

The Freethinker

Volume LXXVIII—No. 49

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Fivepence

SOME PERCIPIENT WIT—it may have been Bernard Shaw—once remarked that religions are founded by laymen but are administered by priests. It has always appeared to me that this aphorism sheds a great deal of light on the evolution of religions and, in fact, is an indispensable contribution to the science of comparative religion. For we find that each new religion represents, in its origins, some kind of a breakaway from an older creed or Church. The founders of a new religion first appear before the world and figure consciously in the eyes of their converts, as innovators, modernists, even as heretics and iconoclasts. When, thanks to the operation of the law of the survival of the fittest—which applies in religion as

in other more mundane affairs—the new religion becomes a going concern, then it loses its iconoclastic character and becomes a new stereotyped system of orthodox and conservative outlook. It is at this stage that the priest, the official custodian of “the Faith once for all delivered to the saints” (as the New Testament phrases it) steps in and hereafter takes charge. (The original reformers who persist are thereupon dubbed as heretics; it always becomes heresy to persist too long with the original belief.) This substitution of an organised priesthood for the original lay disciples of the founder occurs sooner or later in most religious cults. In religious evolution it is the point at which a particular faith shed its original radical and heretical character and becomes the new orthodoxy, in place of the old one which it initially challenged. The radical layman gives way to the conservative priest; the dynamic critique of the old religion gives way to the static acceptance of the new, succeeding orthodoxy.

Pioneering Doesn't Pay

The actual founders of new religions are rarely priests, and are never entirely conservative in their outlook. If they were, they would adhere to the old cult rather than pursue the hazardous task of trying to found new ones. The more so, we may add, since the modern adage “Pioneering doesn't pay” applies in general to the actual founders of most religions, including those which eventually become the most successful. The founders, who are later revered as prophets, or even as incarnations of the godhead, usually experience “the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” in their own terrestrial life-span. St. Peter, “the first Pope,” was perhaps crucified, and if not, certainly lived and died in complete obscurity. It is his clerical successors, the later Popes, who “cashed in” on his name and arrived at positions of opulence and splendour. Jesus died on the Cross but the Christians live on it, or, more accurately, some Christians do; for Christianity also has its proletariat. But it has been historically exceptional for the lay founder of a new religion to make much profit out of it in his lifetime. From Jesus, who was traditionally crucified, and Manichaeus, who was slayed alive, down to the modern Bab, who was hanged, and Joseph Smith, who was lynched, most of the actual founders of religions have

ended up in some unpleasant fashion or other. (I mention the Bab and Joseph Smith, not only because there is no doubt about the manner of their deaths, but because their respective foundations, Baháism and Mormonism, are perhaps the two most successful new religions founded in modern times.) The founders of new cults are heretics by definition, otherwise they would have continued to walk obediently in the old, well-worn tracks. They are often

men of bold and radical temper, fiercely opposed to the superstitions (as they regard them) of their ancestral creeds. Muhammed smashed the idols of Mecca; Jesus is represented as denouncing the Scribes and Pharisees as hypocrites; Luther denounced the Pope

in unmeasured terms as “anti-Christ,” and threw his ink bottle at the Devil. Despite these unorthodox proceedings on the part of their founders, the actual Churches founded by these heretics, Christianity, Islam and the particular Christian cult named after Luther, all soon became conventional patterns of static, sterile and stagnant orthodoxy, to which heresy was something abhorrent and in which finality had been successfully attained. Every religion sooner or later undergoes such a transition. When once established, it abandons its original role as the critic of previous orthodoxy and itself becomes the orthodox barrier against any future innovation. This is the precise point in religious evolution when the priest takes over from the lay founders, whom he deifies and supersedes. As Dostoevsky makes his Grand Inquisitor say to Christ, his presence a second time on earth was quite superfluous; the Church which he had founded on his first visit could now carry on perfectly well without him. In fact, his return merely embarrassed the Church! That Inquisitor was an acute student of how religions develop, which is not at all how they say they do.

The Role of the Priest

A professional priesthood, a professional caste of clerical administrators, represents a nearly universal stage in religious development. It is significant that those cults which have managed to exist without such a caste have remained small and circumscribed in their activities—e.g., the Unitarians or Quakers. Even in cults founded originally by laymen in conscious revolt against priestly domination, such as Judaism or Calvinism, one gets what is in effect a new priestly caste emerging; and very often “new presbyter is but old priest writ large,” as Milton pointedly noted. Even religions which do not admit any celestially-ordained hierarchy, like Judaism or Islam, produce their Rabbis and interpreters of the Divine Law. Whenever and wherever found, and under no matter what label, the characteristics of all priesthoods are substantially the same. They may be summarised as a conservative respect for the past and for authority derived from it; a strongly dogmatic outlook on the theological content of their cult; and an exaggerated respect for what—in secular spheres—might be termed “trade union activities”—religious routine.

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

Priests and Laymen

By F. A. RIDLEY

Orthodoxy

An obvious aspect of religious evolution is that the mental processes of priests who administer a religion differ sharply from those of the laymen who initially founded it. The heretical, iconoclastic, and critical attitude to older beliefs which usually characterises the lay founder, whether he be Hebrew prophet or Christian apostle, is entirely absent in the clerics who are his "spiritual" successors. They display a respect for the past and suspicion of the

future more like that of the people whom their founder condemned. As T. H. Huxley once noted, the Christian clergy are much more like the Scribes and Pharisees traditionally condemned by Christ than they are like their nominal god. This mental attitude, which invariably ends by converting the most radical religious reformation into a conservative force inimical to further progress, is a sure sign that a religion has exhausted its initial impulse and has become a static and stereotyped orthodoxy.

World Enemy: Religion

By DR. J. V. DUHIG

I HAVE OFTEN BEEN TOLD that my criticism of Religion is destructive. I reply that it is meant to be. And then, I am asked what I propose to put in its place. I reply, quite simply, "Nothing." When a surgeon cuts out a cancer, he does not have to put anything back. Religion is a social cancer; its ends, God and Salvation, are fictitious its means, Ritual Magic, ridiculous; its effect, on the whole, bad—Crime, Delinquency, Hatred. The report from Sing Sing for 1925 shows 1,415 criminals, of whom 60% (848) were Catholics, 20% (301) Protestants, and 0.8% (12) of no religion. In U.S.A. Catholics are 16% of the population and 27% of New York State. So the non-religious taxpayer has to carry not only religion but the cost of the Christian religion's criminals in gaol.

The current idea that Monotheism was a refined improvement on the Polytheism of Greece and Rome is not borne out by facts. The history of the Christian religion is so appalling, so dark, so sinister, so bloodstained, so steeped in violence, torture and all the vices that it is difficult to understand why learned kindly men were not so revolted by the acts of the clergy of all grades from papal poisoners to lecherous abbots and of rulers who did their bidding, as to feel compelled, as I was, to reject the repulsive system completely. It seems incredible that men thought wise should be convinced that the ends of life could be served only by the most atrocious cruelties and extermination of innocent men. That is the clear, unmistakable record of the Christian religion: it could not maintain itself by its doctrines alone. Unbridled force and terror were needed.

But today the terror has given place to Social Service (Catholicè, "Social Justice"), advertising stunts to sell "the word"—old people's homes, youth clubs, etc. Fifty years ago these devices were unheard of; doctrine and ritual stood by themselves; economic compulsion and social blackmail filled the pews. No attendance at church, no job; no Sunday school, no party invitations. But now, as the Archbishop of York has said in *In an Age of Revolution*, "For the first time since Christianity was brought to Great Britain the great majority of the people look upon religion as something irrelevant in their lives." He should know. E. M. Forster, our eminent man of letters, gives the *coup-de-grâce* to Christian pretensions. He says, "I cannot believe that Christianity will ever cope with the present world-wide mess, and I think that such influence as it retains in modern society is due to the money behind it, rather than to its spiritual appeal." (*What I Believe*, 1939.) But though religion is doomed, it lives on and there is hardly a country in the world which does not suffer.

The political division of Ireland is basically religious; the I.R.A. plant bombs along the Ulster border to kill policemen and their families, crime they dump in the confessional, while Ulster Protestants have inflicted unspeakable torture on Catholics; but for religion these people

would not behave like this. The Israeli-Arab quarrel is a serious menace in the Middle East.

In Yugoslavia during the last war Cardinal Stepinach employed the notorious assassin, Ante Pavelich, who planned the murder of King Alexander in Marseilles in 1935, to organise murder gangs including Catholic priests to round up orthodox Serbs in their churches and shoot down in cold blood those who resisted forcible conversion to Catholicism. Stepinach should be still serving a sentence of penal servitude for life.

India is divided by doctrinal differences between Hindus and Mahommedans.

Spain is a ruthless persecuting Catholic theocracy, as is Portugal; in both these countries freedom of opinion and speech are extinct and social progress stone-dead. In South Africa "Apartheid" is based on the Dutch Reformed Church of Malan, an ex-parson, and Strijdom, another religious fanatic, just dead. This anti-black "crusade" goes on in the name of a hopelessly reactionary Church.

Dulles is a practising Christian.

It is the same wherever Christianity survives in strength. The only important countries entirely free to pursue high and noble ends, if they so wish, Russia and China, are liberated from the ugly spectre of religious influence. They can go on to any kind of social reform without the disastrous inertial tug of established religion which has never meant much, and still less now; in these countries it does not exist, so at least reformers get away to a good start. And this is the gigantic thorn in the side of the Vatican. Communism is the natural outgrowth from medieval Catholicism, the first Fascist system, and it is now the only serious political challenge to its holy ancestor from whom it has learned all the tricks of torture, duress, blackmail, the whole box of tricks. Naturally Grandpa is very jealous of little grandchild Ivan and godchild PingHo. I hate Communism's hatred of individual liberty and I loathe the mumbo-jumbo (like a Mass) of the dreary Marxist jargon, but, at least in Russia and China, science, learning and human welfare are important. In these countries, people are living people, not future souls in Purgatory, with living relatives blackmailed into paying heavy fees for their release. The Soviet hierarchy do some real work; the Roman hierarchy live in luxurious parasitism on a system which is an impudent fraud.

IN MEMORIAM!

THAT brilliantly irreverent French Freethought paper, *La Calotte*, edited by M. André Lorulot, Vice-President of the World Union of Freethinkers, commemorated the death of Pius XII with a delightful cartoon. It depicted the deceased pontiff, astride a space rocket, soaring from the earth. And the caption read: "En route for the Summit Conference."

Five 'Isms

(Concluded from page 383)

By G. H. TAYLOR

[*Five 'Isms of Today*, by Canon Norburn. Modern Churchmen's Union, 1958. An examination of modern philosophy as it affects religious belief.]

THE NEXT "SYSTEM" considered by Canon Norburn is Existentialism, and he is too honest an inquirer to attempt to wrest from it any favours for his own religion. Existentialism is in fact quite neutral as regards the issues which divide freethought from religion. Atheist and believer, Catholic and Communist, Nazi and Resistance member alike, each has pronounced himself an Existentialist. Jaspers the Christian, Heidegger of the Nazi Party, Jean Paul Sartre the atheist aiming at becoming God—such is the peculiar assortment of Existentialists.

Far from being a system, Existentialism is not even an "outlook." It is, rather, an "inlook." Its character is that of extreme introversion, and this means—perhaps Canon Norburn would agree—that it has no survival value in the realm of ideas, on the principle that those seeking to partake in affairs, and so change the world, are likely to survive those seeking to escape from it.

Perhaps there is no such thing as Existentialism after all, but only Existentialists. In the words of Nicholas Berdyaev, when asked to define the term, "*L'Existentialisme—c'est moi!*"

For the Existentialist, "truth" is not something perceived objectively, but something chosen subjectively. Freedom is something imposed on us; we are doomed to be free, and each must choose his path. The goal chosen by Sartre is to replace the God of theology, the dead God, by himself becoming God. In the case of Heidegger, Death is the goal—not any sort of death, but a carefully prepared *personal* demise, one that will eventually be fitting and appropriate to the life that preceded it. It must be a death of his own seeking, a fulfilment, a crowning achievement, not a brute fact breaking in on him from outside. Nor is it a suicide that is implied, but a life purposefully directed towards its end. Only this, he maintains, can give reality and urgency to one's existence.

However, I have previously dealt with Existentialism at greater length (THE FREETHINKER, 28/12/52) and nothing since then has even remotely suggested that it has any important future. Canon Norburn finds in Existentialism little more than a reminder that "man is a metaphysical animal and nothing will stop him from adopting some sort of world-view." I would go further: I would say he philosophises with the ambition of converting others to his views of the world. And this is where Canon Norburn would seem over-charitable to the Existentialist attitude. The Existentialist does not proselytise. His pattern of existence is for self-consumption. He has no view of "the" world but of "my" world and he is indifferent as to its export. He offers no metaphysic for public acceptance.

Running throughout our author's pages is the claim that any philosophy is inadequate to its task if it fails to provide the metaphysical substratum which shall tell us what existence is about, which shall acquaint us with its foundational character so that man may orient himself towards it. Thus, in dealing with the "Historicism" of the late R. G. Collingwood, Professor of Metaphysical Philosophy at Oxford, he rejects what is presented as "a metaphysic without ontology." In this section I find no quarrel with our author. To explore the verbs of existence without ever bothering about the noun seems absurd. Our dispute would probably be manifest when we came to the noun

and, perhaps, even more particularly, to its adjectives (or, as he would contend, His attributes).

Canon Norburn is perhaps most lenient when dealing with the Aquinate system (Thomism). He allows that when St. Thomas ascribes intelligence to God he is taking the notion of intelligence out of its human context, with all the physical concomitants that it implies and subsumes, and that this process of linguistic manoeuvre finally empties the analogate of all content. He makes some penetrating criticisms of the Aquinate "proofs" and concludes that they depend ultimately on an act of faith in the power of reason.

If this means that the proofs are established within their own terms of reference I would join issue. St. Thomas may have been a brilliant thinker but he was not a *scientific* thinker, because his final conclusions were in his mind before he embarked on the path of reasoning. It is said that he set out to aristotelise Christianity and ended by christianising Aristotle. In any case, the Angelic Doctor is not a stable anchor for logical reasoning these days. Immense findings in science, and developments in Philosophy and Logic separate his time from ours. For instance, the Oxford Maths course in his day only went up to the 5th Proposition of Euclid Book I. No doubt he would have mastered later developments, including Newton and Einstein, had he had access to them, but I doubt whether he would have remained a Thomist!

His arguments were fully disposed of by Kant and his successors, so that they were abandoned by Christian philosophers of the eminence of James Ward, C. C. J. Webb, A. Seth-Pringle-Pattison and W. R. Sorley. I take it Canon Norburn could be added to this company, yet he appears to defend Thomism on the score of good reasoning.

Having cast about—rather strenuously at times—for valid arguments in the cause of claiming that sentences containing the word God are, at least in some degree, *descriptive* discourse, Canon Norburn comes finally to appeal to direct experience through the *numinous*. The latter is a term which was, I think, first used by Prof. Otto in *The Idea of the Holy*, wherein he speaks of "a shuddering sense of the uncanny." The *numen* is supposed to be independent of rational argument (a convenient feature!). Our author says "it must be recognised that human nature is possessed of a religious instinct or *numinous* sense," in which the "expert" is the Mystic, the Seer.

Assertions about this special sense have never had the support of responsible psychologists. Where, for instance, is its terminal? Where are the scientific controls for detecting its presence? Prof. J. H. Leuba (*God or Man?*) has a good deal to say about the so-called religious sense. He reports that the "sense of a presence" can be induced under purely secular conditions, equal in intensity to the mystic's. And he is using "descriptive discourse."

I think Canon Norburn fails in his attempts to establish religious assertions as descriptive, but it is not the failure of mediocrity. It is the failure of an expert climber unable to scale the impossible mountain.

—NEXT WEEK—

RELIGION IN THE UNITED STATES

By DAVE SHIPPER

This Believing World

Leicester Secular Society's energetic secretary, Mr. C. H. Hammersley, managed to get a letter in *News Chronicle* naming some of the world's most popular writers who are barred in the Roman Catholic "Index"—and, of course, a Catholic rushed in immediately with an indignant "reply." "Stuff and nonsense," cried Mr. D. Stewart, who claimed that all the authors mentioned (except Sartre) were in the Benedictine Catholic school where he was educated. Clever Mr. Stewart! Mr. Hammersley said nothing about the Benedictine school but about the censorship of works by famous authors not allowed to be read by good Roman Catholics—works detailed in the "Index."

★

Not all the books written by these authors are, however, in the "Index." For example, Alexandre Dumas has his name attached to about 400, but only some of these are censored. So it is quite easy for a Roman Catholic to say that he has read Dumas and other writers, meaning only that he has read those not forbidden by the Heaven-sent censors at the Vatican. The great works cited in the "Index" are proof that under world-wide Roman Catholicism every scrap of *culture* would be rigorously censored under a damnable dictatorship. Fortunately for the world, this can never happen.

★

"Sunday Pictorial" came out with some amazing photographs the other week showing how a lady, Miss Rosher, writes when she is holding a pen, and how the pen still writes without her holding it when a letter comes from her dead fiancé. This, we are told, proves indisputably that "there is no death," for the two handwritings are quite different. The lady herself declares that she is not a Spiritualist but a practising Christian. And *Sunday Pictorial's* reporter and camera-man declare: "We saw it happen and we can't deny what we have seen."

★

We have seen far more wonderful things performed by eminent conjurors and illusionists—and, of course, we can't deny that they happened, but they could not possibly have happened in actual fact. If a pen can be made to write by a spirit from the "other" world, then the same spirit could easily tap out a message on a typewriter. All that is necessary to do is to put a clean sheet of paper in it and see and hear the message tapped out. What about *Sunday Pictorial* reporter Chapman and camera-man Campbell meeting Miss Rosher again with a portable typewriter and see what happens?

★

Temperance reformers who never cease to attack the menace of alcohol (as they call it) are all disgusted at so many of our bishops either "allowing themselves to be photographed in the act of drinking," or "drawing the first pint of beer in a rebuilt public house." Some of us may think that this shows more genuine "humanism" in the bishops than all the teaching they derive from the New Testament. But, be this as it may, what about "our Lord"? He not only miraculously changed a huge quantity of water into wine at the marriage feast of Cana—and it was very good wine, as one of the drunken guests testified—but he was often consorting with "publicans," though we admit that temperance reformers hotly dispute that the word "publican" here means a publican.

★

All this reminds us of the confusion Christian vegetarians get into when they read the story of Cain and Abel. Poor Cain had his offering to the Lord of fruits and vegetables angrily refused, while the the delicious smell of steaks and

lamb chops offered by Abel was nectar to the Almighty; though, alas, it resulted in the murder of poor Abel. From the Bible story we do get the impression that vegetarianism, if not actually responsible for murderous instincts, does nothing to inhibit them.

★

It is always interesting to find out what people say when the Vicar or some other parson first calls on them with the Precious Message of Christianity. From the *Methodist Recorder* we learn that they "want to know what the Church has to offer," and so "it has been possible really to offer the friendship and salvation of Christ to people in their own homes." Also, people can be started "praying and even reading the Bible." All this is most intriguing, for even after nearly 2,000 years of hammering away teaching the Faith, and certainly for something like 1,500 years it was compulsory, people are at last being persuaded "even to read the Bible"! The success of Christ Jesus is terrific!

The "Suffering Ennobles" Theme

IT WAS AN ELONGATED CASE in the natural history section of the museum that caught my attention. It contained a remarkably variegated selection of birds' beaks illustrating the different developments for different purposes. Amongst them were a large flat bill for scraping and scooping organisms from the river bed, a tiny pointed beak for picking up so minute an object as a seed, and a beak with a sharp and curling edge for the "tearing of flesh." Reflecting that this, in many cases, meant the tearing of *living* flesh led me on in thought to this particular facet of the great mystery.

The argument is frequently given by Theists that suffering is essential for spiritual growth—the "suffering ennobles" theme. Whilst it is undeniable that qualities of courage, compassion and unselfishness can be evoked by suffering, it is also, alas, undeniable that suffering without limit can be and often is utterly destructive. (Those who draw no veils must admit of no limiting factor short of death.) This destructiveness, immeasurable in terms of human suffering, is perhaps especially true of children—the buds that can be blighted before they bloom.

It was the curling beak, however, that led on to the reflection that the "suffering ennobles" theme breaks down entirely in connection with the animal. No one (surely?) claims that the suffering of an animal produces qualities of courage, compassion and unselfishness in its fellow animals. No one claims that beasts benefit spiritually? And if the purpose of the pain of animals is to stir again these qualities in the human breast, what dilemmas are entailed in intervention. Save the delicate deer, and the lion cubs perish from hunger!

"Though every prospect pleases, And only man is vile; . . ." If the truth of this were self-evident it might be easier to accept Christian teaching. Here is nature, one could say—here is the pattern, the plan and the example to man.

DAPHNE GRAY.

BAD REPUTE

One evening last summer, as the train drew in to a small town in the North of Ireland, called Ballanamena, an Orangeman boarded it, yelling furiously: "Down with the Pope! To hell with the Pope!" A Catholic gentleman rose indignantly from his seat and reprehended him: "You don't know what you are talking about! Anyway, who is the Pope?" The Orangeman paused and, thoughtfully scratching his head, replied: "I don't know who he is, but I do know that he has a very bad name here in Ballanamena!"

N.F.

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.

THE FREETHINKER can be obtained through any newsagent or will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, £1 10s.; half-year, 15s.; three months, 7s. 6d. (In U.S.A.: 13 weeks, \$1.15; 26 weeks, \$2.25; 52 weeks, \$4.50.)

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

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

Lecture Notices, Etc.

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 Cinema, Paradise Street).—Sunday, December 7th, 7 p.m.: J. H. PECK, "Wherein is Salvation? Communism or Capitalism?"

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics Institute).—Sunday, December 7th, 7 p.m.: HAROLD DAY, "Is it Reasonable to Believe in the Supernatural?"

Central London Branch N.S.S. (The Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, December 7th, 7.15 p.m.: MINNIE RITTER, "Second Thoughts on Juvenile Delinquency."

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, December 9th, 7.15 p.m.: IAN LESLIE, M.A., "The New Freedom for Parent and Child."

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, December 7th, 6.30 p.m.: OWEN MANNS, "Films—Traps and Newfoundland Sealing."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Hall, Upper Parliament Street).—Sunday, December 7th, 2.30 p.m.: E. GRANT, "France in Crisis."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, December 7th, 11 a.m.: W. E. SWINTON, PH.D., "The Limitations of Man."

Notes and News

THE FOLLOWING LETTER was received by the Secretary of the National Secular Society from Baroness Wootton of Abinger. It will, we think, interest our readers.

24th October 1958.

Dear Mr. McCall,

Thank you for your encouraging letter commenting upon my affirmation in the Lords this week. It would certainly never occur to me to swear by a God in whose existence I do not believe, nor would such an oath have much value! What does surprise me is that so few of my colleagues, many of whom I am sure are no better believers than I am myself, do not avail themselves of the right to affirm. After all, this right goes back to 1888—and the credit, I suppose, is due to Bradlaugh himself. We could do with a few more like him today.

Again many thanks.

Yours sincerely,

(Signed) BARBARA WOOTTON.

MR. FRED HOYLE gave the Christians another headache in the *News Chronicle* (19/11/58) when he expounded his theory of continuous creation. Naturally there was a rush to defend the faith against the atheist astronomer, and two of the efforts are worth noting. One writer (Mr. P. Eisler) found it "impossible to conceive a purposeful creation without a creator." So do we; so would Mr. Hoyle, no doubt. But he never mentioned *purposeful* creation; he talked of *continuous* creation—and the change of adjective is crucial. Another critic (Mr. N. H. Holt) picked upon interviewer Hugh McLeave's unfortunate interpretation of Hoyle's views as, "In the beginning was...hydrogen." Mr. McLeave had already rightly said that "In Hoyle's universe there is no beginning and no end; there is no limit to space and time; and there is no God," so the Biblical adaptation was confusing, to say the least. Even so, Mr. Holt could do no better than ask how the hydrogen got there, and then answer "In the beginning, God." He never asked the next question, "How did God get there?" Flouting Occam's razor, he merely posited an unknown to explain an unknown, and then presumably added Q.E.D.

★

WE have just had the ideal "Catholic home atmosphere" pictured for us. A small crucifix should be in each bedroom; holy water available for daily use; pictures of Jesus and the B.V.M. should have "places of honour" in the front room (what about "Monarch of the Glen"?). A Bible (correct version, with notes, of course), a Catholic newspaper and "one or two or more" (preferably "more") Catholic magazines should be "constantly available" in the living room. Then there should be a Catholic calendar with feast days and the family rosary should be said. It may sound like a dream home to some, but for us it's a nightmare.

★

ARRINGTON (Cambridgeshire) magistrates fined a Pole, Jerzy Gorzelak, £25 with costs, for dragging a dog along behind his motor-cycle at a speed of 25 m.p.h. A veterinary surgeon said that the dog's pads and nails on all four feet were completely worn away; that he thought the animal had "suffered acute and agonising pain"; and that never before had he seen "such extensive injuries on a dog's feet." Gorzelak told police and R.S.P.C.A. officers that he didn't intend to hurt the dog, and added: "I am a Roman Catholic, and have nothing whatever on my conscience." The Roman Catholic "conscience" has always been something of a puzzle to us.

★

NORTH Londoners will have noticed the correspondence on Roman Catholicism which has now continued in their local press for six months or so. During that period Mr. W. J. Mellroy, of the North London Branch of the National Secular Society, has been the leading prosecuting counsel, and he has handled his (admittedly strong) case extremely well. Too well for his Christian opponents, who have steadily retreated in the face of facts and reasoned argument. Too well for Mr. A. B. Phelan, who detected "a type of bigotry which one hoped had long since died out"; and for "non-Catholic" Mr. R. Ingle, who urged that it "be treated with the contempt it deserves." The most regular opponent, Mr. D. J. Murphy, was also the best, though he seemed unaware—or unwilling to admit—that death for heresy had been advocated by a Cardinal in the present century. At least he seemed a little apologetic about Spain. But, no matter what the subject, Spain or Eire, celibacy or birth control, dictatorship or the welfare state, Mr. Mellroy pressed home his points with telling effect.

John Milton

By COLIN MCCALL

JOHN MILTON was born on December 9th, three hundred and fifty years ago. I wonder how many people voluntarily read him today? At school we may have read *Lycidas*, *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, the sonnet *On his Blindness*, of course, and in prose, the *Areopagitica*. We know that he also wrote *Paradise Lost* and *Regained*, *Comus*, and *Samson Agonistes*. Some of us will have dutifully worked our way through these works of undoubted grandeur. But—to pose the question Dr. F. R. Leavis asked about *Samson*—how many cultivated adults could honestly swear that they had ever read them through with enjoyment?

Certainly I couldn't. Perhaps that is one reason why I welcomed Mr. V. Duncan Jones's little book, *John Milton: A note on his life, times and work, with an Anthology*, published by the International Institute of Peace, Vienna, 1958 (unfortunately no price is given) in its Cultural Anniversaries Series. For Mr. Jones is confessedly a Milton enthusiast. He disclaims any academic qualifications for undertaking his commemorative work. "My only justification is profound admiration for Milton as a man and love for his work. It is a meagre tribute to a great writer who has given me much joy and spiritual support." Perhaps I hoped that Mr. Jones might stir in me the love that he himself feels for Milton's work, alongside the admiration that is already there.

Certainly his 200-page book is nothing like so meagre a tribute as he modestly states. And who cares about academic qualifications—except publishers? Mr. Jones has studied Milton with great feeling and understanding. What better qualification could there be for writing about a poet? A poet! How inadequate the word is, unless it is invested with Shelley's absurdly exaggerated meaning. For Milton, more than any other important English writer, was immersed in the religious and political struggles of his time. Those extreme modern critics who would limit criticism to a study of the text alone, without reference to external influence, cannot hope to succeed with England's epic poet. Mr. Jones is right to insist that any interpretation of Milton must be—in a rather clumsy phrase—"firmly grounded on perception of the social upheavals through which he lived and of his part in them."

It is precisely because he was so involved in those social upheavals—and on the right side (Dr. David Daiches once remarked that all the other outstanding poets of the period "found themselves on the Royalist side")—that Milton has been so admired by Freethinkers. To Christians—and particularly those Christians who have never read him—Freethinkers' admiration for Milton may seem puzzling. But it is really not hard to seek. Not only did he devote much of his life—and give his sight—to the cause of Parliamentary government; he went further than most in his opposition to Royalism and Papism; he advocated divorce by consent, and not, as some have suggested, only for personal reasons; and, so far as his own religious beliefs are concerned, he tended more and more towards unitarianism and certainly against the authority of any Church. He sought the truth and boldly declared his findings. We may not share them all, but that is a secondary matter.

There was, as Mr. Jones says, "nothing equivocal about Milton. Where he saw his duty there he stood and proclaimed it." It is not surprising, then, that Freethinkers should admire him. He is fully deserving of their admiration. But admiration is one thing; love is another. The former I have in abundance for Milton; the second, I fear,

is still lacking. Mr. Jones has failed to instil that, as was probably inevitable. Nevertheless, his book is extremely useful.

He shows the mistake of regarding Satan or Christ as the hero of *Paradise Lost*. The hero of the poem, he says, "is Mankind, the theme why he fell, and how, knowing the reason for his fall, he can learn to win through to a perfected world and happiness eternal." And I agree with that. Satan, of course, is "a gloriously conceived and magnificent creation, who holds the attention and often gains our sympathy. But if not, where the dramatic conflict?" he asks. My own question is similar, but essentially different: Where is the dramatic conflict? For that is what I find lacking in *Paradise Lost*.

"Who takes on God must"—as Mr. Jones says—"be god-like, must be nearly his equal." But dramatically, Satan is more than God's equal: he is God's superior. Milton is—shall we say?—more at home in the infernal than in the celestial regions. The similarity between *Paradise Lost* and *The Merchant of Venice* is that the villain in each case gained the sympathy of his creator. The difference—as I see it—is that, whereas the humanising of Shylock adds to the dramatic quality of Shakespeare's play*, *Paradise Lost* suffers because Satan is a much more sympathetic character than God. Theologically, as Mr. F. L. Lucas has said, *Paradise Lost* is "odious," with "the Fall of the whole human race, in its unborn innocence, produced by a cabinet crisis in the celestial government—and that grotesque Heavenly Father forming an everlasting mutual-admiration society with an equally tedious Son." But, like Mr. Lucas, we must add: "And yet what verse!"

Mr. Jones's extracts are well chosen: long enough to savour the verse in all its glory; not long enough to be tedious, as I still feel the full twelve books are. For me to quote from the extracts would be futile. From *Samson Agonistes* I cannot refrain from giving the exquisite chorus lines describing Dalila's remorse:

Like a fair flower sear'd with dew, she weeps
And words address seem into tears dissolv'd,
Wetting the borders of her silk'n veil:

which alone suffice to dispel the view that Milton's poetry is cold and aloof.

And, with Protestant clergy and laity extolling the glories of Rome, it is well to remember the sonnet on the massacre of the Waldensians in Piedmont, "Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughter'd Saints," whose moans,

The Vale redoub'd to the Hills, and they
To Heav'n. Their martyr'd blood and ashes sow
Ore all th'Italian fields where still doth sway
The triple Tyrant: that from these may grow
A hundred-fold, who having learnt thy way
Early may fly the Babylonian woe.

Anti-papist; and anti-royalist.

Since the King or magistrate holds his authority of the people, both originally and naturally for their good in the first place, and not his own, then may the people as oft as they shall judge it for the best, either choose him or reject him, retain him or depose him though no tyrant, merely by the liberty and right of free-born men to be governed as seems to them best. . . .

No wonder his life was in danger when the Commonwealth collapsed. But perhaps because of his great reputation and no doubt through the intercession of friends, he was allowed to live in retirement after a short term of

*I do not mean to imply by this that *The Merchant of Venice* is a great play. I don't think it is, but its faults lie elsewhere.

imprisonment. His religious development was described by a contemporary and is quoted by Mr. Jones:

In his early days he was a favourer of those Protestants then opprobriously called by the name of *Puritans*: in his middle years he was best pleased with the *Independents* and *Anabaptists*, as allowing of more liberty than others, and coming nearest in his opinion to the primitive practice: but in the latter part of his life, he was not a professed member of any particular sect among Christians, he frequented none of their assemblies, nor made use of their peculiar rites in his family. Whether this proceeded from a dislike of their uncharitable and endless disputes, and that love of dominion, or inclination to persecution, which, he said, was a piece of popery inseparable from all churches; or whether he thought one might be a good man, without subscribing to any party: and that they had all in some things corrupted the institutions of Jesus Christ, I will by no means adventure to determine. . . .

Nor shall I, Milton was—in Mr. Jones's words—"a notorious republican, free-thinker, defender of the execution of Kings." "He had a vision of what man could be. He believed profoundly in man's responsibility for his own destiny. He dedicated himself to that service. . . . An Englishman to the core, his spirit is universal, his work a treasury for men of all nations." As an Englishman and a Freethinker, I am grateful to Mr. Jones and the International Institute for Peace for their small, but far from meagre tribute to John Milton.

Jesus and Irenaeus

By H. CUTNER

ONE OF THE GREATEST DIFFICULTIES we Freethinkers have to face is that each generation, so to speak, has to be re-educated. In this Christians have a tremendous advantage over us. No sooner is a child in almost any home born, its parents see that it is "christened" and baptised; and as soon as it can speak a little, it is taught to pray before going to bed. With such a background, it is quite easy to teach "simple Bible lessons" at school, that is, such stories as the "creation" of the world as narrated in Genesis, and from that, many of the most popular stories about Jesus, and the thing is done.

It is true that children in a Freethought home are sometimes taught that the Bible is packed with myths and legends; but even in some of these homes, parents are loth to take advantage of the freedom to remove their children from religious lessons on the grounds that children do not like being different. In a discussion on religious teaching at home and school broadcast the other week, we had an "Atheist" father feeling so sorry for his children that he even sent them to a Sunday school! After all, he may be wrong, he sadly declared to the religious parents, and he seemed to me to be almost in tears at his lack of faith.

Many new readers of this journal sometimes ask the most elementary questions on the Bible and Freethought, and this is not altogether surprising. It is simply not enough to say "I don't believe," and leave it at that. To know the "why" and the "how" of Freethought requires study and reading, and I must confess these are not so easily obtained as when I began my Freethought over fifty years ago.

In those days we could buy excellently printed pamphlets by Bradlaugh, Ingersoll, and Foote, and by a dozen lesser writers for 1d. or 2d. each. We could buy the R.P.A. reprints of some of the finest Freethought writers of the 19th century for 6d., or even less. For 2s. 6d., we could buy one of the greatest of Freethought classics, W. R. Cassel's *Supernatural Religion*, its 1,000 pages beautifully printed. And even the attempts to reply to these books by eminent Christians could also be obtained cheaply. It was always good to learn something of the other side. More-over, THE FREETHINKER itself had 16 or more pages when

Foote, Cohen, Lloyd, Wheeler, and many other contributors were giving us of their best.

All this comes to my mind when readers send us some questions which were elementary in those far-off days, and which, if I may be allowed to say, could be easily answered in most reference libraries with very little trouble.

As an example, one reader was shocked some time ago because I actually called the references to Christ in Josephus forgeries. He promptly asked me to prove it—and when I gave him Christian authorities like Farrar, he declared he had never heard of them! Dean Farrar was popular long before he wrote a "best seller" in his *Life of Christ* with his two famous school stories, *St. Winifred's*, and *Eric or Little by Little*. Yet my correspondent couldn't find Farrar's name in the British Museum Library, and almost intimated that I had invented the worthy Dean. The forgeries in Josephus were exposed once for all by the famous Dr. Nathaniel Lardner in his *Credibility of the Gospel History* (c. 1750), but most Christians still trot out Josephus; and even reverent Rationalists and Humanists often seem to me to resent any exposure of the famous but completely fraudulent passages.

In a paragraph in "This Believing World" the other week, I referred to Irenaeus and his astonishing claim that Jesus was certainly over fifty when he died—presumably in bed, and so he could not have been crucified under Pontius Pilate. A reader took me up on this and wanted the exact reference which, incidentally, he could have easily found in any good reference library himself. He could also have found that Irenaeus was a very famous Father of the Christian Church for he was the *first* writer to name our four Gospels about the year 180 A.D. It always astonishes Christians and most reverent Rationalists that the Gospels, as we have them, were unknown before then—indeed, not a few of the latter will strenuously support the absurd dates given by Christian writers for their first appearance. But there it is—the four Gospels we all know in the New Testament are never mentioned before about 180 A.D., though it is quite possible that they were being compiled or edited before then.

And what do we know about Irenaeus? Almost nothing at all, for he is never mentioned in secular history. He is supposed to have been the Bishop of Lyons in 177 A.D., and he wrote his most famous work, *Against Heresies*, in Greek. Unfortunately, this has been lost and what we have is a Latin translation.

Now the really remarkable thing about this work is that with the four Gospels before him, all of them relating in more or less similar detail that Jesus was tried by Pontius Pilate and crucified, Irenaeus contemptuously rejects them; and taking up a passage from John proves that Jesus was not crucified at all. John says that Jesus told the Jews:

Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it and was glad. Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham? (8, 56-7.)

If this passage has any meaning, it is that Jesus must have been nearly fifty years old at the time. Now no one has ever been *certain* as to the length of time the "ministry" of Jesus lasted, for, according to the first three Gospels, it only lasted a year. His preaching, according to them, was in Galilee and Jerusalem; but according to John, it extended also to Samaria, and lasted three years. Irenaeus would have none of all this for he proclaimed Jesus could not have gathered all that he taught unless "he had reached the age of a master." Irenaeus goes on:

For when he came to be baptised, he had not yet completed his thirtieth year. . . . Now, that the first stage of early life embraces thirty years, and that this extends onwards to the fortieth year, everyone will admit but from the fortieth and fiftieth year, a man begins to decline towards old age; which

our Lord possessed, while he still fulfilled the office of a teacher... He did not therefore preach for only one year. For the period included between the thirtieth and fiftieth year can never be regarded as one year. (Book ii, ch. 22.)

In Book iv, Irenaeus returns again to John, and comments:

Such language is fittingly applied to one who has already passed the age of forty, without having yet reached his fiftieth year, yet is not far from this latter period... It is altogether unreasonable to suppose that they were mistaken by twenty years, when they wished to prove him younger than the times of Abraham...

Not only therefore did Irenaeus call upon John to prove that he was right, he insisted that Jesus "came to save all through means of himself—all, I say, who through him are born again to God—infants and children, and boys and youths, and old men." Therefore,

he passed through every age; becoming an infant for infants... a child for children... a youth for youths... so likewise he was an old man for old men, that he might be a perfect master for all... then at last, he came on to death itself, that he might be the first born from the dead, that in all things he might have the pre-eminence, the Prince of Life, existing before all, and going before all. (Book iv, ch. 22.)

And how did Irenaeus know all this? He got it all from those who were conversant in Asia with John, the disciple of the Lord, that John conveyed to them that information... Some of them, moreover, saw not only John, but the other apostles also, and heard the same account from them, and bear testimony to the statement.

Thus, according to Irenaeus, Jesus was *not* crucified, but "just came to death itself" when he was an old man; and he got this, the literal truth, from John and the other Apostles. No wonder that, though you will find always a very good account of this famous Father in Church Dictionaries, you will not find (or only rarely), a reference to these passages. At least, I have not found any.

Yet, I am sure if some Freethought writer does refer to them, say, in ten years' time, some new reader will at once ask for his authority for the passages. That is why every new generation of Freethinkers has to be educated again, and why the Churches seem always to have the whip hand over us.

CORRESPONDENCE

PURPOSE

Re G. I. Bennett's letter (November 14th), I heartily agree, except perhaps when he says, "basically life exists merely to perpetuate itself. It has no other purpose." By saying "no other purpose," he is apt to imply that life *has* a purpose. Probably friend Bennett does not hold that view, and will agree with me that "Purpose" is confined to living creatures. C. E. RATCLIFFE.

"JUDGE YE NOT..."

Recently I had a discussion with a devout young Christian who was endeavouring to crystallise his views on pacifism. The young man's mind was almost made up: "I cannot but conclude that Jesus was a pacifist and expects me to be one, too," he told me. (I don't know why he should have entertained any doubts, really, because Jesus regularly attends the weekly prayer-discussions which he and his fellow worshippers are in the habit of holding—so he said.) I asked if the Pope and his 400 million followers could, as non-pacifists, be true Christians. "It is not for me to judge my fellow men," said he.

So it seems you must never expect a Christian to commit the unforgivable sin of condemning the actions of *other* Christians. This chivalrous behaviour is not often extended to atheists!

For any Church to accept, in its brotherhood-in-Christ, Christians who agree, even conditionally, with the use of modern weapons of warfare, yet pretend to be shocked at the idea of judging, by mere words, the actions of their fellow-men, is sheer dishonesty. Surely concentration bombing of civilian populations (a commonly accepted Christian practice) is "judging" people in the severest terms!

It won't do for them to quote "Forgive them, Lord, for they know not what they do": the number of times they have their hearts lifted up at ten to eight every morning should surely have put them right by now.

But they are deceiving themselves, indulging in one glorious riot of "mental masturbation" (as one well-known American psychologist called it); dumping their monstrous burden of sins on "Mr. God" in the hope that he can stand it, because *they* don't want to face it.

Have I been too beastly towards the Christians? I don't think so. At least I am not judging them with nuclear weapons!

E. CROSSWELL.

BRANCH OUTING

ON Sunday, November 15th, members of the Central London Branch N.S.S. paid a visit to Downe House in Kent, where Darwin lived for some forty years, *The Origin of Species* being written here. Next year is the centenary of the publication of that epoch-making work, but the original paper on which it was based was read before the Linnaean Society in 1858. We have therefore held two special meetings to mark the centenary.

The species and fossilised remains and his famous collection of beetles were examined at Downe House with great interest by our party. We plan further Darwin meetings in 1959 and look for support and co-operation by other N.S.S. branches.

GEORGE PLUME-HARPER.

OBITUARY

EDWARD ARTHUR REYNOLDS, who died after a short illness at the age of 76, was a Freethinker of long standing, having been associated with Dr. H. G. Farmer and the late H. S. Wishart in the founding of the Woolwich Branch of the National Secular Society, alas no longer in existence. Mr. Reynolds was a great reader, and lived (alone for the last six years since the death of his wife) surrounded by his splendid library. He was particularly proud of his Whitman collection, probably one of the most extensive in England, and he also prized a first edition of *The Origin of Species*. Having played in the Royal Artillery Band, he developed a great love of music and was a prominent member of the Royal Society of Musicians of Great Britain. Dr. Farmer was present, with colleagues from the R.A. Band and the Society of Musicians, at Honor Oak Crematorium on November 21st, when a secular service was read by the General Secretary of the National Secular Society. We send our sympathy to Mr. Reynolds's son and daughter and their families.

- CAN MATERIALISM EXPLAIN MIND?** By G. H. Taylor. Price 3/6; postage 6d.
- THE PAPACY IN POLITICS TODAY.** By Joseph McCabe. Price 2/6; postage 5d.
- A SHORT HISTORY OF SEX WORSHIP.** By H. Cutner. Price 2/6; postage 6d.
- FREEDOM'S FOE—THE VATICAN.** By Adrian Pigott. A collection of Danger Signals for those who value liberty. 128 pages. Price 2/6; postage 6d.
- THE DOLLAR AND THE VATICAN: Its Character, Methods and Aims.** By Avro Manhattan. 2nd Edition—Revised and Enlarged. Price 21/-; postage 1/3.
- ESSAYS IN FREETHINKING.** By Chapman Cohen. Series 1, 2, 3, 4. Cloth bound. Price 7/6 each series; postage 7d. each.
- PRIMITIVE SURVIVALS IN MODERN THOUGHT.** By Chapman Cohen. Price 3/- (specially reduced price); postage 5d.
- MATERIALISM RESTATED** (Third edition). By Chapman Cohen. Price 5/6; postage 7d.
- PAMPHLETS FOR THE PEOPLE.** 18 of Chapman Cohen's celebrated pamphlets bound in one volume. Indispensable for the Freethinker. Price 5/6; postage 8d.
- WHAT IS THE SABBATH DAY?** By H. Cutner. Price 1/3; postage 4d.
- BRADLAUGH AND INGERSOLL.** By Chapman Cohen. Well illustrated. Now available. Price 6/-; postage 7d.
- AGE OF REASON.** Thomas Paine's masterpiece with 40-pages introduction by Chapman Cohen. Cloth 4/-; postage 7d.
- HOW THE CHURCHES BETRAY THEIR CHRIST.** British Christianity critically examined. B. C. G. L. Du Cann. Price 1/-; postage 3d.
- THE BIBLE HANDBOOK** (10th Edition). By G. W. Foote and W. P. Ball. Price 4/6; postage 6d.
- A CHRONOLOGY OF BRITISH SECULARISM.** By G. H. Taylor. Price 1/-; post 2d.