

The Freethinker

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Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

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SHORTLY before the first World War, Messrs. Watts published that remarkable, but nowadays, little known booklet, entitled *The Making of a New Religion*, by B. H. Chamberlain, an English teacher in Japan. In this little masterpiece the author described the origin by deliberate manufacture of what is now the national religion of Japan, the cult of Shinto. Shintoism was, as the author indicated, the deliberate creation for a specific end, of a new religion

artificially inculcated into the Japanese people by an artful and ambitious ruling class for precise political and ideological ends of their own. "The religion of Imperialism" is how one of its founders defined the new cult. In the long and complex evolution of religious belief, it is not often that one is likely to come across such a clear-cut case, as Chamberlain himself noted, of the now prematurely discarded 18th century theory of Voltaire that religion was the deliberate creation of priestly impostors. While certainly not true in every case, it probably is in a good many. In modern Japan, one has an example that Voltaire could certainly have cited had he survived to witness it.

Professor Hanky and Professor Panky

Truth may be stranger than fiction, but fiction frequently anticipates fact. At the turn of the century some years before Chamberlain described the creation of the new Japanese religion, Samuel Butler gave a highly imaginative account of the similarly artificial creation of a fictitious new religion, the cult of the "Sun-Child," in *Erewhon Revisited*. Anyone who has read that witty satire will recall its relevant creations, "The Sun-Child Evidence Society," with its cynical pontiffs, "Professor Hanky and Professor Panky," the celestial relic of the heavenly horse which carried the "Sun-Child" heavenwards. In *Erewhon* in fiction, and in Japan in fact, one finds the same fundamental type of religious creation; a new religion artificially designed to meet the current needs of an artful and cynical dominant set of interests.

How Religions Originate

While the Voltairean theory that religions represent artificial creations cannot be discounted altogether (indeed, one could quote other undeniably authentic examples in its favour besides Japan), I agree with Reinach, who went into this question in some detail in the preface to his *History of Comparative Religion*, *Orpheus*, that it is probably exceptional. Most religions were not deliberately invented but grew naturally out of the social and intellectual soil of their respective epochs. One could, perhaps, if one had made the necessary specialised studies, go a long way to explain precisely why a particular religion did actually make its appearance at the particular time that it did. German scholars like Albert Kalthoff and Karl Kautsky have made important tentatives in that direction in respect to the origins of Christianity. As far as I am aware, no one has ever yet claimed that it was possible to explain *a priori* why all religions appeared at the time that they actually did.

The Golden Age of Religious Creation

I must repeat that I do not know whether anyone can give any adequate reason for this particular phenomenon, but it appears to be a fact that all—or almost all—the world's major religions came into existence during an era which lasted roughly about 1,200 years. During this period all, I think, of the world's major religions either originated or, at least, assumed forms recognisably similar to those which

we know today. In the first category are Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Confucianism (if it can be called a religion), amongst existing cults, and Zoroastrianism, Manicheanism, Mithraism, amongst cults now extinct or virtually so. In the second

category, originally tribal cults like Hinduism and Judaism, whilst perhaps originating in earlier centuries, at least assumed forms identical with, or recognisably similar to what we know today. I must repeat that I do not know whether any theory has even been put forward which might explain this astonishing period of religion-making—no doubt one of the most remarkable facts in human evolution—550 B.C. to 650 A.D.

Modern Religions

It is also a remarkable fact—and one which also seems to need more explanation than it has so far received—that the bulk of modern religious activity has been devoted to the remoulding of old religions rather than to the creation of new ones more in keeping with the changing times. In the West, the Reformation represents the classical example of this religious conservatism. Why did Jesus and Paul (or their impersonators) end up by creating a new religion, while the Reformers, men of perhaps superior capacity, aimed at nothing more ambitious than reforming the old religion, Christianity? Among the innumerable heresies which stemmed from Christianity, only one as far as I know, ever showed any indication that it might break away altogether and end up as a new religion. That was the obscure Franciscan movement in the 13th century which seems to have aimed more or less consciously at displacing Christ in favour of Francis as the Incarnation of God on earth. But this embryo Franciscan cult perished obscurely in the fire of the Inquisition, and it left no successors. While attempts have been made in modern times to create new religions, they have not been very successful. The 19th century saw quite a number of such efforts, of which Comte's Religion of Humanity perhaps attracted most contemporary attention. However, neither Comte's semi-rationalistic cult of Positivism, nor the semi-socialistic cult of his master, Henri de St. Simon, affected more than a narrow intellectual circle. Rather curiously, perhaps, the most successful "new arrival" to arise and to take root in the Western world, was the American cult of Mormonism, the current ties of which to Christianity seem so exiguous that one appears to be justified in describing it as a new religion. The ex-Owenite, Sydney Rigdon, who appears to have been the real Founder of Mormonism, was perhaps an American "St. Paul." In the

VIEWS and OPINIONS

The Making of New Religions

By F. A. RIDLEY

case of Christianity, its *real* Founder appears to have been Paul rather than any hypothetical Jesus; meaning by Paul, the author of *The Epistle to the Romans*, where Christianity first staked its claim to be a new religion and not just another Jewish heresy. In the case of Islam, Muhammed, who seems to have been illiterate, appears to have derived his fundamental ideas from the ex-Christian, Waraka. In the contemporary Muslim East Bahaism, which started as a Muslim heresy but has now severed all relations with Islam, appears also to be a relatively successful new religion.

Are New Religions Possible in the Future?

The answer to this question depends on what the future is

going to be. Had Hitler set up his New Order in Europe, the embryo Nazi religious cult already existent in Germany, might have become a new world religion, a sort of European "Shintoism." The defeat of Hitler's armies put an end to Hitler Paganism, as presumably the defeat of the Muslim armies in the 7th century would have nipped Islam in the bud. The macabre imagination of Aldous Huxley has given us in his book, *Ape and Essence*, his vision of a malignant cult of Satanism which will follow the first atomic holocaust. One can only conclude with the modest observation that if we actually knew more about the laws which dictate the creation of new religions, one might predict the religious future with more confidence.

Six Days Shalt Thou Labour

By COLIN McCALL

THAT ARDENT BODY of spoilsports, the Lord's Day Observance Society, has been in the news again recently. And there is a feeling among some people that the Society may this time have overreached itself; that its latest actions may rebound upon itself. It is one thing to stop, say, a charity theatrical performance: it is another to cross swords with a Bishop of the Church of England, the Church which hitherto has been the Society's strongest supporter. After the cancellation of the Sunday festival of music and ballet in the ruins of Coventry Cathedral, the Bishop, Dr. Cuthbert Bardsley, condemned the Sunday Observance Laws as "old fashioned" and "irrational." He hoped that the last had not been heard of "that protest of the great mass of ordinary people throughout the country who dislike the present outworn legislation and who will seek to change it."

Several newspapers supported the Bishop, among them *The Times* itself. Particularly noteworthy was the front-page display of the *Daily Herald* on Saturday, April 26th. Reverse printing in black gave additional prominence to the admirable appeal, "Gloomy Sunday: Kick up a row." "What are you doing tomorrow?"—it asked. "It's Sunday. If you do anything more than lie flat on your back with your eyes shut it's quite likely you'll break some of the ancient laws calculated to keep Sunday a day of sloth and snoring." After giving illustrations of some anomalies, it warned, "You'd better watch out, you know, or the Lord's Day Observance Society may stop you as it stopped the Bishop of Coventry's festival"; and it declared: "The *Herald* says the Sunday laws should be changed. *The Times* says they should be changed. The Archbishop of Canterbury says they should be changed. If you help you'll get them changed. Let's all kick up a holy row with the people in Parliament and make them liberate Sunday from hypocrisy, boredom, blight of spirit, the Lord's Day Observance Society, and the dead hand of bygone centuries!"

Admirable—as I have said—but what of the opposition? The L.D.O.S. can best tell us about that, and its Secretary, Mr. Harold Legerton, was interviewed by the *Manchester Guardian* on May 1st. His arguments need not detain us; they are even scripturally dubious for, as has often been shown in these columns, Sunday is not the seventh day. Saturday is the Sabbath, as the Jews recognise. And prima ballerina Alicia Markova—who was to have danced at Coventry—has already referred Mr. Legerton to 2 Samuel VI.14, where he may read that "David danced before the Lord with all his might; and David was girded with a linen ephod."

No, it is not Mr. Legerton's arguments, but his claims, that are significant. While it is impossible to know how many supporters the L.D.O.S. has, it claims to have 40,000

regular subscribers, and it says that this number is increasing. In addition there are "more than a thousand churches which subscribe to and support the society in its mission." But most important is Mr. Legerton's claim of parliamentary support. According to the *Guardian*, he knows that "400 M.P.s are sympathetic to the society's cause, for at every general election and by-election the members are circularised to ascertain their views." He even goes so far as to say, "There is no doubt that we won the last election."

The latter statement is surely exaggerated, but the previous one can presumably be substantiated. I confess surprise. Indeed, I cannot believe that 400 M.P.s are *genuinely* sympathetic to the L.D.O.S. I cannot believe that two-thirds of our M.P.s really treat Sunday gardening, motor-ing and hiking as "pure selfish indulgences," as the Society does. Perhaps, say, 100 of them might, but surely no more than that number? I can only assume that it was fear of losing the election that, in the other cases, prompted agreement with the Society.

If I am right, it is a sorry state of affairs. Will the situation be better at the next general election? A correspondent thinks it will. He takes the *Daily Herald* as reflecting the opinion of a majority of Labour M.P.s and, as Labour seems likely to win the next election, he thinks the repeal of the Sunday laws is likely. But some of the 400 M.P. "sympathisers" with the L.D.O.S. must of necessity be Labour. And a Society circular might scare them just as much next time as it apparently did last. The hope is that it may be counteracted by the expressed opinions of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Bishop of Coventry and *The Times*. Such a distinguished trinity might persuade even M.P.s to change their sympathies.

A Catholic at Brussels

THE *Catholic Herald* boasts an art critic, Miss Iris Conlay, and she visited the Brussels World Fair shortly after it had opened. The so-called *Civitas Dei*—City of God—the Vatican pavilion, naturally occupied most of her attention, and again, naturally enough, she found it "just breathtaking" that first shock of "exaltation" as she entered the contemporary church in the pavilion, where masses are to be said daily. But even when she was 300 feet up in the Atomium she couldn't keep her mind off God. She viewed "the midgets who crawled below with their matchbox-size machinery," and she "felt how infinitesimal our efforts when viewed even that much nearer heaven." Did she forget that it was man's infinitesimal efforts that had taken her "that much nearer heaven"?

Hoyle Interprets History

By G. H. TAYLOR

PROBLEMS IN PHYSICS become simpler by statistical averaging and not by trying to account, with our present limited knowledge, for the behaviour of single particles. Exactly the same applies to the study of human affairs, contends Fred Hoyle in his book *Man and Materialism* (1957). In order to understand what is happening in human history we must study long term trends rather than the year to year changes of the kind grappled with in contemporary politics, or indeed by modern politics in general.

Knowledge, he maintains, is the key factor in man's evolution, more durable than social organisation. The latter can be smashed but the accumulated knowledge may survive. Compared with the physical sciences, social studies have insignificant influence on human affairs because they are on the wrong track in being concerned with the desires of peoples. Here they chase a will o' the wisp. Problems to do with the main course of evolution are therefore solved neither by the Christian nor the Marxist bible, both of which are quite hopelessly outdistanced by the modern situation.

The average standard of life can be arrived at by dividing productivity by the number in the population, and if there are to be fair shares of what does not exist then it matters little whether they are parcelled out on Socialist lines or on Capitalist, and political parties become parochial committee meetings in a Lilliputian world of conflicting 'isms. Where knowledge is lacking, societies fail, and no fine theories can save them. Hoyle provides illustrations of this. One example is Magdalenian Man, who perished because he did not understand what was happening to him in time to ward off disaster. When catastrophe came he had not the knowledge necessary to withstand it. He was therefore powerless against changes of the environment that reduced the number of animals on which he was dependent for food.

Hoyle sees a similar sort of situation developing today in the rapid exhaustion of high-grade metallic ores and of coal and oil. We must note, however, that his book predates Zeta.

Glorious Greece, he observes, also perished by a failure to understand long term trends. In such a case, civilised societies tend to overpopulate their nonagrarian component. When food gets short they raise an army to seize someone else's, and thus make things worse by raising the non-food-producing element.

What significantly distinguishes us from primitive man is precisely the knowledge factor, maintains Hoyle, because there has been little if any genetical advance in man's evolution for 50,000 years or more. That is to say, nature has not been producing better individuals, more intelligent individuals, healthier individuals. Yet, while man as an individual has remained stationary, the most amazing changes have occurred in societies, and the power of man over the elements has increased throughout these 50,000 years (and it could well be much longer) in the most astounding proportion.

In this advance, the quality of the individual components has remained unchanged; the most extraordinary development has taken place without genetical change, without our average intelligence being higher than that of our remote ancestors. We see farther than they do, not because we are mentally taller but because we stand on their shoulders. It is the knowledge-structure built out of individuals that is wonderful, and not the individuals themselves, just as a gas condenses into a liquid, not by the

individual particles changing, but through the developing interrelation of one particle with another.

Knowledge is an accumulated social product. Take it away, and how do we compare with our remote forebears or with primitive peoples? Hoyle institutes such a comparison. In the realm of ethics, he remarks, it is safer to leave a valuable article around in the company of the American Indians than in New York. In brutality we are certainly a match for primitive societies; our instruments are, of course, more cleverly devised (and operate without personal contact). The marriage customs of most savages would be preferable to those of Victorian England or present-day Eire. In religion, he says,

Primitive man sees evidence of supernatural activities and of the existence of gods and devils in the origins of storm and drought and in the motions of the sun and the moon. Modern man sees evidence of the existence of a supernatural power in the origin of the universe. The framework is different because our knowledge vastly excels that of primitive man, but the central concept is the same in the two cases.

Neither are we superior in art in any way not related to improvement in materials. All social factors not relating to knowledge are basically identical. The true altered components—transport, communication, machines, medicine, industry—are significantly related to knowledge.

From this comprehensive *Weltschauung* Hoyle considers it imperative that mankind today should move as smoothly as possible into a single-power world.

If, on the other hand, we insist on our right to national sovereignties, on our right to build a multi-power world, we shall be punished with severity. World wars will then continue to break up our social organisation until at length, either voluntarily or by chance, we arrive at a single-power world. This, I think, is the extent of our choice. . . .

However our votes are cast at the next election we shall get very nearly the same thing, one or other of two identical twins. We shall get politics that belong to an outdated past. We shall get policies that have no sensible chance of working in the present-day world.

Hoyle's book may be regarded as the prediction of one of our most brilliant thinkers that the future belongs, not to politics, but to science, guided, one hopes, by freethought.

British Irreligion

THE American publication, *Christian Science Monitor*, printed in its issue of October 14th, a letter from an English correspondent who was disturbed by the lack of interest in religion today demonstrated by the British people. The correspondent quoted a Gallup Poll which stated that only 14% of the English population go to any kind of church on an average Sunday. The Church of England manages to attract with difficulty perhaps 9% of its total membership, although the Roman Catholic Church manages to get some 44% of its membership. (In the United States it is estimated that half the population go to church.)

Gallup states that Atheism does not usually proclaim itself openly, holding that only about six Atheists out of a hundred openly announce themselves to be such. There is an alarming indifference among the youth, who are much more concerned with the acquisition of economic security than with the Church.

In conclusion, the correspondent of the *Christian Science Monitor* cites some expert opinions, among them Dr. Julian Huxley, author and naturalist, and that of the Rev. Eric Geddes. The former predicts the advent of a new religion which would be based on the quest for Truth, while the latter asserts that mankind is still eager to find God but is alienated by the feeble arguments which are advanced in order to demonstrate his existence. The reverend gentleman asserts that "when the idea of God will be demonstrated more effectively, then the Faithful will return to the Church."

So, after numberless centuries consecrated to religious propaganda, no one has so far succeeded in demonstrating the existence of God.

[*Defense de l'Homme*, 1957. Translated by F.A.R.]

This Believing World

It is not only about the reality of Hell and eternal Hell Fire that modern Christians worry about. In that compendium of credulity, *Psychic News*, a correspondent wants somebody to tell him whether "Jesus of Nazareth actually spoke the words attributed to him on the subject of everlasting damnation (Hellfire) and everlasting bliss (Heaven)?" And another wants to know where Jesus clearly says that all babies should be baptised, and whether it is best to be baptised "by the Holy Spirit or water?" There is no end to these questions from worried believers. Moreover, those worried Christians who are also parents are terribly dismayed when told that a child who dies before being baptised will undoubtedly go to Hell and live eternally in its flames.

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We are spending hundreds of millions of pounds in "educating" our people, and there are still many who really believe all this Christian drivel about Hell and Heaven and Baptism. It is incredible! But let us be fair to some modern Churches. They just hate dwelling on these relics of medieval superstition—even when vouched for by Jesus—but prefer to expound, as volubly as possible, on those teachings of "our Lord" which are literally *secular*, and deal with morals and conduct in *this* world. In other words, they have been obliged to civilise themselves.

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But did Jesus say anything whatever attributed to him in the Gospels? Well, one would first have to prove that (if he existed at all) he really addressed his followers; that his discourses were most carefully taken down (in Aramaic) by somebody who could write that language, obviously in some kind of shorthand; that the speeches were carefully checked and possibly revised by "our Lord" who may or may not have been able to read—though there is no evidence that he could either read or write; that his discourses were then carefully translated into Greek by a Greek scholar and checked again by various other people who heard him and were ready to vouch for their accuracy; and that they were finally put aside for over 100 years after his death, appearing only in Gospels which contradict each other in dozens of places and which were quite unknown before about the year 150 A.D.

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Even then we are not sure for what we have are the words of Jesus translated into English, but the versions often radically differ from each other, Christians giving all kinds of reasons why this is so. Nobody should ever forget that what Jesus is supposed to have said which is new is not true, and what is true is not new. But it may take many years—perhaps centuries—for this to trickle through to our fully-believing Christians.

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That Christianity can still command big money—and after all, cash in the hand is worth much more than a vague eternity in another world—can be shown in the beautiful story of the Bishop Daddy Grace, the renowned leader of a big American religious sect who, according to the *Daily Mirror*, never needs anything for the Lord provides him with everything. In proof of this, he has just paid £150,000 for a large mansion. Bishop Grace has homes all over America, and his Church owns the £6,000,000 Eldorado Hotel in New York as well as companies marketing Daddy Grace Soap, Tea, Coffee, Pomade, etc. But he preaches regularly in one or other of his 325 Houses of Prayer every night to counteract the evil of night clubs where, of course, the Devil only reigns. It proves what

being faithful to the Lord can do—the money just pours in. It has always been so.

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On ITV recently we were shown the awful conditions under which many of the three million population of Hong Kong live—mostly because, the Bishop of Hong Kong blandly admitted, of the evils of "over-population." And the remedy? Were we told by the Bishop that it was entirely in the hands of "our Lord"? Not a bit of it. We Christians, he again blandly told the viewers, have called in the Family Planning Associations, and they will do their utmost to keep the population down. "Family Planning," which once used to be called Birth Control or Neo-Malthusianism, was in the eyes of all the Churches the last word in criminal activity; and they all helped to exterminate it with fines and long prison sentences. It is now accepted—not yet by the Roman Church but that will come—as being quite *Christian!*

The Snobbery of Sinning

THE ROMAN CHURCH... has never been changed except by force. It has always kept its teeth: when Garibaldi extracted the biggest, it merely declared that they had been replaced by still bigger ones. It takes a more serious view of Grace—that is to say, if Protestants believe that Christ framed Christianity, Catholics believe that He left the actual self-portrait to be painted by greater artists: this is very Italian. Catholicism has suffered by throwing over its reputation for learning and depending upon numerical superiority to keep it in power; hence the curious situation of a Church that once prided itself upon asceticism and Schoolmen, favouring infinite breeding and limited reading.

Yet even a Church that clings so stoutly to the merits of pain and degradation and would like to see a world in which a maximum of fecundity could be achieved with a minimum of jocundity, must feel when it reads Mr. Faulkner, Mr. Greene and Mr. Mauriac that though Christ *did* die to save sinners, the fact should be noted more drily. Otherwise, there is the real danger of Grace hovering so incessantly over the utterly-fallen, that the more-upright must worry lest they are not getting *above* it, or are insufficiently vicious to make Christ's sacrifice worthwhile. Once sin becomes a desirable value, discipline starts going to pot, envy and chagrin creep into the hearts of the upright. From there it is only a step to Bohemianism and freedom of thought.

[From the Preface to his Plays, *Cards of Identity* and *The Making of Moo*, by Nigel Dennis.]

International Pen Club

INAUGURATED by the *American Rationalist*, the purpose is to develop and further friendly relations between freethinkers in various countries. Such correspondence, we can tell from experience, is both interesting and educational. Anyone who would like to join this "club," which has no membership fees, should write to me at 5 Kyveilog Street, Cathedral Road, Cardiff. Addresses will be published in subsequent issues of *A.R.*

As the club is not limited to English only, readers are asked to specify if other languages are spoken and may add any details they wish (organisations, etc.). Overseas readers should write in English at first (if possible), though we will do our best with letters in German, Norwegian, Danish, Swedish, Dutch (Flemish), French and Italian.

We especially invite all overseas freethought, rationalist, and humanist journals to reprint this call. DAVE SHIPPER.

THE FREETHINKER

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Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

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

TO CORRESPONDENTS

R. SMITH.—Dr. Roux was speaking of the Biblical Fall and the verdict of evolution. Is there any scientific evidence of a previous superior state of man not connected with an animal ancestry?

E. WILLIS.—The fertilised egg at conception may weigh something like one 5,000th part of an ounce. This may seem a far cry from the 8lb. birth, but in embryonic recapitulation a week to the foetus is something like a million years to the species.

J. POND.—The medium D. D. Home always imposed his own conditions or chose his own company, placing the most gullible guests next to himself. There are discrepancies, even so, in the accounts of witnesses. And he certainly sought a fortune from a wealthy widow.

J. HUNTER.—Thanks. The more cuttings we have, the wider the selection for comment.

P.J.R.—Russell has recently denied any suggestion that he is any less an unbeliever than formerly. Read his *Why I am not a Christian*, obtainable from this office at 1s. 3d. inclusive.

C. T. O'DONNELL.—Pope Innocent III forbade physicians from practising except under strict ecclesiastical supervision, and Boniface VIII indicted surgery as atheistic. Even John Wesley relates how (in 1739) he assisted in the expulsion of a demon from a girl.

S. M. REX.—You say we suffer from "the will to disbelieve." But if the penalty is Hellfire, as you believe, what is our motive in courting that fate?

S. PEEL.—We know it became the fashion to disparage Bradlaugh's writings when compared with his speeches. But this is to set an extremely high standard. His *Plea for Atheism* is a model of sustained argumentation.

F. SIMPSON.—Thanks for comments on the Joseph Lewis series: he is now launching a vigorous campaign against Billy Graham.

S. AYRES.—When we say worry and other emotions can have bodily effects, we do not imply that emotions directly cause these effects: they can only do so through their bodily accompaniments.

KEITH ROSE.—To demand that the materialist shall "explain everything" is to assume that science has finished its work.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, May 18th, 11 a.m.: Mrs. D. PICKLES, M.A., "France, North Africa, and the West."

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.: Messrs. J. W. BARKER and 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. Sunday, 11.30 a.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

Wales and Western Branch N.S.S. (The Downs, Bristol).—Every Sunday, 6.30 p.m.: D. SHIPPER.

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.

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £321 13s. 11d.; A. W. Coleman, £1; Mrs. A. Vallance, 10s.; A. Hancock, 4s.; P. G. Bamford (New Zealand), 15s.; W. Craigie (New Zealand), £1; North London Branch N.S.S., 5s.; T. H. Grimley, 5s.—Total to date, May 9th, 1958, £325 12s. 11d.

Notes and News

JUST another reminder to all readers that the Annual Conference will be held in Nottingham on Whit Sunday, May 25th, 1958. Members who want to reserve accommodation should inform the General Secretary, N.S.S., 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1, as early as possible. Please state number of double or single rooms and nights required.

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ALTHOUGH it has been denied in some quarters, it looks suspiciously as though Catholic Action was responsible for keeping Mr. Tom Driberg off the short list for the Labour candidature of St. Helens. First news in the press suggested that it was trade union opposition, but this was later shown to be untrue. The *St. Helens Reporter* printed a letter alleging that "a small but highly organised clique, operating under the cloak of a particular religious belief, have been seeking to obtain control of the local Labour Party." Mr. Driberg wrote to *The Times* suggesting that "So great a preponderance in favour of one denomination can hardly be due to mere coincidence." And in the *New Statesman* (3/5/58) "Critic" (Mr. Kingsley Martin) referred to "some effective caucus work to ensure that the constitutional procedure worked in its (Catholic Action's) interests." Five of the six names on the short list were, in fact, Roman Catholics, and one of them, Mr. Austin Curran, got there under very dubious circumstances, according to Mr. Martin.

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MR. CURRAN had been suspended from membership of the Fire Brigades' Union and so was ineligible as a candidate, but he "produced the membership card of another union—the National Union of Public Employers—and so the National Executive (of the Labour Party) gave him the all clear." Finally, of course, the chosen candidate was the only non-Catholic on the list, Mr. Leslie Spriggs, the railwayman who declared himself a Protestant. So, for once, Catholic Action has been foiled. We hope this case will serve as an example to the rest of the British Labour movement. Catholic Action must be exposed as the menace it is, otherwise it will ruin the movement here as it has in Australia. All praise to those who shamed and defeated it by bringing it out into the light of day from underground where it normally does its dirty work.

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THE Sixth Convention of the Indian Rationalist Association will be held in Madras in the last week in June, and it is intended to discuss three subjects. These are—in the words of Vice-President Mr. S. Ramanathan—"the eternal problem of caste which still plagues this sub-continent"; the language problem (with special reference to the proposed replacement of English by Hindi for official purposes) on which "the sentiment of patriotism is being whipped up" against "enlightened opinion"; and "political theories with reference to prevailing conditions in India from the rationalist point of view." We send cordial greetings to our Indian colleagues and wish them a very successful convention.

—NEXT WEEK—

SPECULATIONS ON THE ORIGIN OF LIFE

By DR. EDWARD ROUX

My Years as a Monk

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

(Continued from page 147)

THE PRINCIPAL WEAKNESS, however, lay in the attitude of lecturers to what can be termed the cumulative impact of science. The discoveries of evolutionary biology, for example, they generally took piecemeal (when they discussed them, which was rare) and consequently by-passed their meaning. This may not be surprising, for if you do grasp the latter, religion, with its omnipotent, omniscient God, disintegrates. If the presence of a hormic driving principle in evolution be granted at all—and today I find the concept of “hormé” unacceptable except as a name for a quality of self-moving matter—the cumulative evidence of evolution indicates that it is blind and liable to error. The amateur biologist may study the evolution of the small bones in the mammalian ear, and mutter “Design.” He may read about the fertilisation mechanism of the flowering plant or compare reproduction in the club-moss and the fern, and say “Purpose.” But he overlooks in each case the ages of trial and error, the waste and the torment involved in the elaboration of these forms. He by-passes the fact that the human body at the present stage of evolution is so marvellously constructed that toilet-training by an ignorant parent can ruin it for life, that the poor working of an endocrine secretion can generate an idiot. Even in conscious organisms, all purposive striving is partially blind and the most wonderful results are the product of many fumbling stages. These facts, taken cumulatively over the whole range of science, do not merely fail to suggest an omnipotent or omniscient God, but are incompatible with the idea of one.

In such fields, our lecturers generally gave the impression of inadequate contact with reality. Not much, indeed, was said about them, unless a student who already knew something of science brought them up. In matters like the psychology of unconscious motivation or evolutionary biology in particular, the impact of science was feared. The prevailing sense, therefore, was that the courses had a polemical aim. One was imbibing theology rather than philosophy. It was propaganda. I have always found this understandable, in view of the standpoint of the Church, but I have never found it acceptable. In addition, the studies were unbalanced owing to the large number of forbidden books, which included some of the most important Catholic authors who had in one way or another fallen foul of the Vatican. Anything on religion or philosophy is prohibited if it contradicts the Catholic faith. One could get permission to read some of them, but the demand was generally disliked. “Sound” students would not ask, which was again probably true.

The knowledge, consequently, of the scientific aspects of philosophy among the students, at the end of eight years, was practically nil. Some of the lecturers were not much better. I read a paper on embryology and evolution to the debating society one evening in my third year, and one old priest (a well-known Catholic writer) objected to it with fantastic arguments about the copulation of monkeys. He also gave evidence of being misinformed about normal methods of human copulation, or about the possibility of choice in the matter. What kind of instruction such people give in the confessional I do not know, but they must make themselves ridiculous to married laymen who have read, say, the books of Dr. G. Lombard Kelly. Other critics supposed that material in my paper on similarities between embryos entailed a defence of the old recapitulation theory.

Not all the lecturers were so naïve as my examples, but those who were acquainted with science tended to keep their knowledge and faith rigidly separate. In private discussions, when difficulties affecting my own attitude to the Church arose, every one of their arguments turned out useless. More often than not, rational investigation of an objective problem would be drowned in speculations about the moral turpitude of doubt. The usual theme was that characterologically the doubter must differ from the “normal” Catholic. From their angle, once more, they were right. A biologically correct attitude to sex means the disintegration of religious faith.

In connection with the naïveté of the students there occurred an unkind incident. A fellow monk and I, one summer afternoon during the annual revision period, had to type summaries for a lecturer on the term’s philosophy. We typed an extra page of thunderous German and Latin phrases, rather in the style of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, but without a shred of meaning. This page we circulated, bound up with the others and labelled “Note B.” We made enquiries at recreation how the work was going: “‘Note B’ was hard, wasn’t it?”—And they all fell for it. One declared that he’d begun to understand “Note B,” and victory was absolute. We told the lecturer three years later, and even then he was annoyed. He appeared to think it reflected on the intelligibility of his teaching rather than upon the general level of intelligence of the class.

We never had our I.Q.s tested, which may have been fortunate.

Much of the learning was obedient, uncritical memorising. There were exceptions: we had some clever lecturers, but even here what I have said about the feeble sense of cumulative evidence applied. It appeared in discussions about the development of the early Church, whose constitution was made far too rigid, or about the problem of evil in the animal and plant world: a subject which has always been treated with grotesque triviality by the Catholic religion. No one understood dialectical change, and every feature of the natural world and human social development tended to be circumscribed with metaphysical rigidities.

But it is to what I have called the cumulative impact of science and the material world, and to the absence of contact with it shown by the religious mind, that we now have to turn. I have understood certain peculiarities of Dominican life and the following are my reasons for having done so.

We spoke earlier, for example, of the liturgy of the feudal Church as having the beauty of an ideal, but implied that later experience uncovered the reverse of the ideal, hinting at a concealed element of brutality.

The ideals of “culture” generally, and of religion in particular, have all through history been associated with two things. One is the obliteration of the natural colour and structure of reality. The other is brutality. The ideals, and these two phenomena, are mutually involved. To eliminate one you have to eliminate all three, and the hope of a peace-loving, human religion in touch with reality is an illusion. The reasons can be formulated in the language of depth psychology.²

Psychoanalysts use the terms “idealisation” and “denigration.” “Idealisation” means the construction of ideals

which are not worth what they appear to be worth. "Denigration" means blackening—hostility and contempt for the human drives that have been shut out of the ideal, together with repudiation of all aspects of reality associated with these drives.

Idealisation and denigration are responsible for a deformed relation to reality. The deformity is bound up with what psychoanalysts call the projection of the rejected impulses. Idealisation without denigration is impossible. Therefore in a society where culture is the product of idealisation the accompanying products of denigration will be found. A group whose members are abnormally romantic and sentimental, where story-book ideals of chivalry and the like abound, will contain a streak of barbaric cruelty. Where desexualised ideal figures are worshipped and discarnate gods or sexless angels or saints adored, here the natural drives of humanity will be viewed with suspicion and persecuted. If these drives, and the feelings associated with them, menace the ideal, if, that is, they begin to break through from the unconscious, they will be opposed by every defence-mechanism at the disposal of that society.

²And only the reasons. The following account is an explanation provisionally stated in Freudian terms, but inevitably influenced throughout by the character-analytic theory of Reich and the findings of Malinowski. The sequel will show why the practical application on a social scale calls for direct methods that have nothing in common with psycho-analytical or character-analytic therapy, concerning which there is probably some truth in the opinion of Professor H. J. Eysenck.

(To be continued)

Chosen Question

By H. CUTNER

EVERY NOW AND THEN we are favoured in this journal with a question or questions often designed to show our ignorance as Atheists or Materialists. Many of them could be answered without troubling us at all by consulting the Encyclopedia Britannica or Chambers' or, for that matter, a good text book. Others, it is true, require more or less research, but an afternoon at the local reference library would in most cases provide an adequate answer.

For my own part, I am often amused when somebody who is quite certain we don't know the answers, puts questions which he fondly imagines also have never been put before. This is true especially when they come from an anti-Materialist. Most, if not all of these people, appear never to have heard of d'Holbach's *System of Nature* or Buchner's *Force and Matter* or even of the late Walter Mann's brilliant little work, *Modern Materialism*. In these three books will be found answers to nearly everything an anti-Materialist can bring forward; unfortunately the books themselves are not easy to buy, and I am sure no genuine anti-Materialist would ever read them even if he could buy them. His business is in the main not a search for knowledge, but a violent desire to prove Materialists wrong.

We have, for example, a letter from a Mr. J. W. T. Anderson, who tells us that "we are asked to believe that 'matter' has, through æons of time, been able to produce living organisms . . ." Now, in the very first place, nobody is asked to "believe" anything of the kind. He is, on the contrary, asked to study what Materialists have to say about "living organisms" and "matter," and if he can show the Materialist is wrong then there is no need to "believe."

And first of all there is the word "matter," which Mr. Anderson says, is "merely an English noun." Of course,

he has a right to think what he likes, and a right to say it; and if he thinks that the word "matter" is "merely" an English noun in a discussion like this, I can only say I prefer to leave him and his invincible ignorance severely alone. As Schiller once put it, against downright stupidity even the very Gods cannot make headway.

When a Materialist uses the word "Matter," he uses it with certain definite meanings. There is not the slightest reason why Mr. Anderson and those who think like him should accept our definitions, of course, but if he wants to discuss the question then he must either show we are wrong, or must prove that it is "merely" an English noun. Merely saying it is no proof.

The definition of "matter" given by Chambers is "That which occupies space and with which we become acquainted by our bodily senses"—a definition which can hardly be bettered. It is, in fact, only a variation of Bradlaugh's "Totality of all phenomena." If "matter" occupies space, it seems to me a waste of time to discuss anything else occupying space at the same time if that can be imagined—which I deny.

Here are a few gems from Mr. Anderson:

Particles of so-called matter have no natural tendency to form themselves into men and women, cats and dogs, etc. Certain exponents of Mechanical Biology do not explain why organisms are born with sexual organs which are unnecessary in the embryonic stage. . . .

Throughout organic nature there is evidence of purpose and foreknowledge of each creature's needs.

Some form of intelligence is at work throughout the biological world. . . .

Materialism, like other metaphysical systems, cannot answer the great questions. The real nature of "matter"; its origin and its destiny; the real nature of life and consciousness. In fact, why does anything at all exist?

Every one of these statements has been, as far as it was possible to deal with them, answered by both d'Holbach and Buchner. Indeed, all these points have been dealt with in long articles not only in THE FREETHINKER from time to time, but in many splendid articles in Bradlaugh's old *National Reformer*. I can go further. These, and other problems like them, were discussed, not only by the old Greek philosophers, but by nearly every prominent philosopher ever since. The *Problems of Life and Mind*, as G. H. Lewes called them, and to which he devoted three volumes of fascinating discussion and speculation, have always attracted great minds. If the questions they posed have not been answered, it is surely because either they are unanswerable, or because we have not yet reached the stage in knowledge to enable us to answer them.

The little trick of saying Materialism cannot answer why some forms of life result in cats and dogs, and others in men and women, is just the kind of trick we expect from people of invincible ignorance. Any book on Evolution will explain, as far as it is possible to explain, how forms of life appeared when the conditions on the surface of our planet were favourable. The Materialist, it is true, cannot see any form of Design or Intelligence in the process—we evolved in the way we have evolved because that is the way in which we evolved. We see no directing force whatever; and when people like Mr. Anderson say, "some form of intelligence is at work throughout the biological world," he takes good care not to define what he means by "intelligence," for that is the operative word; or to give us any evidence for his statement.

The word "intelligence" came into being when highly developed forms of life had evolved on this earth of ours and not before. Apart from flesh and blood as evolved here, the word has no meaning whatever. No one would credit a cabbage with intelligence; and it varies according to the being involved. Apart from such a highly organised piece of "matter" called the brain, we know nothing of

intelligence. Thus, "some form of intelligence" is just a meaningless phrase, unless applied to evolved living beings in this world. The beautiful picture of "some form of intelligence" at work "creating" things, and thus confounding blatant Materialists like myself, is only alluring to sheer ignorance.

Nor can Materialists answer the question, "Why does anything at all exist?" Nor can anybody else. Nobody knows. What we do know is that forms of matter appear or have appeared in the world when the conditions for making them appear and for their survival are just right for them.

It is easy to understand why people like Mr. Anderson believe that "there is evidence of purpose and foreknowledge of each creature's needs" in the world. He and his like will point to the cow as being specially designed to give us milk, or to hens to give us eggs. But, strangely enough, they rarely point to "nature red in truth and claw." Nor, indeed, to the beautiful way in which Nature designed the tapeworm with its delightful hooks to fasten on to our intestines so that it cannot easily be dislodged. And there are hundreds of similar things "designed" for man—like cancer—according to our Andersons.

Those of us who are Materialists are constrained to acknowledge our ignorance of thousands of things in the Universe—for example, we haven't the slightest idea of what use is Jupiter, which has an icy envelope on its surface thousands of miles in thickness. We cannot fathom the wonder of the rings of Saturn "designed" "by some form of intelligence," as Mr. Anderson would say, with "purpose and foreknowledge." He, no doubt, as he believes in his "form of intelligence" so thoroughly, could tell us of what use is Neptune, which has a temperature of -220 degrees Centigrade. And so on.

In his book, *The Scientific Outlook*, Bertrand Russell says, "The evidence of Divine Purpose is non-existent; so at least one must infer from the fact that no evidence is adduced by those who believe in it." That is the point always to be borne in mind. What we Materialists always ask for is *evidence*, not loose and ignorant talk.

Perhaps Mr. Anderson will bear this in mind if he tries to answer me. That is, if he really does try.

CORRESPONDENCE

EASTER EGGS

I have written to the *News Chronicle* on the following lines: Geoffrey Murray, in his appeal for Eastertide charity (*Chronicle*, 31/3/58) says that the Church "made" the egg the symbol of creation and rebirth. Surely it would be much more accurate to say that the egg has been such a symbol for as long as mankind has been able to think metaphorically and symbolically, which takes us back many thousands of years B.C.

All Christian customs derive from pre-Christian usages. Christmas is the festival of the winter solstice; monasticism and asceticism originated among the Hindus; baptism and a form of eucharist were practised by Jewish sects prior to and contemporary with Christ. S. W. Brooks.

ARE WE POLITICAL?

Politics is better left out—completely out—of Freethought and Rationalist propaganda, for this work, to be done effectively, exacts long and strenuous toil on the part of each one who undertakes it. And it is sheer nonsense to pretend that we can be politically minded without being party minded. It is politically impossible to be otherwise.

The day may—or may not—come when political parties are so tolerantly dovetailed into each other that to be a ruling politician will exemplify wisdom. Such a day is certainly not yet in sight.

Freethought must not be hampered or swayed or influenced by

any political leanings whatever, irrespective of whether they bear an actual party label or merely take the general party line. But—and this is fundamental—the freethinker will often as an individual be connected with some political party activity, yet back on his freethought platform his party politics should vanish. Which means—no politics.

ELIZABETH MILLARD.

THE THEISTIC CHURCH

If any of your readers has, or knows the whereabouts of, a photograph of the interior of the Theistic Church, which stood in Swallow Street, Piccadilly, London, from 1885 to about 1933 and was ministered to by the Rev. Charles Voysey, will he kindly inform me at 110 Bradbourne Road, Sevenoaks, Kent, and do me a service.

T. S. LASCELLES.

APE AND MAN

Dr. Edward Roux's excellent article, "Exit Adam," raises the old question of "When did ape become man?" Might I venture to suggest that it was when the ape-man adopted fetishes? However intelligent apes may be, they are never found worshipping idols. If a race of apemen were found today a sure test of whether or not they had passed the "boundary" would be to give them statues and objects of a shape alien to them, and then watch to see if they got upon their knees!

Incidentally, many of the savants have queried why the arboreal apes took to the ground, but I have never seen the simplest explanation of all published—that a group may have done so because their forests were destroyed by fire, tempest or earthquake.

H. A. ROGERSON.

[It has in fact been found that apes can evince fear at unfamiliar objects.—Ed.]

"EXIT ADAM"

The great fundamental difference between animals and men is, surely, brain capacity—intelligence. On the basis of a comparison of the brain capacity of animals and man, the gulf between them is incalculable. But on a basis of comparison (taking all the animals and men that have ever existed) between the animal with the *greatest* brain capacity and the man with the *smallest*, the gulf becomes very materially reduced.

T. W. COCKS.

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