

The Freethinker

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IT MUST NOT BE THOUGHT that we Freethinkers have to deal solemnly with solemn things all the time. I often find a great deal of fun meeting Christians and other religious people not so much perhaps with those who have shed some of the imbecilities of their various religions, as with those who appear to have stepped out of the year 30 A.D. or thereabouts from Palestine, and who have learnt nothing whatever since.

Among these very addle-headed folk who speak generally for some "Society," the funniest from the viewpoint of ordinary commonsense is an American version of the various Societies we have here for converting Jews into Christians. The Heavens may fall, the H-bomb may blast its way through our civilisation, there may be even a War of Extermination—but nothing is so important as making Jews into Christians. When I think of religious imbecility I can think of nothing more extreme than that.

This particular bunch of converts calls itself the "New York Messianic Witness, Inc.," and a friend of mine sent me one of its tracts, which detailed how an orthodox Jew was completely bowled over by a converted Jew, who showed him how thoroughly Jesus Christ was "prophesied" in the Old Testament, in this case through passages in Isaiah. Needless to say, anyone who can use even a modicum of intelligence can see that Isaiah was dealing with the tribulations of Israel and his 53rd chapter was merely a description of the people of Israel "personified" as having a rough time. When the Gospel writers were making up their fantastic story of Jesus, they went to the Greek version of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, and any passage which could be appropriated to this story was "pinched" without the slightest scruple. They were dubbed "prophecies," though prophecies written after the event can only appeal to people so silly that it is useless to argue with them.

Most Jewish converts are hopelessly illiterate, though it is true that there have been a few scholars among them. And not a few went over because of the way in which Christians have so bitterly persecuted Jews—it enabled them to be accepted as, for example, were Heine and Disraeli. It would not be unfair to claim that these great men and many others believed neither in Judaism nor in Christianity—in private.

Now, in the tract I have referred to, readers were asked to send for a New Testament in which all the "prophecies" were given in bigger type; and as I always like to read both sides of any problem, I immediately sent for a copy— notifying the "Messianic Witness" who is named Rachmiel Frydland, that I have never come across any of the remarkable prophecies of Jesus in the Old Testament, and I would dearly like to know where they could be found.

By return of post, so to speak, came a very well printed New Testament with a Preface, giving, as it says, "Old Testament Prophecies of the Messiah Fulfilled in the New

Testament"—there were 18 of them.

Now, it seems incredible, but the compilers of these "prophecies" are so sure of the gullibility and credulity of their dupes that they did not notice that in not a single instance is the word "Messiah."

It would be futile to give all the 18 "prophecies." They have no more to do with Jesus than they have with the flowers that bloom in the spring. Christians, that is, the more intellectual ones, have long since recognised this. Dr.

Percy Gardner, for example, faced with the believers who still talked about "prophecy," was obliged to admit (in his *Historic View*) that "a careful, critical examination of the circumstances of a past prophecy which is supposed to have met its fulfilment nearly

always deprives it of its superhuman character, and leaves it either without foundation or easily explicable." But the *New Commentary of the Bible*, edited by Bishop Gore, is far more blunt. It says "The Jews do not seem to have regarded Isaiah 53 as having any Messianic reference, and even in St. Paul's Christian days he refers but little to this chapter." Paul—if there ever was such a person—would certainly have been astonished to find Isaiah's easily understood symbolical reference to his own people was made into a "prophecy" of *Jesus!*

Prophecy number one tells us (in big print) that "Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem." Here it is:

But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. (Micah 5, 2.)

What this rigmarole really means is known perhaps only to God Almighty and Jewish converts. The word "Messiah" is, of course, absent, but it will, I hope, be worth reading a little further into Micah. Verses 3 to 6:

Therefore will he give them up, until the time that which she that travaileth hath brought forth; then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel. And he shall stand and feed in the strength of the Lord in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God; and they shall abide; for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth. And this *man* shall be the peace when the Assyrian shall come into our land; and when he shall tread in our palaces then we shall raise against him seven shepherds and eight principal men. And they shall waste the land of Assyria with the sword and the land of Nimrod in the entrances thereof; thus shall he deliver us from the Assyrian . . .

Whether any reader will have the patience to read this jargon I cannot tell—but if it has any meaning, it is that about the year B.C.700, when Micah is supposed to have written it, "this *man*" will arrange for seven shepherds and eight principal men to wage war on the Assyrians and waste the land of Nimrod; and Jewish converts tell us that "this *man*" was Jesus, born 700 years afterwards! I can fancy nothing sillier in the whole range of prophecy. I wrote and asked Mr. Frydland to be good enough to explain this prophecy to me, but neither he nor a gentleman he referred me to, a Mr. G. R. Mortimer, M.A., of

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

The Gentle Art of Prophecy

By H. CUTNER

the Mildmay Mission to the Jews in London, could possibly have read anything whatever of Micah but the bit about Bethlehem. Their ignorance was appalling. Yet Mr. Frydland had the impudence to ask me—though he could not explain the “prophecy”—to send a *donation* to the Mildmay Mission!

The second “prophecy” is the familiar one about a “virgin” being born, taken from Isaiah. As everybody knows who has studied comparative religions, many of the Pagan Gods were “virgin” born, though they did not have the assistance of Angels singing hosannahs at their birth. To make Jesus at least equal to a Pagan God, he also was endowed with a Virgin birth; but to make sure of Jewish converts, the Gospel writers hunted up Isaiah in the *Greek version*, the Septuagint, and there was the magic story. The Greek translators rendered the Hebrew word “young woman” into “virgin,” unaware that Hebrew had a special word for “virgin”; but it was good enough for them as it stood, and ever since Christians and Jewish converts alike swear by the “Virgin” birth. As I have often pointed out here, the *Catholic Encyclopedia* knows perfectly well, however, that “modern theology” (its own term) that is, what Christian scholars really believe, considers Matthew was *mistaken* in his quotation from Isaiah; but what can “modern theology” do with such converts to religion as Messrs. Frydland and Mortimer? Prophecy number four is taken from Zechariah and is headed “Messiah was to enter Jerusalem in triumph,” and is as follows:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem; behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.

It will be noticed again that no mention whatever is made of “Messiah,” but the brilliant editors of Matthew, utterly

mistaking what was meant by the verses, made Jesus send two of his disciples to get an ass and a colt and, as the Precious Word says, they “put on them their clothes and they set *him* thereon”—by *him*, of course, they meant Jesus—“and when he was come into Jerusalem all the city was moved, saying Who is this?” Jesus is actually made sitting on *two* donkeys, and our Jewish converts call this blatant piece of idiocy, “entering Jerusalem in triumph”!

But what says another marvellous “prophecy”? Here the Jewish convert responsible for this conglomeration of sheer nonsense lets himself go with a vengeance. The caption is, “Messiah was to be rejected by his own people,” and the “prophecy” is from Isaiah 53:

Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief . . .

Note again that the word “Messiah” does not occur; note also that the tense of the verb is the present tense—“he *is* despised, etc.,” which at the time of the writer is given as about B.C. 712. Note also that if Jesus entered into Jerusalem, “in triumph,” he could not have been “despised and rejected.” When I pointed this out to Mr. Frydland, he said this referred to Jesus on the Cross—but there is nothing whatever about the Cross in the quotation; and I asked for a further explanation. I’m afraid Mr. Frydland gave me up here in despair. I suspect he would have preferred a donation to being asked inconvenient questions by such an out-and-out unbeliever as I am.

If it were not too boring, I could go right through all the prophecies which, in the tracts sent out by these people, always bowl over orthodox Jews who, it need hardly be said, go over immediately—with donations—to Christ Jesus.

But it is hard to believe that anybody takes these people seriously except hopeless illiterates.

Points from New Books

IN A NEW BOOK, *Babel in Spain* (Hamish Hamilton, 21s.), John Haycraft writes about religious processions in Seville. He says: “The Macarena is one of the gayest processions. It starts out with some three hundred penitents at one in the morning. But by eleven o’clock, when the Virgin returns to her temple, there are perhaps ten left. The rest are in bed, or drinking in bars. “Eucharistic drunkenness” was how I once heard *Semana Santa* described, and to a certain extent it is apposite. Standing in a bar, as a procession stops outside, the visitor is amused, or perhaps shocked, to see a crowd of penitents enter, lift their face-coverings, hurl a glassful of wine down their throats and rush out again. Small boys go round selling cigarettes and peanuts to the penitents.”

Happily enough, in another new book, *The Holiday Beaches of Northern France* (Herbert Jenkins, 15s.), Dawson Gatrix says that at Plonevez-Porzay on the last Sunday in August the visitor may witness an example of one of Brittany’s most famous *Pardons*. He writes: “In order that nobody shall approach this devout religious ceremony under any misapprehension, let them understand from the outset that they are going to see very much more than this, and something that may offend. What they will see may be more like a Pigalle version of Bank Holiday on Hampstead Heath, Petticoat Lane, the Flea Market of Paris and Blackpool Pleasure Beach all in one. . . . This matter having been explained, those who are curious can now go to the *Pardon*.”

The readers of Thor Heyerdahl’s new *Aku-Aku* (Allen and Unwin, 21s.) may be sad to learn that there is no other organised entertainment for the natives of Easter Island but to attend Sunday service. One imagines, though,

that the local priest is going to get a shock when he reads Mr. Heyerdahl’s new and thrilling book, for the author managed to win the confidence of the islanders and learnt much about the magical practices which are still solemnised. The wizards hold that they are Christians and that their magic is “another thing, apart.” One wonders how many converts are converted to what? Certainly, as the local priest bans the consumption of alcohol, one feels that the islanders in their turn might be quite startled by accounts of the “religious” processions in Spain and France.

OSWELL BLAKESTON.

Religion and Society

“SINCE MAN, especially in prescientific ages and circles, has conceived supernatural powers according to his fears and in ignorance and misinterpretation of the phenomena of nature, his religious codes could scarcely be a true reflection of his social needs. They often perverted social relationships and admitted or inspired conduct detrimental to social interests. To such older and more primitive examples as taboos against useful foods, human sacrifice, religious prostitution, maiming initiation, and stultifying superstitions, may be added such modern religiously sanctioned prescriptions as that against planned parenthood or against proper medical care of the ill or injured. The religious codes often emerge as powerful engines of control to maintain the interests of the established order against the processes of change. . . . In any event, the reconciliation of religious code and social need can never be complete so long as the code is based on dogmatically false conceptions of the laws of nature and society.”

[R. M. MacIver and Charles C. H. Page: *Society, An Introductory Analysis* (Macmillan, 1955).]

An Eminent Victorian

By F. A. RIDLEY

EXACTLY A CENTURY AGO, the world of Victorian literature and scholarship was engaged in discussing a book by an unknown author, which was just then enjoying international success despite its subject matter and its exceptional length. The author was Henry Thomas Buckle (1821-1862), then a comparatively young man who had already achieved some renown as a brilliant amateur chess player, but who had never before written books. The title of this work was *An Introduction to the History of Civilisation*. The first volume appeared in 1857 and the second four years later. In May 1862, the author died whilst at Damascus on a tour of the Middle East. His gigantic project for an encyclopaedic *History of Civilisation* was reduced to a bare fragment, to a part only of the Introduction to the *History of Civilisation*; yet even this unfinished fragment has proved sufficient to establish its author as one of the master intellects in a great intellectual age.

For reasons to which we shall refer later, Buckle's work enjoyed an immense, but transient, fame and the great philosophical historian has not attracted much attention from biographers. Both his personality and his ideas are, today, held to date from the mid-Victorian era prior to the adoption of an evolutionary, post-Darwinian, point of view. In 1895 another equally great historian, John M. Robertson, edited an edition of Buckle, and subsequently defended the author in a book entitled *Buckle and his Critics*. Now, almost a century after the appearance of the first volume of Buckle's great work, we have an adequate and well-documented biography under the title of *A Victorian Eminence* by Giles St. Aubyn. The biographical value of this book is increased by an elaborate biography and copious indexes. St. Aubyn and his publishers are to be congratulated particularly for again focussing attention upon a really great, but almost forgotten, figure in the annals both of English historical writing and of English radical thought. Like his friends and great contemporaries, J. S. Mill and Herbert Spencer, Buckle has ultimately paid for his fame by a subsequent prolonged and unjustified neglect. It is now time to rescue this great pioneer of a really scientific historiography from his undeserved oblivion and with the objectivity of another age, to place Buckle against his historical background and thus to estimate his respective merits and weaknesses. This task Mr. St. Aubyn accomplishes very fairly and fully.

H. T. Buckle started life with the advantage—an almost indispensable one for a literary freelance as he later became—under Victorian capitalism of inheriting a private income of substantial proportions from his father, a successful merchant. Without this income Buckle, who had no profession and was self-educated, could hardly have found the leisure to undertake his gigantic work, upon which he devoted his short life in solitary study. Like his predecessor Gibbon, he owed his leisure to inherited wealth. His literary fame was crowded into his last five years, and he died at 40. He spent his life in seclusion, only emerging on one brief occasion when, in 1857, he vigorously championed a crude, but courageous Cornish well-sinker named Pooley who, for some harmless if rather elementary criticisms of Christianity, received the savage sentence of 18 months' imprisonment. Buckle made a sensation by the publicity which he attracted to the case by his spirited attack on Mr. Justice Coleridge, the Judge responsible for the sentence. Apart from this solitary interposition in the world of affairs, Buckle finally undertook the journey to the East, in the course of which he died at Damascus.

An Arabic inscription on his tomb predicts that his work will long outlive its author; one could, in fact, say that Buckle's work was his life. However, during his short period of fame in his last years, Buckle relaxed his solitary habits and frequented the brilliant literary society of his day, where his prodigious memory attracted much attention, and his exceptional brilliance as a talker was generally acknowledged. Among his associates were such famous figures as Mill, Darwin, Spencer, Macaulay and Thackeray; a lesser known contact recounted by St. Aubyn establishes an interesting link between Buckle and our own age. Among the great historian's feminine admirers was Kate Stanley, later to become Lady Amberley and the mother of Bertrand Russell, Buckle's present successor in the radical tradition of English thought. Darwin, in particular, greatly admired Buckle's work, but, though the historian immediately accepted Darwin's evolutionary theory when *The Origin of Species* appeared in 1859, the great discovery came too late to be embodied in Buckle's historical theory. His present biographer is of the opinion that it is this pre-evolutionary outlook which has been largely responsible for the short-lived nature of Buckle's once universal fame.

H. T. Buckle lives by a single book; though the book which he actually wrote represented merely a fragment of what he had originally intended to produce. However, his *Introduction* to his projected *Introduction*, was at once sufficient to give him world-wide fame. His great book was found equally in the libraries of German professors and of Russian peasants—and was even quoted on the Russian stage! In view of recent events, it is interesting to learn that a passion for scientific inquiry already characterised the educated Russian people around 1860. Among English Radicals the great book was at once hailed as a classic. Upon this point the American *Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences* tells us: "Its brash confidence in human progress, its lordly generalisations, its apt detail and its swinging rhetoric, its attacks on conservatism—especially on clerical conservatism—gave it a place superior even to that occupied by Comte, Mill and Spencer in the minds of thousands of obscure faithful nineteenth century radicals." However, even if some of his generalisations proved to be oversimplified, Buckle was a really great philosophical historian, besides being the master of a rather long-winded style of Victorian eloquence. He was essentially original and his present biographer is, no doubt, correct in stating that had he received a formal education at a university, he would probably never have written his masterpiece. He is, I should say, one of our greatest philosophical historians; had he lived thirty years longer and completed his projected *History of Civilisation*, he might well have been one of the greatest in world literature.

We thank Mr. St. Aubyn for reviving the name and fame of this great man; we hope that this timely and instructive biography will have the wide circulation, in particular in Rationalist circles, which both its merits and its subject matter deserve.

[*A Victorian Eminence. The Life and Works of Henry Thomas Buckle*, by Giles St. Aubyn. Barrie Books. 25s.]

—NEXT WEEK—

SELF SALVATION

By C. G. L. DU CANN

This Believing World

Rarely in its history of over 1,900 years have the Churches had such triumphant publicity as they received this Easter from the radio and TV. Apart altogether from the many religious programmes which in general deluge us during the week, Good Friday was almost taken over by various parsons telling us again and again the Grand Old Story of the Death and Resurrection of "Our Lord and Saviour Christ Jesus." We had in "Lift up your hearts" a Bible reading and comment on "The Agony of God"—an "agony" too dreadful to contemplate. Then, of course, there was the "Morning Service," and a harrowing description of "The Last Hour," described as "a Meditation on the Passion of our Lord."

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At "Five to Ten," there came "A story, a hymn, and a prayer," later followed by the story of "The Road to Emmaus." Then came a "People's Service," packed with "The Passion Story" in "hymns and scripture." And later, "With Heart and Voice" we were given (if we had not already forgotten all about it) "A Solemn Remembrance of the Death of Our Lord Jesus Christ." For children especially, there was "The Way of the Cross"; and for everybody, a "choral" concert packed with religious music. And once again we had to be reminded about it all in a "Meditation for Good Friday night," otherwise some of us might even then have again forgotten Jesus.

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But for those who like their music light they got Stainer's "Crucifixion"—which is described as a "Meditation on the Sacred Passion of the Holy Redeemer." All this was on the radio only—but what a feast TV enthusiasts also had, beginning with an "hour of worship" from Bromley—"God so loved the World." Then came "The Stations of the Cross," all about "Jesus of Nazareth," entitled "a cycle of plays on the Life of our Lord," finishing with "An Epilogue," again all about the day Christ died "and the evening when his suffering was over."

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On the other hand, ITV got the "agony" over rather quickly. We had, naturally, a "Good Friday Family Service," no doubt designed for families who preferred looking in and eating their hot cross buns comfortably at home rather than going to church wondering what they were missing at home in the eatable line. In the afternoon we were given "The Crucifixion" again, no doubt with all the usual excruciating details—but that was all in the way of "services." There was, however, a discussion on "Are new cathedrals necessary?" with a vigorous "yes" from the Bishop of Guildford, who is quite sure that there is now a genuine religious revival going on in England. And judging by all these radio shows and TV exhibitions, one would imagine there was.

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What is the real truth? Apathy, apathy, and still more apathy. Most Christians naturally believe in Jesus Christ, but what the word "believe" means with them is a different matter. Ask almost any married lady whether she believes in the Virgin Birth and see how difficult she finds it to keep from laughing. And the same with Devils, Angels, and Miracles. In spite of the terrific exertions of the BBC and ITV, can anyone truthfully say that there is nowadays more belief than ever in the story of Christianity?

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For example, we get columns of tosh on "Prayer" in the *Daily Express* with the assurance from Mr. Godfrey Winn—who can beat anybody in writing and speaking the kind

of thing best described as maudlin—that he "has seen it work"; and a similar assurance from a lady, who proudly tells us that she is "a Christian and a Catholic." We wonder whether prayer worked in the case of the six millions of men, women and children who were butchered and tortured by Christian Germans at the command of the Roman Catholic Hitler. But perhaps it only works in the case of popular writers like Mr. Winn and Catholic ladies.

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If there is one thing which is quite unknown, it is the date of the Crucifixion—assuming that one ever took place. However, for the *London Evening News* this is a small matter as nothing is easier than inventing a date. In a new version of "The Easter Story" by P. G. Munro Smith, he starts with giving us the exact date of the "emergency meeting" held by the Jewish Sanhedrim "about a certain young man from Nazareth." It was "March 17, A.D. 29." Thus is history made—and falsified. There is literally no scrap of proof for this date, or even for "the emergency meeting." No wonder Christians hate the word "evidence."

The Rising Generation

XXIX — MOSES

IT WOULD not be unfair to state that almost every Christian and Jew without exception believes the story of Moses as related in the Bible. He is the great Law-giver, the author of the Pentateuch, the Israelite leader to whom were given the Ten Commandments. And his name and fame will be perpetuated for long years ahead.

Yet there is not a particle of evidence of any kind that he ever lived at all. Not a scrap of archaeological proof has ever been unearthed confirming a single word of the Bible story.

On the contrary indeed. What has been discovered is that Moses is just one of the many great men who have been invented to give point to and a *raison d'être* for, a people's mythical history.

The Old Testament is a compilation of myths and legends, some founded perhaps on fact, and adapted by later Jewish writers as having happened in their own historical past. Moses is the Jewish adaptation of one of the stories floating round the East about various men and Gods. For example, we can take the well-known God Bacchus—the God of wine, among other things. He was found on the waters in an ark; so was Moses. Bacchus was styled a "lawgiver"; so was Moses. Bacchus had two mothers, his nurse as well as his true mother. So had Moses, his own mother and Pharaoh's daughter. Both Moses and Bacchus are represented as having horns in their heads. Bacchus "dried up" the rivers Orontes and Hydarnes so that he could cross them dryshod. Moses passed through the Red Sea in the same way. Bacchus struck water out of a rock; so did Moses. The rod of Bacchus changed into a dragon; the rod of Moses, into a serpent. Bacchus was called Osaraph; Josephus calls Moses, Arsaph. Bacchus married a Ziporah; Moses married a Zipporah.

There are many other astonishing parallels between the two, and no doubt they influenced the famous Bishop Colenso (1814-1883) in his great studies on the Pentateuch to say that it could not have been written by Moses, and further, "that the Mosaic narratives by whomsoever written cannot be regarded as historically true."

And Bishop Colenso stands still unanswerable, as when he made that astonishing statement. H.C.

THE FREETHINKER

41 GRAY'S INN ROAD, LONDON, W.C.1.

TELEPHONE: HOLBORN 2601.

Hon. Managing Editor: W. GRIFFITHS.

Hon. Editorial Committee:

F. A. HORNIBROOK, COLIN MCCALL and G. H. TAYLOR.

All articles and correspondence should be addressed to THE EDITOR at the above address and not to individuals.

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

TO CORRESPONDENTS

GEO. DUTTON.—While there is only one FREETHINKER there are dozens of Christian papers. Can you persuade one of them to publish G. I. Bennett's article and your reply alongside? If none of them has the courage, can you find some Christian official representative to answer Mr. Bennett in THE FREETHINKER? If none will, then send us the evidence for any single one of your unsupported assertions.

DR. M. BEDDOW BAYLY, G. BIBBY (Secretary, National Anti-Vivisection Society), PAT SLOAN (General Secretary, British Soviet Friendship Society) and other animal lovers who have written.—Many thanks for your further comments, but we adhere to our published decision to close the controversy for the present. We will retain your communications and advise you next time the controversy is opened. Meanwhile, we have shown Mr. Hammersley your comments. His article was not written in any spirit of dogmatism but merely to present a case as put by a speaker at Leicester.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

INDOOR

Bristol Rationalist Group (Co-operative Hall, Prewett Street).—Wednesday, April 23rd, 7.30 p.m.: B. K. PREUSS, "A Rationalist Approach to the United Nations Organisation."

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics Institute).—Sunday, April 20th, 7 p.m.: O. C. DREWITT, "My Years as a Monk."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, April 20th, 11 a.m.: W. E. SWINTON, PH.D., "The Religion of Success."

Wales and Western Branch N.S.S. (Butc Town Community Centre).—Tuesday, April 22nd, 7.30 p.m.: L. EBURY, "Wherein is Salvation—Science or God?"

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.: J. W. BARKER.

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.: Messrs. T. M. MOSLEY and R. POWE. Sunday, 11.30 a.m.: R. POWE.

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

Notes and News

THE 1958 Annual Conference of the National Secular Society will be held on Whit Sunday, May 25th, in the Co-operative Hall, Nottingham. A number of hotel rooms have been provisionally reserved, but accommodation is very limited, and members who intend to be present should inform the General Secretary, N.S.S., 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1, as soon as possible. Please state whether single or double room and for which nights they are required.

WE regret that owing to the Easter holidays and other unavoidable causes, there will be some delay in acknowledging receipts, orders, etc., to the Pioneer Press. We are doing our utmost now to deal with everything and expect to restore our normal deliveries in a very short time.

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THE unexpurgated *Autobiography of Charles Darwin* has just been published by Collins at 16 shillings. We have not yet come by it, but we note that Darwin's granddaughter, Lady Nora Barlow (who edits the book) has reinserted passages which were suppressed at the wish of Darwin's wife. Some of these record the great scientist's scepticism. One (quoted in *The Observer*, 6/4/58) expressed his view of Christianity. "I can indeed hardly see how anyone ought to wish Christianity to be true," he wrote, "for if so, the plain language of the text seems to show that those men who do not believe—and this would include my Father, Brother and almost all my best friends—will be everlastingly punished. And this is a damnable doctrine."

★

SIR HAROLD NICOLSON, reviewing the book, says the modern mind does not find it "so repugnant that the Old Testament should have been criticised as a tribal myth, provided only that the New Testament retains unimpaired the beauty and the incitement of its philosophy." Can it be that Sir Harold thinks the hell-fire idea is confined to the Old Testament? If that is the case it may go some way towards explaining what has puzzled us for some time: why, though he was an "agnostic," Sir Harold resolutely refused to put in a word for unbelievers when he was a Governor of the BBC.

★

AS usual, the BBC was right up to date with the news on Easter Sunday morning. Just after the last stroke of Big Ben, the flash came through: "Jesus Christ is risen today." Appropriate hallelujahs followed and then, after a suitable pause, we got on to the insignificant stuff—H-bombs and the like!

★

A VETERAN Irish reader, aged 82, tells us that an old playmate of his who became a Roman Catholic priest often used to remark: "I shall not feel happy unless I see you safely on the other side." Recently, the priest, now a canon, has been sending his curate to try to accomplish a conversion. "I can feel no enmity for the canon," says our reader, "he has a great regard for me, and he is perfectly genuine, but I have told both him and the curate that I shall die a Freethinker." And he adds with a chuckle: "I have a few questions up my sleeve for the curate's next visit."

★

THE British film, *Innocent Sinners*, revolves around a young girl's desire for a garden of her own in a built-up area of London. At times it is amusing; more often it is banal. We mention it here because of the intrusion of Roman Catholicism—a feature of many American films, but, as yet, rare in our own. When a wealthy young man, who is a trustee of a blitzed Roman Catholic church, brings his fiancée to see the building, the child prays to the Virgin Mary that the couple should lunch at her guardian's high class but unsuccessful restaurant. We watch the big car drive past the restaurant, stop, and then reverse to it. The couple then go in to eat. Yes, it is as silly as that at times. Let us hope that it is not indicative of what British film studios have in store for us!

My Years as a Monk

AN IRRELIGIOUS INTERPRETATION

By O. C. DREWITT (EX-FATHER NORBERT, O.P.)

THE PROTESTANT ENGLISHMAN'S idea of a monk is frequently confined to the pages of Robin Hood. Or he may remember a wall-picture at school, displaying fat men in aprons. There his idea finishes, and, if you take him over a ruined abbey or priory, he does not know what to look for, or what anything means when you show it him. This particularly applies to the church, where the relics of the medieval Mass, from the high altar to the sedilia in the south wall of the chancel, are unintelligible to him. Dislocated sentimentalities—for example, the legend of St. Francis and the birds—he may have heard about, and he may enjoy tangled recollections of having been taught something once about Cranmer and Bloody Mary. But of what the Catholic Middle Ages meant, of the complex, closely interconnected historical institutions and doctrines that characterised them, he has only feeble impressions.

None of which would greatly matter in the twentieth century were it not for the fact that, with no guidance beyond this nebulous information, he may be a parent who sends his children to a convent—which he does in the belief that, although the teachers have superstitions about the devil and eat fish, they offer a "sound education."

Child psychologists are not agreed upon what a "sound education" is, but the convents have it, because everybody says so. He therefore believes it, just as he believes that all girls in Honolulu wear grass skirts or that the Greek Church in Cyprus is a form of Mau-Mau.

Such disorganised knowledge is not a basis for an intelligent discussion. I shall, for this reason, give a short account of the beginnings of the monastic Order to which I formerly belonged, after which we can proceed to life in these monasteries today. I shall venture a number of marginal observations on the way, and finally draw some conclusions.

The beginnings of the Dominican Order, which is also termed the Order of Preachers, have to be visualised on the background of medieval, feudal society. The monasteries in which I lived and studied were drenched in medievalism. Their customs and methods of teaching are still fundamentally those of the thirteenth century.

These monks, or friars, were the black friars of the Middle Ages. Among them were many celebrated names. Thomas Aquinas, the fanatical Florentine Savonarola, the painter Fra Angelico, the notorious Torquemada, were Dominicans. The heretic and freethinker, Giordano Bruno, who placed the Jewish record on the level of Greek myths and defended the astronomy of Copernicus, was a Dominican.

The founder, Dominic Guzman, was born in Old Castile and became a canon in the cathedral chapter of Osmá. From 1205 to 1215 Dominic preached among the Albigenses in Languedoc, having been charged to do so by Pope Innocent III. The Albigenses were a powerful heretical sect, whose doctrines were sufficiently repellent to oblige Innocent III to call on the secular princes to suppress them by force. For seven years Southern France was devastated by one of the bloodiest wars in medieval history. Dominic's friend, Simon de Montfort, was leader of the anti-Albigensian crusade. Dominic, according to the historian Grützacher, "took no part in the crusade." He devoted himself to preaching, self-flagellation and pious exercises. His attitude to the war, we are told, was one of detachment and Christian love. He only prayed for the

success of the crusaders' arms at the battle of Muret.

The Order of St. Dominic grew out of the band of preachers who joined him at this time. By 1214 the nucleus was formed. It was called the "Holy Preaching." Dominic went to Rome to obtain permission to found his Order. The foundation was confirmed by Pope Honorius in 1216, and Dominic died at Bologna in 1221.

Rigid orthodoxy governed the Dominican philosophy from its foundation. The black friars, by virtue of it, played a dominant part in the elaboration of a dogmatic and moral theology that became so intricate in application to every field as to inhibit independent movement. The result was the Scholasticism of the later Middle Ages. The same theological system underlies the pronouncements of the Vatican in the twentieth century. Modern Catholic theologians are equally armed with the principles of an intricate doctrine which, if obeyed, inhibits independent movement.

For this the Dominican Order was largely responsible, and even by the year of Dominic's death its influence had spread over Western Europe, in Italy, France, Spain, Poland and Bohemia. Black friars were established in England in the same year, and were soon penetrating Denmark, Sweden, Russia, Greece, Palestine and central Asia—the vanguard of the biggest theological advance of the Middle Ages, protected by the Catholic princes and blessed by Rome.

Chairs were rapidly acquired by the Dominicans in the universities of Paris, Bologna, Palencia, Oxford, Padua, Cologne, Vienna, Prague and Salamanca. The London Dominicans were first at Lincoln's Inn. In 1275 they migrated to Printing House Square, giving its name to Blackfriars. In 1559 the English communities were suppressed. There were none for a hundred years, but this has been the only break in continuity. In 1658 the Dominican Thomas Howard, afterwards Cardinal, established an English house at Bornhem, near Antwerp, and there have been English Dominican communities ever since. Some half-dozen English priories exist today. There have been four Dominican Popes—Innocent V, Benedict XI, Pius V and Benedict XIII. The friars, who are males, form the "first order." The nuns, females, are the "second order." These nuns are "enclosed." There is a more active "third order," comprising non-enclosed nuns and secular tertiaries.

The following is largely autobiographical. I spent nine years leading the religious life of the Dominican Order, after which I obtained permission to work in a secular capacity, but still as a Catholic, "in the world." The subsequent seven years passed in teaching and pursuing my studies in psychology and biology, and in philosophy. The idea remained for some time of formulating a modernist faith which it would be possible to preach in the twentieth century. The Catholic modernist movement had interested me very much while I was still in the Order, and I continued to believe for several years that the work of Father Tyrrell and Loisy in particular, and to some extent that of Baron von Hügel, were contributions of permanent value which could ultimately be reconciled with a reintegrated orthodoxy. The writings of Bergson interested me for similar reasons, particularly because *Evolution Créatrice* offered a possible bridge between Scholastic psychology and the dynamic psychologies and biological concepts of the twentieth century. Freud and Jung I had read before entering the Dominican Order, and I considered Jung's

findings another possible link, chiefly in connection with the problem of relating the Christ myth and the sacramental theology of the medieval Church to the pagan religions.

These illusions can be dispelled only after the psycho-biological principles explained at the end of this series have been understood and applied, which is difficult for people who have been subjected to the Catholic system of brainwashing.

Consequently the formulation of a viable modernist creed continued to occupy me for a long time, but reconstructions continually broke before the cumulative impact of science, particularly biology. The difficulty may have been aggravated by reading Darwin, and also Haeckel, at the age of fifteen. Orchids, earthworms, embryos, lancelets, phylogeny and ontogeny, conjured up a scientific universe irreconcilable with religion. Irrespective of conjectural solutions to particular problems, such as the Adam and Eve myth or the "physical premotion" of an omnipotent, omniscient God, where special pleading coupled with poor focus could suggest plausible fusions of science and dogma, the cumulative evidence prevailed. The evolutionary process belonged to another universe where "design" and "purpose," where they existed at all, had an irreligious meaning. Apologists argued that such opinions were antiquated or "woolly," their exponents discredited. Similar methods were used with reference to Freud or dialectical materialism. "Victorian" was a fashionable epithet, and the doctrine had been "exploded," but usually little could be unearthed beyond the fact that an obscure writer had found it disagreeable.

Wading through polemical refuse to find out what had been discovered, "Victorian" or otherwise, took years. Possibly the early influence of an agnostic grandfather made me view reappraisals of nineteenth-century science with caution. He was a scientist, trained at Breslau and London, and an aroma of Tylor, Huxley, Darwin and Haeckel enveloped him. Coaching in physics and chemistry at eleven, and the reading of J. H. Fabre at the age of nine, were due to this grandfather. He had a streak of militant secularism and I remember a day, as a small child, when he found me with a Bible and collapsed with laughter. According to psychoanalysis, identifications with good (or bad) adults in childhood affect the character for life.

(To be continued)

From Poland

AT THE PROPOSAL of the distinguished Freethinker, Professor Jeziarski, the Krakow Branch of Polish Atheists and Freethinkers established recently a Scientific Research Centre of Religiology and Independent Ethics in connection with Krakow University. Members of the Centre give lectures in the Freethought Discussion Club which has been founded recently by the Municipal Cultural Centre in Krakow.

Another proposal by Dr. Jeziarski is for the establishment of an International Home Study University under the aegis of UNESCO. The aim would be the education of youth for independent thinking on problems connected with the moral, social and economic welfare of mankind—for peace, humanism and world citizenship.

The President of the Society of Atheists and Freethinkers in Poland, Dr. Andrzej Mowicki, is in correspondence with the Manchester N.S.S. Branch Secretary, Mrs. Rogals, and tells her that he is compiling an article on Karl Pearson, from the books she supplied to him.

The Control of Procreation

By R. READER

IN GENERAL, human activities become controlled only when they arouse both public indignation and a public sense of danger. Thus, animal experiments, many of which are wantonly cruel and useless, do not excite alarm. They therefore continue. But one unfortunate mouse in the soup empties a restaurant immediately. Mice transmit diseases, and not even the clerical gentleman in the corner assuring us it is a sacred mouse can stop the stampede.

Similarly with overpopulation. Far Eastern famine and Indian birthrates elicit intellectual appreciation and sympathy, but they are too remote from the everyday affairs of most people to excite *feeling*—the mainspring of human action. On the other hand, the average person feels very strongly about his own personal difficulties and problems. Public opinion on overpopulation can therefore be aroused by discussing the subject *in terms of individual, personal problems*.

Thus, Mrs. A complains of poor quality foods. She must be told that the soil, drenched with chemicals for quantity before quality, is nearing exhaustion, and that, only ten years hence, the position will be far worse. Mr. B raves about his woods being chopped down. He is quite illogical, because trying to multiply dividends by multiplying consumers inevitably multiplies building and destroys the countryside. Mr. B, in fact, is the author of his own trouble. Miss C loathes the foreigners. Her missionary grandfather, however, spent 50 years indoctrinating them with the "Increase and multiply." If they now overspill their own countries—if Tunisia, Algeria, Arabia, Morocco, Kenya, Egypt, India, Sumatra, Indonesia are now buzzing like demented hives—whose the fault? And Mr. D's expensively-educated sons' poor jobs. Why should Mr. E's son fare better than they? And, in any case, what will happen, also ten years hence, when the 1947 "birthrate bulge" is seeking employment? Dr. E, a professional psychiatrist, is greatly concerned by the enormous, and increasing, numbers of psychoneurotics. Has he remarked how, when large numbers of human beings herd together in small spaces (*e.g.*, in conference rooms and in public transports) the collective nervous tension rises, throwing an increased strain on all? Or that the growing dementia of world affairs might be attributable to this cause?

A million similar examples could be given, but the essential is that overpopulation should first be related to the individual problem. Afterwards the discussion may gradually be widened until the monstrous truth becomes apparent, namely, that the present gigantic outpouring of money and brains on nuclear devices is a natural logical end of our outworn social and religious notions: that a world war is simply a biological drama which carries out, brutally and inhumanly, a task which reason should have accomplished painlessly two decades before: that, like cattle in the field, mankind takes no heed of the morrow, and like cattle, its end is the same. Gradually, the fact must be presented and faced; the weapons of one country have come into being to correct the surplus production of human flesh of the other country, until public indignation and, above all, a public sense of danger is strong enough to force the following reforms:

1. No new family allowances or rebates to be allowed one year after an announced date.
2. Birthrate propaganda to be made a major felony, punishable by heavy terms of imprisonment.
3. Legalisation of abortion and sterilisation in approved clinics.
4. The imposition of heavy fines in cases where parents ignore the appeal thus made to their

intelligence and foresight. 5. The young to be taught that childless sexual happiness is more conducive to happiness—and therefore more valuable to the world—than sexual hysteria with a nursery. 6. All, whatever their social class, to be taught that procreation is *not* an inalienable right, but a *privilege* to be earned. 7. The education of girls and women out of baby-worship and the opening of all professions to women on the same terms as men.

The above measures form the foundation for a new world—that “better world” that the politicians are always babbling about. And it is no exaggeration to say that today the lives of all of us depend on them. Those who talk of race suicide should be asked what purpose is served in having battalions ready to plunge, bayonets fixed, into areas tenable only by radioactive corpses. Also, what tiny fraction of Britain’s 50 millions can design, manufacture, or just use atomic weapons? What can the others do but get in the way and cause panics?

Lastly, a second powerful lever may be used. Nobody likes to be the dupe of others. Yet that is precisely the position of millions today. A scrap book can be filled in a week with cuttings from the popular press extolling the increase and multiply, deliberately twisting news, comments, opinions, articles and photographs. It is the perfect answer to those who pretend that procreation cannot be controlled.

To sum up: You have a personal problem. It is related to overpopulation. Your friend is in the same case. You can see, by the ordinary processes of thought, that millions must also be affected in the same way. In fact, through the intricate mechanism of economic life and international relationships, *your very life is in jeopardy, at the mercy of others’ procreation*. What is standing in the way of reforms? The delirium of a handful of religious neurotics, posing as the custodians of all that is desirable in human living!

CORRESPONDENCE

FROM TRINIDAD

Now that secularism is firmly planted here, religious occasions and ceremonies are noted with interest, and not without a little comment. On February 1st and 2nd Billy Graham closed a United Evangelical Crusade with his enthusiastic preaching, which was given all the publicity possible, from the radio, the press, etc. One newspaper mentioned that the Doctor converted 8,000 in one hour, though no mention was made as to how many converted Hindus and Moslems were in the 8,000. Secularists here carried a vigorous campaign before his arrival, and he took time off to mention something of it to his followers. Now it is a remarkable thing that exactly three days after the departure of Billy Graham the Roman Catholics had a stupendous ceremony commemorating the centenary of Lourdes, which was kept *al fresco* in a recreation field, the only place available to accommodate 16,000 believers. At the arrival, the Archbishop inspected a guard of honour, comprising Boy Scouts, Girl Guides, and the Cadet Corps, after which, standing on an elevation, he blessed the crowd, thus doing what the American evangelist could not do. A few days ago the Anglican Church erected a 500lb. cross and statue of Christ in one of their churches. The value of the cross and statue is said to be something like \$5,000. What benefit that cross and statue would be to the community one cannot see!

F. F. CORBIE (Trinidad).

BBC RELIGION

In THE FREETHINKER for February 28th, page 69, Canon McKay gives some religious statistics apparently on church attendance, which are not entirely intelligible to us of the unbaptised in the wilds of America. Will you be good enough to explain: the territory covered, *i.e.* the amount of total population included and the significance of the various categories; Sunday morning service in all regions, people’s service, Sunday half-hour, meeting point, Life up your Hearts.

I might add that recently I participated in a check of church attendance at Sunday morning service in Yakima, where it was

found that approximately 20% of the population were in attendance.

IRA D. CARDIFF.

Washington.

[The figures given by Canon McKay were estimates for radio and TV programmes of the BBC, not for actual church attendance.—ED.]

JESUS NOT CHRIST

I take the liberty of appealing to my fellow Freethinkers not to use the name Christ when referring to “Jesus of Nazareth.” No Jew will employ the term in this connection and for good reason, as it implies that Jesus was the Anointed Messiah. Freethinkers, whatever their racial origins, should do the same.

One could resort to the original name Yeshua bar Yosef or the Hellenised form found in the Greek “New Testament”; but the Vulgate rendering Jesus has been adopted in the English, French, German and Spanish translations; it is Gesù in Italian and Iisusu in Rumanian. So we may stick to Jesus but, please, without the appellation Christ.

W. A. OSBORNE (Emeritus-Professor, University of Melbourne).

MR. DU CANN AND JESUS

It would be interesting to learn what led Mr. H. A. Rogerson to believe that Mr. C. G. L. Du Cann is a defender of the gospel Jesus. In his 18-page pamphlet, *The Faults and Failings of Jesus Christ*, Mr. Du Cann finds Jesus lacking in almost every desirable quality associated with intelligent, sociable human beings. Every charge that Mr. Rogerson lists to show that Jesus Christ, judged by modern standards, is unworthy of emulation or admiration, and many more besides, can be found more powerfully presented in Mr. Du Cann’s pamphlet. In his own words, “The mind of Jesus Christ was a defective mind.”

H. IRVING.

Obituary

WILLIAM HENRY TALBOT HAYHOW, of West Ham and District Branch, National Secular Society, had not been well for a long time, but his death came at the age of 59 with shocking suddenness just before Easter. At his wish, he was cremated at Manor Park Crematorium on Tuesday, April 8th, 1958, and a secular service was conducted by the General Secretary, N.S.S., Mrs. F. G. Warner representing the Branch. We send our sincere sympathies to Mrs. Hayhow, who is also a member of the West Ham Branch, and to her son and daughter-in-law.

EDWARD CHARLES HARTGILL, of Islington, London, whose death also took place shortly before Easter, had never recovered from the loss of his wife, Amelia, who died last August. We may say of him, what he said of her, that he was a genuinely good man, who never knowingly did anybody any harm. As in the case of Mrs. Hartgill, the General Secretary of the N.S.S. officiated at the interment at Islington Cemetery in the presence of Mr. Hartgill’s daughters, to whom we send our deepest sympathy.

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