

# The Freethinker

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THE FORMERLY SUBJUGATED PEOPLES of the Orient and Africa are again emerging from the margin of history to which they were relegated during the colonial era. This fact reflects itself in the spheres of culture and religion and, in the latter field, attention is no longer exclusively fixed on Christianity. Amongst these non-Christian "higher religions," perhaps the most powerful and cosmopolitan—and certainly the most aggressive—is Islam, the religion of "submission" (Islam) to Allah, the unique God, a monotheistic cult founded in the early years of the seventh century of the Christian era by the Prophet Muhammed. An Arab, born in Mecca about 570, he died in Medina in 632.

## Muhammed and Islam

In the most recent volume of Messrs. Longman, Green's series, "Men of Wisdom"—earlier volumes of which have been reviewed in these columns—an eminent French scholar, M. Emile Dermenghem, has outlined the life of the Prophet after whom the creed of Islam is often, though inaccurately, named, and has considered the religious nature and subsequent evolution of Islam. An elaborate bibliography, supplemented by copious quotations from the Prophet and from leading Muslim writers, adds to the value of this excellent work. I, personally, found it the most interesting and instructive book which has so far appeared in this definitely outstanding series. An attractive green jacket—green is, for some reason with which I am not acquainted, the traditional sacred colour of Islam—and the splendid illustrations which are an habitual feature of the series add still further to the value of this masterly précis of one of the most powerful forces in the world. It is indispensable reading to students of comparative religion and world affairs.

## The Life of the Prophet

Whilst no one, to our (and our author's) knowledge, has ever doubted the historical existence of Muhammed, not very much is actually known about his social origins or his pre-prophetic life. It is probable that he was born in Mecca in or about 570—M. Dermenghem accepts 571 as the most likely date; as also the tradition that he was a member of the Meccan aristocracy, the Koreish, but other scholars have called this in question. Muhammed appears to have been originally what would now be termed a commercial traveller; and it was during his little-known journeys around Arabia that he seems to have first obtained the rudiments of his later ideas, probably from Christian and Jewish sources, since a predominantly Pagan Arabia then contained many of these communities. When aged about 40, Muhammed began to see visions, a practice which continued until his death. As a result of these visions, he became a religious reformer, announcing that there was only one God, Allah, and that he, Muhammed, was the Prophet and Messenger (Rasul) of Allah. As such, he called first on Mecca, then on the whole of Arabia, to renounce its idols and to accept the new revelation. Mecca was already a well-known religious and commercial centre,

the seat of an idolatrous worship of the Black Stone enshrined amidst idols in the Kaaba. Muhammed was too timid—or shrewd—to break with this immemorial tradition and he later "baptised" the Kaaba as the House of Allah, purging the sanctuary of idols but keeping the Black Stone as the centre of Muslim pilgrimage.

Like most iconoclastic reformers, Muhammed and his early disciples had at first a rough passage and, to escape persecution, fled to the city of Medina to the north. The present Muslim chronology dates from this Hegira—"Flight" from Mecca to Medina in 622 of our Christian era. Muhammed's followers gained control of the small town of Medina, where the Prophet set up a theocratic Muslim state: a "Church Militant" which

proclaimed the jihad—holy war—against Pagans and unbelievers, including Jews. After ten years of desultory warfare marked by vicissitudes, Muhammed succeeded in capturing Mecca, and when he died he had become the temporal and spiritual ruler of most of Arabia. What, however, really made the subsequent fortune of Islam—a fact which M. Dermenghem could perhaps have made clearer than he has—was not primarily its theological content, which seems to have been borrowed from Jews and/or Christians (though Muhammed also seems to have had some Arab prophetic predecessors) but its subsequent astounding military conquests. After the Prophet's death, his successors (Khalifs)—in particular the great Omar (634-644), the Arab Carnot, "the organiser of victory"—built up a vast empire in less than a century which expanded from the Pyrenees to Delhi and to Morocco. Without this astonishing military expansion, Muhammed would probably not have proved any more successful than such modern "prophets" as the Sudanese Mahdi or the Somali. It seems doubtful whether his creed would have lasted even in its cradle, Arabia, but for its headlong foreign expansion. In the seventh century there was no Lord Kitchener summarily to arrest the rush of the Arab fanatics like the very similar modern dervishes who broke even a modern British square in the Sudan. Had there been, would 400 million people still call upon Allah and his Prophet? An idle but intriguing question.

## Islam and the Koran

Muslim theology does not *worship* Muhammed nor—at least where orthodox—regard him as divine. He is merely the last and greatest of the prophets. A Muslim modernist—such people exist nowadays!—could make out a plausible case that Muhammed believed in a kind of religious evolution, since he expressly recognised Abraham, Moses, the Old Testament prophets, John the Baptist and, in particular, Jesus, as his prophetic predecessors. (A Muslim cannot deny the historicity of Jesus since this, and that of Mary, is declared in the Koran.) In strict Muslim orthodoxy the real object of veneration is not Muhammed, but the Koran, which is not a book or in any way the work of

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

## Muhammed and the Islamic Tradition

By F. A. RIDLEY

the Prophet, but the actual eternal and uncreated Word of Allah dictated by angels to Muhammed in a series of visions. The psychological conditions of these are described in detail by M. Dermenghem and appear to indicate traces of epilepsy. The author quotes an orthodox tradition that "any one verse of the Book of God is worth more than Muhammed and his entire family."

Islam actually is a kind of Jewish "Catholicism," a cosmopolitan expansion of the original tribal Jewish creed, whilst the Koran is a much more authentic successor to the Hebrew Old Testament than is our New Testament, which is Greek and not Semitic. Muhammed originally taught his

followers to turn to Jerusalem whilst at prayer; it was only later, after the Jews had declined to accept him, that he substituted Mecca as the Holy City of Islam.

#### The Revival of Islam

The present revival of Islam, exemplified in the Muslim states, in Indonesia and Pakistan and its rapid expansion in Africa, makes Emile Dermenghem's masterly outline particularly timely. We trust that it will have the wide sale and recognition that both its subject matter and remarkable powers of condensation deserve.

[*Muhammed and the Islamic Tradition*, by Emile Dermenghem, "Men of Wisdom" series. Longmans, Green and Co. 6s. net.]

## Religious Barbarism

By DAVE SHIPPER

IN A RECENT ISSUE of the Polish freethought magazine, *Glos Wolnych*, an article under the heading "Barbarzynstwo" ("Barbarism") appeared. The writer tells of the initiation of an investigation into certain incidents in the town of Zurominie by the Public Prosecutor of the Warsaw Province. Following investigations, eight persons were arrested, among them assistant-pastor Jozef Czarniecki. It was also stated that the Rev. Staniaszko would have been arrested but for his old age and further investigations into his "work" were being made.

Apparently, trouble arose when Stanslaw Nikiel, the Chairman of the City Council of Zurominie, a man with a long record of social service, and apparently an anti-clerical history, died in February. The 87-year-old pastor of the local parish refused to mark the grave in which Nikiel would lie (one of his duties as agreed with the city authorities), in effect denying his right to burial in the public cemetery. At a special meeting the City Council decided that Nikiel *would* be buried there, had the grave dug themselves, and notified the Rev. Staniaszko of their decision.

The burial ceremony (presumably a secular one) was due to take place on a Sunday and on that day during church services Staniaszko appealed to those in church to help him stop the ceremony. After a service, Staniaszko went to the cemetery, accompanied by Jozef Czarniecki and a crowd of the "faithful," and partly filled in the newly-dug grave. At 3.30 p.m., the appointed time, the funeral hearse entered the cemetery while a band played a funeral march. The religionists attempted to stop the coffin-bearers from entering the grounds and the mourners had to use physical force to reach the partly filled-in grave, a city official receiving a severe beating in the process. Many of the mourners were extremely upset by this gross defamation of the funeral and the jeers and catcalls of the religionists, so some left the grounds without waiting for the burial. Refusing to submit to such bigoted intimidation, the family of the deceased, along with several close friends, surrounded the coffin to protect it and, after re-digging the grave, the corpse was laid to rest.

A few days later *Trybuna Ludu* commented that such events in the 20th century were to be deplored as worse than the inquisitorial obscurantism of medieval times. Even savages would show more respect for the corpse of a dead man. The two priests were clearly responsible for having incited their "faithful" to such acts of barbarism.

My translator, Polish-American S. Dziengielewski (without whose co-operation this would not have been written), comments wryly that these events took place in a land where—according to law—absolute freedom of conscience and religious practice prevails, and where religion is being taught in the schools.

As the religious journals talk so often of "atheistic atrocities" behind the "Iron Curtain" (and often without giving specific details), they may like to reprint this story, which has adequate documentation.

## Until We Meet Again

THEY QUARRELLED HAMMER AND TONGS. He was a Protestant and had married the barmaid, who was a Catholic. Right from the end of the honeymoon he had scratches on his face, and frequently she had a pair of black eyes. He worked with me at the factory and was a first class worker. I lodged next door to them, and on Saturday nights especially the rumpus coming from their house was terrific, and often had I to go into their home to give first aid.

She had told me that she had done her best by force and common sense to convert him to the Catholic way of life, but her effort was of no avail. On the other hand, he had informed me that his father and his grandfather and all of his family were "Galvanised Methodists" and that was good enough for him. "I would go to chapel," he said, "but I have enough to do as secretary of the Cork Club and the Pools Syndicate, but although she goes to mass every Sunday morning, I am as good as her any time."

Then, one Saturday night, a terrible thing happened. She and her cronies had just left the jug and bottle department of the pub at the corner of the street and, in crossing the road, the local Holy Father, who happened to be coming along in his car at too fast a rate for stop tap time, mowed her down and killed her. I helped to carry her body home, and he who was waiting for the usual Saturday night rumpus, collapsed and moaned through the night by her still body. The funeral was a rattling one, with a fine coffin and beautiful flowers, and the boiled ham when we returned and the drinks were of the best. He bought a lovely headstone, which gave her name and age, etc., and across the bottom read the following: "Until We Meet Again." We next door now enjoyed perfect peace and my first aid box went into disuse, but he seemed to wither up and waste away, and, no doubt, that state of health can be described scientifically as a conditioned reflex brought about by his drastically changed environment. For many years this cat and dog couple had worked, drank, kicked, and scratched at each other, until it had become second nature to them, and peace and silence had become an unbearable hell to him, and so twelve months afterwards he died and we laid him beside his beloved. What happened when they met again I do not know, but I imagine that if they did meet again, she would play hell with him and make up for lost time in that place where a first aid box would not be required.

PAUL VARNEY.

# The Superstition of Astrology

By RUBY TA'BOIS

"TEACHERS OF RELIGION have always condemned the pretensions and doctrines of astrologers," writes Westaway\* in a short article on astrology. This seems to me an amazing statement. Surely the contrary is the truth, for popes, cardinals, bishops and priests have sought the advice of astrologers. Further, from the very first astrology was put forward as a scheme of divination by means of the supernatural. It was directly God-given knowledge.

The Bible itself has references supporting belief in astrology. There is the quotation in Isaiah—"Let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators stand up and save thee from these things that shall come upon thee," though surely even God himself could not save anyone from things that "shall come." Teachers of religion have always taught as true the story of the Star of Bethlehem; and what is that but a piece of astrology based on the notion that after the birth of a child, a star would stand overhead to guard the new life. The Hebrew "Blessings of Jacob" in Genesis assign a constellation to each of the twelve tribes of Israel, an idea which survives in a modified form in the flag of the U.S.A. assigning a star to each of the States.

The fact is that astrological practices of today represent the stale residue of what was once a great pantheistic religion. Many words persist in our language which are of astrological derivation. "Disaster" comes from the French word *désastre*, which means literally a "hostile star." "Influence" (and hence "influenza") come from the Latin "influ-" "to flow into," and originates directly from the primitive belief that something from the stars "flowed into" a person. "Sidereal" is from the Greek "sideron," meaning "iron" and the Latin "sidera," meaning "stars," contributing to the belief that iron meteors falling from the sky were "falling stars." The belief that people's souls went up to the sky or fell down (and in many cases the people themselves in the body) with a star is a belief shared by Jesus in the words, "I have seen Satan fall like lightning from the sky."

It is surprising that while astrologers attempt to place their superstition upon a scientific basis in maintaining that "vibrations" from planets and stars exert a real influence on human beings, they use in their horoscopes the Signs of the Zodiac which have no objective existence whatsoever. What Sign a person is born under always figures most prominently in all astrological predictions, and yet the Signs of the Zodiac are merely twelve divisions of the sky. The constellations of stars are merely subjective configurations based on the optical perspective of an observer according to his position on earth. In reality there is nowhere in the sky a real Aries, the Ram, or a Scorpion or a Virgin for a person to be born under. Moreover, the First Point of Aries is still reckoned by astrologers at the Spring Equinox, although owing to the astronomical phenomenon known as the Precession of Equinoxes, all the Zodiacal Signs have retrograded along the ecliptic. The result is that the Signs no longer correspond with the constellations after which they were named.

It is also important to note that astrologers did not hesitate to add fraudulently star-figures quite non-existent in the sky in places where there was a dearth of stars, thereby necessitating the use of astrological globes for predictions. It is pertinent to ask what then becomes of their scientific "vibratory influence"?

\*F. W. Westaway, *Obsessions and Convictions of the Human Intellect*, 1938.

Nowadays, the astrologer discusses his horoscopes on a circular paper diagram, using as his basis mythological and imaginary star-groups. It is amusing to find him pretending to be up to date by including the more recently discovered planets Uranus, Neptune and Pluto in his horoscopes, and stressing as important that every second makes a difference to the correctness of a nativity reading, and yet he fails to make the necessary correction (like the astronomer makes) for light-time. As the velocity of light is 186,282 miles per second, there is a difference of six minutes between the real and the apparent position of Venus. And, of course, this rule applies in varying degree according to the distance of a star or a planet. So the astrologer's horoscope may be out of date by anything from minutes to hundreds of years.

Astrologers try to bolster up their case frequently by quoting the names of great astronomers who professed belief in astrology, Galileo and Newton being two of the alleged subscribers to the cult. True, Galileo did draw up a horoscope for the Grand Duke Ferdinand I de Medici of Tuscany predicting for him a long and happy life, though he died a few weeks later. As to Newton there is not a trace in any of his books or his letters intimating that he showed the slightest interest in astrology. We may mention Voltaire in this connection, who was the victim of two astrologers' horoscopes predicting that he would die at the age of thirty-two. He lived to be eighty-four!

It is an incontrovertible fact that after the discovery of Kepler's Laws and of Newton's principles explaining the movements of the planets round the sun, not a single astronomer of repute has defended the stupidities of astrology. As the great astronomer Flammarion stated so admirably: "No fact of observation proves that planets and stars have any influence on our . . . destinies. It is the last thing even remotely probable."

It has been said that if it were possible to kill superstition by ridicule, astrology would have been dead for more than two hundred years. Yet it is still a living faith in the minds of millions who have not outgrown the pre-scientific stage of intelligence. The great psychoanalyst, Prof. Jung, taught that the mind somehow preserves the different strata of the primitive imaginations and fancies evolved in the course of the history of religion long after they have been recognised as stupid and false by the clearer thought of the rational personality. Astrology may be bracketed with religion in this explanation.

What better example can one have to illustrate the truth of Jung's thesis than the following: As recently as ten years ago a properly qualified Harley Street practitioner always took the horoscopes of her patients before making her diagnosis!

## APPRECIATION

May I crave your indulgence to express my appreciation of G. I. Bennett's article "Where Wisdom Lies" in your issue of 22/8/58. It was indeed brilliant for its clearness, conciseness and exposition. More power to his pen and may we have more from it.

W. M. MCALPIN.

—NEXT WEEK—

READERS' VIEWS ON FREEMASONRY

## This Believing World

We note with not a little amusement the two articles in our contemporary, *The Humanist*, on Bradlaugh and Ingersoll. Bradlaugh is put forward as a great Humanist—which he was—but his eulogist has the unique distinction of filling six columns about him without once mentioning the fact that he was a militant Atheist, and the author of *A Plea for Atheism*. Bradlaugh's courage as an outspoken Atheist is one of the outstanding qualities of his splendid career, not only as a great advocate for Free-thought, but also as a great Parliamentarian. Had he lived he would undoubtedly have attained Cabinet rank.

★

The writer of the article on Ingersoll was not afraid of calling him the "great Agnostic," it is true, but he might have shown that for Ingersoll, an Agnostic was an Atheist or an Atheist was an Agnostic. There was no distinction for Ingersoll. In any case, we are assured that "Ingersoll was not a profound thinker"—possibly because he never lost himself in a maze of metaphysical jargon, or perhaps because he had no university degree. Ingersoll was also "not a scholar in the academic sense," and he suffered from "the bleakness of his central theme" which was "ultimate extinction." Well, it may be "bleak" but it is undoubtedly true.

★

The shouting down of Mr. Gaitskell when he was trying to make a speech in Liverpool the other day, had nothing to do with politics but, not at all surprisingly, with religion. The crowd, it appears, was mainly composed of Protestants, and they were voicing their strong objection to Roman Catholics getting some of the new flats, the opening of which was made by Mr. Gaitskell, supported by Mrs. Braddock and the Lord Mayor of Liverpool. The whole affair was a typical example of the way these Christians love one another. We wonder what the crowd would have done had the three people concerned been actually Roman Catholics?

★

A correspondent to "Psychic News," writing on his visit to Lourdes, calls it "a city of greed and suffering," and adds, "Never in my whole life have I seen anything so breathtakingly awful. . . . Imagine the vilest, most commercial of English seaside towns. . . . Lourdes is the worst seaside town on earth with the most grisly type of religion in place of the sea!" The full account he gives is about the most damning indictment of the Holy Shrine we have ever read.

★

But will this or any other account have any influence with fully-believing Catholics? Not on your life. The unfortunate sick and other pilgrims will still be wheedled into going with hope and religious fervour, and thus help to perpetuate what really is the biggest swindle in the world. The fact that practically no miracles now occur will make no difference to the confirmed believer, and Lourdes will continue to flourish—and swindle.

★

General Sir Richard Gale—who has succeeded Lord Montgomery—has been examining in the London *Evening Standard* the famous battles described in "Holy Writ," taking it for granted that Joshua, Saul, David and the rest all really lived, and actually fought these battles. There is not a scrap of evidence that these Biblical heroes ever lived at all, let alone fought any battles. Joshua is as mythical as Moses. The huge armies they are supposed to have led could never have been fed, and this goes for the huge armies of their enemies as well. General Gale swallows everything he reads merely because it is in the Bible.

That battles were fought between the various Asiatic peoples in the past is, of course, quite true; and what really happened was that some of the accounts of the battles which survived were later—very much later—worked into the mythical history of the Jews as if they had fought them. The idea that any horde of slaves could escape from a country, and immediately build for themselves chariots and weapons of all kinds so that they could easily beat any number of fierce Asiatic tribes (naturally described as "nations") all more heavily armed with the latest weapons of war, is just fantastic nonsense. Still, so many of our generals appear to be incurably religious and thus they have to believe everything, no matter how silly, so long as it is in the Bible.

## Bertrand Russell on T.V.

INTERVIEWED by representatives from the *Daily Telegraph*, *The Observer* and the *New Statesman* on Friday last in "Press Conference," Bertrand Russell must have left an enduring impression on those who were privileged to hear him (we hope not for the last time, though that time must come eventually).

As expected, he made another eloquent plea for international sanity, and rated the chances of mankind's survival into the 21st century as, at present, about fifty-fifty. There were no questions on his academic philosophy, but a number were asked about his religion, or lack of it. To the question as to whether he was "afraid to die" the Grand Old Man presented a magnificent picture of amused tolerance in answering "Not in the least. Why?"

Asked whether he believed in "any kind of after-existence" he gave a decided negative. "Fear is the motive behind all religious beliefs," he observed. What, then, had life offered? An enormous question to put to a man like Russell! He spoke of the joy he had taken in the acquiring of knowledge and the many friendships, some of them of a most intimate nature, he had made throughout his life. What a reply to the stupid type of Christian who says "If there is no life after death we are just so many cabbages!"

The attitude of his questioners was at times rather "anti," especially in the case of the *Telegraph* man, who would no doubt have liked to draw some concession from the great man on the religious issue. But Russell stood firm, a model of clarity and of matured opinion.

On the subject of freethinking he said there would have been more Freethinkers had it been safe to hold such views. The *Telegraph* man then proceeded to get freethinking mixed up with free activity of scientists in producing the H-bomb, a typical piece of *Telegraph* nonsense.

The whole interview (much more satisfactory than the paltry one conducted by Lady Barnett with him some time ago) was excellent propaganda for Freethought and Peace.

G.H.T.

## No Respite

IN the first of a *Daily Mail* series on Education (8/9/58). Mr. Woodrow Wyatt interviewed the headmaster of Charterhouse School, Mr. Young, who is 36, gave reasons for retaining the public schools "independent of interference from Government or local authorities," the schools themselves deciding "what is right," and doing it. One of the things that Mr. Young thinks is right, is religious indoctrination and, in a boarding school, he says, "religion can be thoroughly inculcated." Asked by Mr. Wyatt why this applied more than in a day school, Mr. Young replied: "We have got them at weekends." (Our italics.)

# 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

O. E. FOX.—Many thanks for your valuable support and encouragement. *Peace News* is evidently well aware of Catholic machinations.

K. AITCH.—A remarkable collection, but not in publishable form.

## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### OUTDOOR

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

London (Marble Arch).—Meetings every Sunday from 5 p.m.: Messrs. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER and C. E. WOOD.

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.

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Pierhead).—Every Wednesday, 1 p.m.; every Sunday, 7.30 p.m.: Various speakers.

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, 6.30 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

### INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Midland Institute, Paradise Street).—Sunday, October 12th, 7 p.m.: Dr. H. G. WOOD, "The Marxist Conception of History."

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics Institute).—Sunday, October 12th, 7 p.m.: J. DAVIES, "Prehistoric Art." (Illustrated.)

Central London Branch N.S.S. (The Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, October 12th, 7.15 p.m.: NELL VYSE (O.A.P. Federation), "The Pensioner Today."

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, October 14th: Three Points of View—"Should Sunday as a Sabbath be Abolished?" Yes: COLIN MCCALL (Secretary N.S.S.); No: H. J. W. LEGERTON (Secretary, Lord's Day Observance Society). Yes and No: J. HUTTON HYND (Secretary, S.P.E.S.).

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, October 12th, 6.30 p.m.: L. EBURY, "Atheism."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Hall, Upper Parliament Street).—Sunday, October 12th, 2.30 p.m.: R. P. WASELL, "The British Press Today."

Orpington Humanist Group (Sherry's Restaurant).—Sunday, October 12th, 7 p.m.: V. SEREBRIAKOFF, "Cybernetics and Sociology."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, October 12th, 11 a.m.: W. E. SWINTON, PH.D., "The Advance of Science, 1958."

Tuesday next, October 14th, with Mr. J. B. Coates on "Humanism—A Challenge," and ending on Wednesday, November 19th, with Dr. W. E. Swinton on "Man and Evolution." Among the other speakers is Mr. F. A. Ridley, who will speak to the Group on "The Irrelevance of Christianity" on Monday, October 20th. All lectures will be held in the Taylor Institute at 8.15 p.m., and the Group's energetic Secretary, Mr. A. F. M. Brierley, asks us to say that visitors will be welcomed. Those who would like further details should write to Mr. Brierley, at Lincoln College, Oxford.

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ONE of our readers, Mr. G. Watling, of 3 Larchwood Close, Collier Row, Romford, Essex, is collecting Free-thought debates—and he already has over 61. If any reader has debates by Holyoake, Joseph Barker, Joseph McCabe and others, Mr. Watling would be pleased to get in touch with him.

★

*The Star* (London) book critic (22/8/58) reviewed Alister Kershaw's recent work, *A History of the Guillotine* (Caldar, 21s.), which has not yet come our way, but which, it is claimed, ranks with Charles Duff's famous *Handbook on Hanging*—high praise indeed! However, the passage in the review that caught our eye concerned one Louis Deibler, "most sensitive craftsman of all," who "would spend maybe a minute arranging the neck just so." Deibler, we are informed, made pilgrimages to Lourdes, but always wore gloves at mass. He resigned in favour of his son in 1898, having successfully chopped off more than a thousand heads. His son, incidentally, once performed before Lord Rosebery.

★

WRITING in the June issue of *Free Mind*, the bulletin of the American Humanist Association, Mr. Edwin H. Wilson tells us that John Bryan State Park, comprising over 500 acres and situated just outside Yellow Springs, Ohio, was given to the State of Ohio by a local freethinker, with the stipulation that in support of the principle of separation of Church and State there should be "no preaching of Buddhism, Christism or Mohammedanism" there, but that "no well-behaved person should ever be excluded because of his race or national origin." So, writes Mr. Wilson, Yellow Springs had the "first completely integrated and secular recreation park in the State, due to a freethinker who was decades ahead of his time." Wishing that there were a dozen such places, Mr. Wilson wonders if readers can name any other places "deliberately dedicated to Humanity."

★

UNDER the heading, "Girl returning from Lourdes regains sight," the *Universe* (5/9/58) alleges that "An eye specialist has declared that the recent cure of a young Spanish woman at Lourdes to be beyond the bounds of science." The woman is Maria Osorio, and she had "developed eye lesions which sent her blind." On her way back from Lourdes she fainted, "fellow pilgrims bathed her eyes with Lourdes water," and when she came round she could see. This is the sort of thing that often appears in the press (non-Catholic as well as Catholic) and in most cases it is impossible to pass any judgment. This time, however, the report contains a significant admission. The specialist is Dr. Ignacio Barraguer, head of an eye clinic in Barcelona, who—says the *Universe*—"examined her in 1954." Dr. Barraguer "certified her cure" on the strength of an examination *four years ago!* No wonder Fr. Filiberto Villalobos, a Capuchin on the pilgrimage, has "recommended that the incident be regarded with prudence."

## Notes and News

THE Oxford Humanist Group has arranged an interesting series of weekly lectures for the present term, starting on

# Israel through a Jewish Looking Glass

By J. SOLOMONS

I HAVE BEFORE ME an article of unique interest, based on an interview given by Dr. Yosef Burg, former Minister of Posts in the Israel Government and a leading figure in the principal political-religious group in Israel, the National Religious Bloc (or Mizrachi-Hapoel Hamizrachi, as it is termed in the Hebrew).

The existence of the State of Israel has been a source of considerable misunderstandings not only in the non-Jewish world, but also in the Jewish world. It has been generally assumed that Zionism and the State of Israel are synonymous with the theory and practice of Judaism, that the present-day Israeli nation is the legitimate offspring of a two-thousand-year-old Diaspora Judaism. The interview given by Dr. Yosef Burg in the *Jewish Observer and Middle East Review* (September 12th, 1958) casts a different light on this generally held view.

According to Dr. Burg (and his consistency of outlook can at least be recognised): "... religion is the one and only link uniting all the immigrants arriving here. It is the motive power that has made many of them come. Moreover, the Torah [the Jewish Bible and Talmud] is our title deed to Palestine."

Here Dr. Burg thrusts at the 80% of Israeli Jews whose adherence to the ancestral faith is open to question. What claim, what right have Jews to Palestine, if it does not derive from Scripture? If the Scriptural teachings are rejected or ignored, how can Zionism justify itself? Granted that Jews are a persecuted minority, why should Jews choose Palestine as a National Home? Why not Uganda, or Australia, or the Dominican Republic (all these territories have been seriously suggested as a Jewish National Home at one time or another)?

In the words of Dr. Burg: "What right have we [the Jews] to our country [Israel] if we abandon this title deed? The Jewish religion must therefore be maintained. And somebody must take upon himself the task of maintaining it." At least 80% of the Jewish population in Israel does not support the National Religious Bloc. Significantly, the present generation is almost completely indifferent, if not openly hostile to the ancient Judaic practices and customs. Zionism, which became a mass movement only through the horrors of the Nazi persecution in Europe, derived its initial ideology not from the Rabbis, but from the enlightened school of Young Europe which blazened the trail of national freedom in the last century. There was Mazzini and Italy, Kossuth and Hungary, and Moses Hess and Zionism. This romantic-nationalist movement had nothing in common with the heavy practices of the Jewish religion. Zionism arose in revolt against the stultifying influence of the Talmudic way of life on European Jewry. It drank of the heady wine of the French Revolution, the socialism of the Utopians, anarchists and Marxists—and overturned the Jewish gods and taboos with the same relentless purpose that animated their Gentile counterparts.

The earliest Russian Zionists were persecuted by the Rabbis. These Zionists challenged the authority of the Rabbi in his community. They proclaimed the State of Israel without, perhaps independent of and in opposition to the Messianic deliverance prophesied by the prophets and sages. They needed neither prayers nor fasts, neither diligent observances nor scholarly advice to realise their Zionist dreams. They collected money, they interviewed Gentile political leaders and statesmen, they organised groups of immigrants, they bought spades and trowels—all

in the great cause of the centuries-old dream of a rebirth of the Jewish nation.

Only at the beginning of this century did religious Jewry stir itself. A section of the more intelligent Rabbis began to feel the pull of this extraordinary, "heathenish" movement. They formed the Mizrachi Party, now the principal political pillar of religious Jewry in Israel. This Party tried as it were to re-direct the Zionist movement into orthodox-Jewish channels. They even went so far as to insist that Zionism could not exist apart from the life-giving blood of Judaism.

However, Dr. Burg is forced to recognise "that the Israeli labour movement [which effectively controls the political and economic life of the country] is a child of Continental socialism, which has always been strongly anti-clerical. Ever since the days of *Haskala* [the Jewish enlightenment at the beginning of the 19th century]," he goes on, "Zionist labour parties have had an anti-clerical streak."

It is this feature of Zionism which makes the uneasy working relationship between the Zionist-Religious Bloc and the non-religious Zionist Parties so unstable.

Only the foisting on to the Israeli State and Government of ancient and obsolete regulations and laws regarding kosher food in governmental and public institutions, such as hospitals and the Army (i), the establishment of two separate systems of education, National and National Religious—both maintained by the State (ii), and the orthodox Judaic marriage and divorce laws (iii)—holds the unhappy coalition of National and National Religious Blocs. Any attempt to eat into the "privileges" granted by the 80% Jews to the dictating 20% minority leads inevitably to friction, to bitterness.

And yet it is this problem which has precipitated the recent crisis in the Israel Government. The National-Religious Bloc had until very recently fully participated in the Israel Government as a separate, distinct entity with clearly defined attitudes on all matters affecting the observance of the Jewish religion. The Government, in its majority, non-clerical, decided to register as Jewish the children of certain mixed marriages where the mother is not Jewish and the child itself has not been converted to Judaism by the proper procedures of religious law. This issue of principle forced the National Religious Bloc to withdraw from the Government, thus opening up a new era in the relations between "National-Secular" Zionism and Religious-Zionism.

The cement holding the Jewish people together as a separate entity is only religion to a very secondary extent. In Israel this cement has been dissolved away by the hard, practical realities of modern industrial and agricultural life. It is only a matter of time before the Religious-Zionist hold over the body of Israel's politics is thrust aside by the militant National-Zionism of the modern Israeli youth. Not that the National-Zionism is a significant improvement over the old Judaism. Nationalism today, particularly in the Middle East, is just as reactionary and retrogressive as Judaism. Without wishing to press the analogy to the point of a direct comparison—Nationalist-Zionism is to Religious-Zionism what German Nazism was to Prussian-Lutheran Christianity.

The breakthrough into Israel's life of a broader outlook on international politics and religion must be accompanied by considerable stresses and strains in the fabric of the

Israeli State. For the problem in Israel is by no means confined to the obsolete practices of Judaism, it is also a problem of nationalism. The problem of a Zionist-Nationalism at loggerheads with a more powerful and more historically formidable nationalism—the nationalism of the Arab countries.

The emergence of an Israel "State," freed from the barnacles of the Talmudic laws and regulations, and shorn of its Jewish nationalism, at peace with the Arab world in a Federation of Middle Eastern countries—this is wholly possible. But it is possible only after the Dr. Burgs are transformed from spokesmen of significant political forces into museum pieces for the curious, and nationalism is replaced by the humanism, breadth of outlook and international spirit so ably embodied in the persons of such great Jewish figures as Benedict Spinoza, Rosa Luxemburg, and Albert Einstein.

## Why Not "Atheist"?

By H. CUTNER

AS ALMOST A LIFELONG ATHEIST, I was particularly interested in Dr. Axel Stern's most stimulating article, "Neither Atheist nor Agnostic," particularly where he said "that both positions yield more ground to the religious person than he deserves and, in a way, all that he wants." This may well be Dr. Stern's unfortunate experience, but it has never been mine. I think it would be fair to say that whenever I have met a "religious person," he usually got so angry at my insisting that I was an Atheist, that he wouldn't believe me. I *might* be an Agnostic, but I simply could not be an Atheist. No man had the impudence to deny God—but if he had, then that proved he did not understand the philosophical implications of such a denial. My Agnostic friends always pointed out that if I denied God, that meant I was *literally certain* that there was no God, and how could I be literally certain? They were in a much more logical position—they simply didn't know one way or other. This is, I think, the position taken by our modern reverent Rationalists and Humanists. I have always opposed this position.

As Dr. Stern is writing another article on God, I cannot say whether in it he has shown how we Atheists yield the religious person more ground than he deserves; but he has certainly not shown it in this article. His analysis of other points is excellent as far as it goes, but it was "yielding ground" to religion which I wanted carefully to examine.

The great name in the Freethought movement is that of Charles Bradlaugh, and in his *Plea for Atheism* he makes his position clear. He says:

The Atheist does not say "There is no God," but he says, "I know not what you mean by God; I am without idea of God; the word 'God' is to me a sound conveying no clear or distinct affirmation. I do not deny God, because I cannot deny that of which I have no conception, and the conception of which, by its affirmer, is so imperfect that he is unable to define it to me."

Thus, when Dr. Stern defines an Atheist "as a person who denies the existence of God," he simply proves that he has not studied the work of perhaps the most considerable of all our Atheists—the man who never for a moment took up any other position than that of a complete Atheist. What Bradlaugh said in the passage above I wholeheartedly accept.

Dr. Stern himself does not, of course, define what he means by the "God" the Atheist is supposed to deny—except that he does give him a capital "G." I do my best always to give any God a capital G—no matter how defined. I also give the Devil a capital "D" whenever I can.

But Bradlaugh goes a little further—and here again I am in complete agreement with him. He says:

If, however, "God" is defined to mean an existence other than the existence of which I am a mode, then I deny "God," and affirm that it is impossible such "God" can be. That is, I affirm one existence and deny that there can be more than one. Bradlaugh's "one existence" was the Universe—the totality of all phenomena; and if he has not done so, I strongly recommend Dr. Stern to read *A Plea for Atheism*.

As an example of an Agnostic, we can take Ingersoll, whose lectures and essays read as well today as when he wrote them. Ingersoll generally called himself an Agnostic, but he insisted that there was no difference whatever between the two positions—Agnosticism and Atheism. In any case, what does he say in his last lecture—"What is Religion?" He says, "If we have a theory, we must have facts for the foundation." He insisted that "matter—substance—cannot be destroyed; that force cannot be destroyed, cannot be annihilated; that matter and force cannot exist apart—no matter without force, no force without matter; that which cannot be destroyed could not have been created; that the indestructible is the uncreated. . . . It follows that nothing can be created; that there never has been or can be a creator." Ingersoll enlarges on his argument and concludes:

If matter and force are from and to eternity, it follows as a necessity that no God exists; that no God created or governs the Universe; that no God exists who answers prayer; no God who succours the oppressed; . . . and so on.

Here we have Ingersoll denying "God," though as I have said, he usually called himself an "Agnostic."

Now what I am interested in is, how do these extracts help the "enemy"—how do they "yield more ground to the religious person than he deserves"? It must be remembered that both Bradlaugh and Ingersoll were writing towards the end of last century, and, of course, nineteenth century science is more or less dated these days so great have been the advances in our knowledge of many things in Science. But I have never seen any clear reply to our two premier Atheists.

Of course, it may interest Dr. Stern that I and other Atheists *do* deny God, for I prefer the short cut here. The definitions of God that I have had to face have mostly been ignorant or confused nonsense. And merely writing God with a capital "G" does not help.

As to whether "the question of God's existence" arising here or not, or in his article "on metaphysical" grounds, seems to be a sheer waste of time with people who are quite certain that God does exist and that he exists "up there." And those people who do believe in God are right in looking upon those who do not as "the enemy." They certainly do *not* look upon us as "yielding more ground than they deserve" or, indeed, yielding any ground whatever.

## Making Religion Pay

By JACK GORDON

THE WORLD, it seems, is to witness yet one more Christian "challenge." Under the headlines, "Simon Phipps Leads New Church Shock Troops," the *Sunday Dispatch* reveals the exciting details. In a few days' time, the Rev. Simon Phipps, "close friend and escort of Princess Margaret," will move into action. The city selected for this windfall from heaven is Coventry. There, the Rev. Phipps will lead no less than 14 local clergymen in a combined operation "designed to bring God to the workers in Coventry's factories." What will happen when God and the workers meet is anybody's guess. But the *Dispatch* thinks that Simon Phipps's work in the factories will have a national impact. Well, we all remember the enormous impact made

by the last "challenge" from the Billy Graham circus. Or do we?

Whatever happens, the Rev. Phipps will come out all right. As religious adviser to the ATV, he has come in for some criticism from Church circles, where they look askance at his rock-and-roll in Church tactics, probably because they have been brought up to believe that the Rock of Ages is the greatest "rock" that ever was. But there are whispers that the Rev. Phipps is being "groomed" for a bishopric, a not unlikely prospect in view of his impeccable social connections.

It all tempts one to reconsider the possibilities of religion as a career. If your boy or girl is gifted with a good brain, and the brainier the better, your first choice would probably be science. But the competition is keen. With another set of qualities dominant, you might select the law, or medicine, or commerce. But if your boy is not patient and persevering enough for science, nor shrewd enough for the law, not smart enough for medicine or journalism, he might do worse than consider the Church. After all, the job requirements can scarcely be called exacting! In fact, if a man is a failure in the pulpit, it is hard to say in what walk of life he would be a success. The would-be clergyman need have no qualms about being considered not too fond of thinking. In science or medicine you might lose your job for not thinking enough; but in the Church you can be dismissed for thinking too much. In short, the Church is a "natural" for the boy who has no particular ability, yet, on the positive side, is possessed of a gift of the gab and a passion for managing everyone else's affairs. The pay is not too great, but the clergy hope for more; there are many amenities, and besides, they could hardly hope to earn as much in the open labour market.

Consider, too, the rewards awaiting the imaginative. What will pass as mediocrity in the secular world will be hailed as genius in the Church. A man may gain a reputation as a daring thinker merely by casting doubt on the literal accuracy of such nonsensical narratives as the Virgin Birth. By mouthing a few amiable generalities about the working classes, he may become a social reformer. And if he can impress his listeners with a show of learning accompanied by ornate verbosity, he can consider himself "made." He may even be thought a daring innovator on the strength of inviting the girls and boys into the church hall for a little "rock-and-roll."

Here, then, is a profession for which almost anyone may qualify. Short of downright imbecility, lack of intelligence is no obstacle. And if one can persuade a friend in the Press to oblige with a little publicity from time to time, accompanied perhaps by a photograph showing oneself rubbing shoulders with an "exalted personage," who can say to what heights one might some day rise?

## CORRESPONDENCE

### CARDINAL NEWMAN

THE FREETHINKER arrives in New Zealand some four to six weeks after publication, so I have only just read Mr. Ridley's article on Cardinal Newman (July 4th). However, the New Zealand papers had already told us of the move being made in Catholic circles to canonise Newman. I note Mr. Ridley is at some pains to stress Cardinal Newman's literary status. This, so far as I am aware, has never been questioned. Anyone setting off on such a trail would soon meet with convincing defeat. But what, may I ask, did Cardinal Newman, either as Anglican or Roman, do to advance mankind—to raise him socially, or to release either the educated or the illiterate from the thralldom of superstition or from exploitation at the hands of the Church? The hymn referred to by Mr. Ridley, "Lead, Kindly Light," is certainly an excellent

piece of hymn-writing and fine tune and harmonisation has kept Newman's name before the public even more than his conversion to Rome. The hymn was written in his Anglican days. It has probably put many thousands into a state of mystical emotion, but Longfellow's "Let us then be up and doing" or the dying Beethoven's scrawl on a manuscript, "Man, help thyself," are more inspiring and more likely to move a man to try to do something for his fellow beings.

I cannot see that a man who wrote the following held any claim to be considered a humanist. (It does show, however, to what depths religion can drag down, intellectually, a man of education, refinement and natural gifts.) This is what Newman wrote in the days of his maturity and religious exaltations: "The Catholic Church holds it better for the sun and moon to drop from heaven, for the earth to fail, and for all the many millions on it to die of starvation in extreme agony as far as temporal affliction goes, rather than one soul, I will not say should be lost, but should commit one single venial sin, should tell one wilful untruth or should steal one farthing without excuse." Pathetic nonsense. Cardinal Newman may be made a Saint of the Catholic Church but, in these Sputnik days, even Roman Catholics will surely jib at the Saint's horrible fantasy. ARTHUR O'HALLORAN.

### THE CHURCH IN THE DEEP SOUTH

THROUGHOUT the Bible Belt only a handful of pulpits ring with talk about the brotherhood of man—if brotherhood implies sitting together in a schoolroom.

—Time (October 6th, 1958).

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