure that Bertrand Russell himself would be glad to elucidate any point you do not understand in his *Why I am not a Christian* if you write to him, enclosing a stamped envelope, care of his publishers.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

INDOOR

Brandford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics Institute).—Sunday, March 9th, 7 p.m.: A Lecture.

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Room 4, 83 Suffolk Street).—Sunday, March 9th, 7 p.m.: E. TAYLOR, "Technology and Religion."

Central London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, 5 minutes Edgware Road Tube).—Sunday, March 9th, 7.15 p.m.: AVRO MANHATTAN, "The Problem of Time: Science Fiction or Fact?"

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, March 11th, 7.15 p.m.: Mrs. N. SPILLER, "How 'Votes for Women led to my visit to China.'"

Edinburgh Humanist Group (St. Mark's Unitarian Church, Castle Terrace).—Friday, March 7th, 7.45 p.m.: Public Discussion between Mrs. MARGARET KNIGHT and the Rev. KENNETH MACKENZIE, "Humanism or Christianity?" Chairman, the Rev. J. L. BROOM, M.A.

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, March 9th, 6.30 p.m.: A. R. WILLIAMS, "Social Influences of the Churches."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Hall, Upper Parliament Street).—Sunday, March 9th, 2.30 p.m.: W. PAUL, "J. A. Hobson, Economic Heretic"

Portsmouth Branch N.S.S. (Oddfellows Hall, Kingston Road).—Thursday, March 13th, 7.30 p.m.: A.I.D. Rev. B. THOMAS (C. of E.), Rev. D. W. THOMPSON (Methodist), Dr. Wilson (Gynaecologist), Father DWYER (R.C.), P. G. YOUNG (N.S.S.).

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, March 9th, 11 a.m.: Prof. H. LEVY, D.SC., "The Crisis in Science and Politics."

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.: G. WOODCOCK. Sunday, 8 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, MILLS and 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.

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £309 13s. 5d.; W. Marchant, £1; A. Hancock, 2s.; S. Merrifield, 2s. 6d.; A. W. Harris, 3s.; R. Lewis (Manchester), 12s. 6d.; A. Allman, 2s. 6d.; H. and K. Clark, 10s.—Total to date, February 28th, 1958, £312 5s. 11d.

Notes and News

MR. G. W. WARNER, Hon. Secretary of Dagenham Branch of the National Secular Society, recently contested a local cleric's assertion that "man without God is incomplete." We Secularists—wrote Mr. Warner in the *Dagenham Post*—"have been without gods since we were able to appreciate the facts of science. . . ." If the clergyman in question (the Rev. C. Alan Stephens) would care to debate, "maybe he will find that we are more mentally complete with a practical philosophy than believers who base their lives on an abstract religion." No answer to the challenge has been reported to date.

★

The Observer (23/2/58) quoted figures from the Oxford and Cambridge magazine *Gemini* concerning undergraduate preferences at the two universities. All the undergraduates were male in their third year, and had done their National Service. Asked if their religious background was active or not, 61% at Oxford and 55% at Cambridge answered "active." 54 out of 100 at Oxford, and 71 out of 100 at Cambridge were satisfied with the British Monarchy as it is; 46 at Oxford and 28 at Cambridge being dissatisfied. To the question, "Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God?" the results were: Oxford—Yes, 58; No, 26; undecided, 17. Cambridge—Yes, 48; No, 38; undecided, 14. We can hardly imagine a Christian being undecided or answering "I don't know" to the last question. It seems a fair assumption, then, that just over half at Oxford and just under half at Cambridge are Christians in any positive sense. Assuming that they are *active* Christians (which is not necessarily so) there would seem to be a slight drift away from church, compared with their parents.

★

MR. F. C. ASHDOWN, a reader in Kent, sends us an undated cutting from *John o' London's Weekly* (now, alas! no more) concerning humour in hymns. Of the samples given, our vote goes to the Wesleyan hymn containing:

O may Thy powerful word
Inspire the feeble worm
To rush into Thy Kingdom, Lord,
And take it as by storm.

We trust the tune has the proper revolutionary fervour that the words demand.

TO MY FELLOW SECULARISTS

(Concluded from page 75)

quency and adult opportunism will eventually bring us chaos and the fall of our embryo-civilisation. In effect, we must assume some of the functions of the Church if we are to exert any appreciable influence toward a more satisfying life for the individual and a more humane society.

If we follow the lead of those who, in their ignorant sincerity, shout nothing but their "anti" this and their "anti" that without any affirmative philosophy behind them nor any respect for the precious experience of human consciousness which is ours, then we are headed down the broad highway to oblivion and the limbo of the forgotten, which is as it should be. It is what we are *for* that matters. It is only upon our affirmations that we can ever build a real civilisation.

An Atheist Benefactor

By G. H. TAYLOR

A COMPLETE LIST of avowed unbelievers who have eminently benefited humanity would make an imposing array. Perhaps the latest is Prof. Anton Carlson (1875-1956), who died about eighteen months ago.

Born in Sweden, he went to the United States at sixteen. He first became a Lutheran minister but after one year gave up the ministry for science. Chief professor of physiology at Chicago University, he was honoured in 1946 as President of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. He was a member of numerous medical advisory boards and did great work in the first World War with the Sanitary Corps.

He once fasted for fifteen days with a balloon in his stomach to test his theories on hunger contractions. His early work on diabetes paved the way to the manufacture of insulin. He was also an expert on the aging processes in man. In 1953 he won the American Medical Association Gold Medal and was voted humanitarian of the year, and was the recipient of honorary degrees from universities all over the world. He died of cancer at Chicago.

Carlson had a strong belief in the necessity for scientists to keep contact with the general public, and to bring not only their findings but their *methods* into the language of non-scientists.

An understanding of scientific method is surely the basic principle of all education. An understanding of such elementary matters as What is evidence? What is a controlled experiment? What is the law of parsimony? When is knowledge veridical? is essential if the public is to throw off the muddled thinking that comes from the religious tradition over thousands of years. The secularist propagandist's task would be immeasurably eased if he could always face an audience already trained to think scientifically.

Anton Carlson's atheism is best illustrated from his Moody Lecture to the University of Chicago, which he calls *Science and the Supernatural*, in which, at the outset, he calls for scientific, as against supernatural, thinking. Scientists, he says, "always ask for the evidence. When no evidence is produced other than 'revelations' in dreams or the 'voice of God,' the scientist can pay no attention whatsoever except to ask, 'How do they get that way?'"

He is ready to employ ridicule against such notions of what constitutes evidence:

When the Mormon leaders received a tip from God that polygamy was ordered by Him for his chosen people on earth (a revelation, by the way, that is easy to take by the average human male), the U.S. Government did not hesitate to challenge God. The Federal Government was powerful and adamant and God yielded through a second revelation to the effect that he had changed his mind and polygamy was no longer according to the plan of God. In some cases the revelations are reported as coming through dreams, in other cases through bush fires, by direct writing of the finger of God on stones, or indirectly through oracles, Popes, the flight of birds and the liver of slaughtered bulls.

The physiologist cannot accept revelations from dreams any more than he can detect wisdom in hallucinations... The supernatural as a way of knowledge is in direct conflict with science.

What people under intense emotions and the desire to believe think they see has frequently no relation to the light that actually impinges on the retina. Intense faith as well as intense fear seem to predispose to hallucinations in many people.

The failure to appreciate the relation between cause and effect has been the downfall of the religious way of thinking. The person who prays to get well, and then gets well and concludes that the prayer did the trick, is in the position

of a farmyard rooster who crows just before sunrise and then notices the sun rising and concludes that it does so as a result of his crowing.

People do recover naturally from many diseases. But if a sick person, says Carlson in his Lecture,

has the notion handed to him by his priest or his mythology that holy water, holy oil, an amulet, a prayer, the killing of a goat or the laying on of hands will cure diseases, experience will teach him that after applying any one or all of these measures to the sick persons many of them do get well... Those who believe that ill-health can be cured by prayer will pray, and those who have faith in holy oil or laying on of hands will try these methods and most of the people get well. The common error made is that the person recovers because of the treatment. The experience is correct. The conclusion is wrong. There is no control. The obvious control, of course, is a sufficient number of people of the same age with the same malady...

We could then see how medical treatment compared with religious treatment when every case was reported. The same controls could be applied to agriculture. In arid lands the believers irrigate and pray; the unbelievers merely irrigate. And the results bear relation to the irrigation rather than to the prayers! As Carlson has it: "If rain is sent to earth in proportion to holiness and prayer to Jehovah, the sundry heathens and worshippers of false gods would have a dry time, not to speak of plants and animals who, according to the Bible, have no souls to pray with."

A favourite way of belittling science is to represent it as being faced with "The Unknown." This term has a spectral flavour about it and is much loved by defenders of religion. The implication they hope to convey is that although the *known* may favour materialism, the Unknown is going to re-establish religion. And all the time the unknown is gradually passing into the realm of the known, so that any assumption that there are spooks round the corner is a mere gratuitous wish-fulfilment. As Nigel Dennis puts it in his *Making of Moo*, as telescopes get stronger and stronger, getting to God takes longer and longer.

The scientist, says Carlson, "either knows or he does not know. If he knows, there is no room for faith or belief. If he does not know, he has no right to faith or belief. He may have grounds for his hypotheses but the moment he begins to have *faith* in his hypotheses they tend to become myths."

As a physiologist he rejects attempts, spiritualist or otherwise, to establish that man survives death. This he regards as an idea coming down to us from the ancients and

We can give no greater credibility to the ancients' views about immortality than to their views on other things about which they knew nothing. Conscious phenomena and intelligence in man; that is, personality, appear to be just as much an evolution of the material world as the rest of the bodily processes.

The dependence of consciousness, intelligence, memory and personality on bodily mechanisms is shown, he contends, by such phenomena as brain injuries and tumours, drugs, hypnotics, anaesthetics, defective heredity, etc.

Not many scientists are prepared to give much time or attention to combating religion. To use the late Sir Arthur Keith's phrase, the scientist is rather apt to let the world wag as it will. He has his own work to do. At the end of his Lecture, however, Prof. Carlson considers whether he has been "flogging a dead horse" and decides otherwise:

Is supernaturalism a thing of yesterday? What are the facts? If the orthodox Jew has dethroned Jehovah and rejected the Bible I have not heard of it. According to the latest news the

Jesus and Freethought

By CHRISTOPHER YOUNG

Pope is still God's viceroy among men and the faithful R.C.s still believe that the voice of the Vatican is the voice of God. The acceptance of the whole Bible's Divine Truth is not a rarity among Protestants. . . . Enter almost any religious service and you get an earful of ancient and modern supernaturalism anent the soul, the Devil, Hell and Heaven, sin, redemption, Almighty God, angels, Divine Purpose, prayer. Is the supernatural extinct? Take a look on and about this campus and you will find a very prolific and very recent growth of chapels and churches.

Finally, Carlson considers the incidence of some scientists among his colleagues who continue to hold some supernatural notions. Yet "a shrewd business man may consult a soothsayer. . . . Most of us in early childhood are emotionally conditioned to the supernatural. . . . We can be conditioned to science or justice just as to the supernatural but the latter usually gets there first. The conditioned emotions usually outlive one's intellectual metamorphosis. Their disappearance seems to be a slow atrophy of disuse."

His conclusion is that not only is the supernatural quite incompatible with science, but it is frequently an active enemy.

Vacuous Worship

[THE FREETHINKER is privileged to publish the following extract from Mr. Nigel Dennis's Preface to his plays, *The Making of Moo and Cards of Identity*. The book is to be published in June.]

THE WORSHIPPING by Laplanders of large stones with eccentric shapes has so died out that, today, no Epstein could excite a Lapp's devotion. The cause of this falling-away is education: God is worshipped as a Solid only by backward people; once educated, the mind reaches out only for what cannot be grasped, recognises only what cannot be seen; sophistry adores a vacuum.

Vacuous worship brings solid advantages. The first, without any doubt, is that it makes worship far more difficult—which, in turn, means that ordinary people have no idea of what it is about and must ask better men to tell them. The second is that in being able to understand something so difficult, higher minds see that their minds *are* higher and attain to extreme self-confidence. The Invisible is always their goal because it offers unlimited opportunities for intellectual expansion. Only, for example, a Being who cannot outwardly be touched can haunt the sage with the notion that he may be inwardly touched by It. Only the Invisible has the requisite elasticity, and can be twisted and twined by the mind so flexibly that it can give a binding, if not neat, appearance to the most cumbersome of confessions. Only an Invisible can make daring sorties into plain visibility; by doing so two or three times every few thousand years, it can intensify, by means of simple contrast, its characteristic condition of being out of sight.

The temptation to put flesh on the Invisible more often, to make live-bait of it, is a strong one; but any succumbing to it is not only a regression to savage solidity but provocative of scepticism. For the principal advantage of the Invisible is that so long as it cannot be seen, its presence cannot be denied. Any student of philosophy can show that a stone, however oddly shaped, is merely a sensory illusion; but no sceptic, however skilled, can poke his shooting-stick through the rails and give a reflective prod to nothing. Hume remarks the fact that the major heresies of the Christian religion were attempts to make it "[less] contrary to plain sense"; this is *why* they were heresies; they made arguable, and thus uncertain, what was literally beyond doubt. A religion may make rational forays and expeditions on a tremendous scale, but it must always be able to withdraw to an interior castle on a desert island, and pull the ladder up.

I HAVE FOLLOWED with some interest the rival arguments of Mr. Du Cann and Mr. Cutner. The former has skilfully disguised the poverty of his argument with prose as ornate and gilded as his Cartier pen, while the latter, with his more direct style, has exposed in no uncertain fashion, the total inadequacy of "Freethought" as a belief, rather than as a way of thought. Both take liberties with the meaning of the question as posed, and it is now high time that the fog in which together they have plunged the subject be dispersed.

We must first decide what we are to understand by the question: "Was Jesus a Freethinker?" I suggest that it means this: Was Jesus (as portrayed in the Scriptures) a Freethinker (with a capital F)? This approach reveals two things. It exposes the practice of Mr. Cutner, who immediately discounts as a fable or an interpolation anything which, on Mr. Du Cann's interpretations of the word, might show that Jesus was a Freethinker. On the other hand, it establishes the uselessness of a mass of information, both philological and literary, supplied to us by Mr. Du Cann on the meaning of the word "Freethinker."

No. It simply will not do. For the purposes of this discussion we must assume that the Bible is historically correct about Jesus, and that the word "Freethinker"—I quote the Oxford English Dictionary, which I am sure Mr. Du Cann will regard as an impeccable authority—means "One who refuses to submit his reason to the control of authority in matters of religious belief." In other words, one who relies on his own reason and judgment to lead him to whatever belief he may, or may not, attain.

It is clear from this, therefore, that many of the instances which Mr. Du Cann cites in favour of Jesus the Freethinker do nothing more or less than show a tendency towards precocity, unorthodoxy, and occasionally intolerance. Jesus never questioned the correctness of the Jewish faith and the law—all he did was to modify it, and to challenge the hypocrisy and self-seeking of its priests, the Pharisees. Again, in all his personal religious matters, Jesus was guided, or so he claimed, by his Father in Heaven, whom he recognised as a supreme authority, thus removing himself completely from the definition of Freethinker in the O.E.D.

We must accept that Mr. Cutner is right. Jesus was no Freethinker, but an Authoritarian of the most intransigent kind, both in his own ways of belief, and those he would have others follow. However, what distresses me is Mr. Cutner's own standpoint in religious matters, for he is certainly an atheist, both bigoted and dogmatic. The O.E.D. definition of a Freethinker is defective here, because, by implication, it could include the attitude of an atheist, and it appears to treat Freethought as a belief, as well as an approach to belief (or, by implication, unbelief).

It is my contention that the true Freethinker regards "Freethought" not as a belief, but as a method of thinking, which might lead him one day to be a fair-minded religionist or a fair-minded atheist; provided, that is, that he does not rely too much on the powers of reason, which is surely one of the least potent and formative influences on that progress towards belief or unbelief.

In conclusion, neither Jesus Christ nor Mr. Cutner are Freethinkers in the correct sense of that word. Mr. Du Cann is, although he seems satisfied to submerge his attitude in a welter of verbiage.

CORRESPONDENCE

CATHOLIC STRENGTH IN BRITAIN

The figures given in your number of January 24th by D.S. are not in dispute. However, these figures are no reason for progressive people to be depressed—because the R.C. Church blows itself out like a bullfrog in order to present itself as favourably as it can.

Many of the increases claimed are due to immigrants to Britain from such places as Eire and Hungary. So what is gained on the swings is lost on the roundabouts.

I was in Eire in 1956, and the population has now been reduced to its lowest recorded level, and it is peopled by sad old persons, while every week there is a stampede of 800 young ones to get to Britain. There, undoubtedly, many of these young Irish have their eyes opened to the Truth, and they lapse. In fact, during the past year, I have met two priests who have lapsed.

As D.S. rightly points out, the R.C. Church never publishes its losses; but a striking instance occurred in Holland in 1955, when it was found that half the flock had lapsed. The place was declared a "mission area" and 200 extra priests were drafted in, to "stop the rot."

In China, the R.C.s have pointedly told the Vatican that they will obey it in matters of dogma but absolutely refuse to obey any of the political orders of the Pope.

In Mexico, after centuries of turmoil upon which the Church battered, priests are now only allowed to use their robes when conducting services.

After 20 years, I am re-visiting Malta, which was once notorious for the number of priests. Today they are scarce and difficulties are being found in securing candidates to replace those who die or retire.

So things are not quite so disappointing as they may appear, at first sight, from the confident figures given in the Catholic Directory. Truth is gradually dawning. Still, this is no reason for any slackening of the efforts of persons of good will in exposing the evils of this political Church. As Macbeth once said, "We have scotched the snake, not killed it."

Malta. ADRIAN PIGOTT.

ALDOUS HUXLEY

Re Mr. Corrick's letter on Aldous Huxley, I think Freethinkers who read Huxley's entertaining essay "Justifications," appreciate his attitude towards religions in general and the Christian religion in particular. It is a pity that some of the "crank sects" with which we are plagued do not read it; it might give them food for thought, if they are capable of thinking!

H. A. ROGERSON.

SHEPHERD AND SAGE

I am afraid I cannot agree with my friend Mr. G. I. Bennett when he says (21/2/58), "An unlettered shepherd in the quiet and lonely hills, cut off from radio, newspapers, and other mind-conditioning agencies... is at a considerable advantage" over townsfolk subject to "such educationally corrupting media." I don't think his favourite Richard Jefferies would have agreed either. He is, in fact, going much too far in idealising the pastoral life and degrading the urban.

Nobody would suggest that press, cinema, radio and TV could not be considerably improved. Nevertheless, they do help to broaden people's outlook. Viewers, for example, see news from many parts of the world; many are seeing good plays for the first time in their lives, and so on. Rubbish, of course, there is in plenty, but let us get it in perspective. Idealisation of the "unlettered shepherd" should have gone out with Wordsworth.

COLIN MCCALL.

TO KILL OR NOT TO KILL?

It was with very great interest that I read Mr. G. I. Bennett's article "Further Humanitarian Considerations," as it seems to me he gives a lucid answer to some questions that come at times to most thinking persons. However much we may wish to live up to our best ideals, there are occasions when we are driven to choosing the lesser of two evils. Taking life then is sometimes the only right course, but it must be done in a way that will cause the least

possible suffering and no humanitarian can be happy at being forced into such an action.

Macaulay states that the Puritans were opposed to bear-baiting, not so much because of the cruelty to the bear but because of the pleasure it gave to the spectators. Yet one may perhaps be as greatly shocked at people's enjoyment of cruelty as at the cruelty itself. "Grey Owl," the "Indian" broadcaster, once said that the American Indians were obliged to hunt for food and clothing but never hunted for pleasure, which in this respect surely puts them above many people who, strangely enough, consider themselves more civilised.

I feel sure that many readers will hope for more articles from Mr. Bennett's pen, as he certainly gives us food for thought.

W. G. SCHOLDS.

REINACH ON CHRISTIANITY

I was glad to see Mr. Ridley's comment on Reinach's *Orpheus*, as I think it is about the best history of religions I have seen.

There is a passage not mentioned by Mr. Ridley that is worth quoting. The best summary of basic Christian principles in a few sentences that I know of is Reinach's, "Ever since St. Paul, the ruling idea of Christianity has been that of the redemption of man, guilty of a prehistoric fault, by the voluntary sacrifice of a *superman*. This doctrine is founded upon that of expiation—a guilty person must suffer to atone for his fault—and that of the substitution of victims—the efficacious suffering of an innocent person for a guilty one. Both are at once pagan and Jewish ideas; they belong to the old fundamental errors of humanity. Yet Plato knew that the punishment inflicted on a guilty person is not, or should not be, a vengeance; it is a painful remedy imposed on him for his own benefit and that of society. At about the same period, Athenian law laid down the principle that punishment should be as personal as the fault. Thus St. Paul founded Christian theology on two archaic ideas which had already been condemned by enlightened Athenians of the fourth century before our era, ideas which no one would dream of upholding in these days, though the structure built upon them still subsists."

In other words, Christianity was obsolete centuries before it was founded!

(Dr., GEORGE A. FINK (U.S.A.).

PERSONIFYING THE UNKNOWN

Please allow me to thank Mr. Arthur Hewson for his letter replying to mine on "Hairsplitting." I am with him all the way. It was the use of the word "behind," implying something *apart* from cosmos, that puzzled me.

E. A. McDONALD.

AMUSING?

People are probably more ready to write a letter of criticism than support. Whether Mr. G. S. Brown's articles will gain readers I know not. I only know that they amused me—and that is something.

ROBERT DENT.

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