

# The Freethinker

Volume LXXIX—No. 2

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Fivepence

ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS I have drawn attention to the learned French publications issued monthly in Paris by the Ernest Renan Cercle, a group named after one eminent Rationalist scholar, and actually founded by another hardly less eminent one, the late Professor Prosper Alfaric. It is probable that the Cercle represents the most scholarly group of Freethinking students of comparative religion to be found in the contemporary world. At least, whilst I have heard that similar work is being done in the Soviet Union, the iron curtain and, one can add, the even more impassable iron curtain of the Russian language, prevents any first-hand knowledge of this from reaching the non-communist world. As far as the West is concerned—which includes all the lands now affiliated to the World Union of Freethinkers—I do not know such similarly erudite and penetrating studies as those begun by Professor Alfaric and worthily continued by his successors.

The *raison d'être* of the Cercle is the study of Christian origins from the strictly scientific standpoint of comparative religion, and any English Freethinker who can read French should make a point of becoming acquainted at first hand with these valuable studies. It is not for nothing that since the days of Voltaire and the great French Revolution (from which modern democracy derives) France has been universally regarded as the citadel of reason, a proud historic role which we hope will survive the present neo-fascist régime of General de Gaulle and his "Grey Eminence," M. Soustelle.

## After Renan

The fact that the Ernest Renan Cercle derives its name from the illustrious ex-clerical historian of Christian origins, by no means indicates that, in 1959, his titular disciples share all the views held by the eloquent and learned but, at times, somewhat romantic and sentimental, author of *The Life of Jesus*—the most celebrated and least convincing of Renan's books. Using his work as—to quote a classic phrase—"a beacon and not a boundary," his successors now utilise, and often lean heavily upon, such great scholars as Joseph Turmel, Paul-Louis Couchoud, and Professor Alfaric. Under the critical guidance of these eminent men, the Cercle is now elaborating a critique of Christian origins which makes use of such recent finds as the Dead Sea Scrolls to throw some light on the beginnings of Christianity, which have been so long deliberately obscured by religious intolerance and the once well-nigh complete control of scholarship by clerical influence. The results, which are being gradually accumulated, present a very different, though still in many ways an inconclusive picture of the most powerful and widely diffused religion on this planet.

## An Outline of Christian Origins

Professor Alfaric himself was a mythicist; that is to say, he did not believe in a historical Jesus. And this seems to be—as far as my reading of their publications goes—the

practically unanimous view of the contributors to the Cercle. Contrarily, they attach great importance to Paul of Tarsus, whom they seem to regard almost as the *real* founder of Christianity when considered as a separate religion from Judaism—a position with which I agree—and as the author of most of the Pauline Epistles (excluding Hebrews, probably the oldest book in the New Testament, and the obvious forgeries written to bring Paul into

line with Catholic orthodoxy, Titus and Timothy, which are absent from the earliest edition of the Epistles, Marcion's own). Personally, I think that Jesus represents a composite character, who may have been *partly* historical and, whilst I agree in general

with the Cercle's view of Paul, I think it is more probable that his Epistles were written by his followers than by himself. But I do agree with the fundamental thesis that historical Christianity derives from Paul and not from the early Galileans, who were merely another Jewish sect and would never have developed, if left to themselves, into a *new* (non-Jewish) religion.

## Marcion and Christian Origins

Perhaps the most revolutionary innovation made by the Cercle is the very important role which they ascribe to the second-century Asiatic heretic, Marcion. Here they appear to follow very closely the position taken by Couchoud in his fascinating book, *The Creation of Christ*, the English translation of which ought to be read by every Freethinker who wishes to keep *au fait* with speculations about Christian origins. (Before Couchoud, the great Protestant scholar, Adolf Harnack, had drawn attention to Marcion's importance in a book which has not, unfortunately, been translated into English.) The Cercle have dealt with Marcion in several previous bulletins, and their most recent monthly publication is devoted solely to him.

## The First Editor of the New Testament

According to this, Marcion (who was born about 85 at Sinope on the Black Sea, started preaching about 129, and was finally excommunicated by the Church of Rome in July 144—the first *authentic* date in the history of Christianity?), was the author of the first Gospel, the first editor of Paul's Epistles, and—most important of all—the first man to suggest the creation of a *Christian Bible*, a *New Testament* which would supersede the Jewish Old Testament, up to that time the sole Christian Bible. The net result of this was to cut the bond between Judaism and Christianity: more precisely, to complete Paul's revolt against Judaism, and to create a new religion. Upon this showing, Marcion, almost equally with Paul, may be regarded as the real founder of Christianity.

## How We Got Our New Testament

According to Couchoud and the Ernest Renan Cercle, the Marcionite revolution was successful, though—as so often happens in both religious and political revolutions—Marcion himself was the first victim. The Church threw out Marcion, but assimilated his ideas (Marcion's Gospel is

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

## How We Got Our New Testament

—By F. A. RIDLEY—

known to have begun, "In the 15th year of Tiberius Caesar [i.e. 29 A.D.] Jesus, the Son of God, came down from Heaven and appeared at Capernaum, a town in Galilee, whilst Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea") and wrote the four canonical Gospels largely based on his lost work. It accepted Paul as an inspired Apostle, but bowdlerised his original Epistles and forged new ones to condemn Marcion. (Even Bishop Barnes admitted this!) More important than either, it accepted the novel idea of a New

Testament and, whilst not rejecting the Jewish Bible altogether (as Marcion, who was violently anti-Jewish, wished to do), it relegated it to the subordinate rank of the Old Testament. Not for the last time, the Catholic Church condemned the heretic—and then borrowed his essential ideas to its great profit. That, according to our French students of Christian origins, is how we got our New Testament—and, indeed, how Christianity started as a new religion.

## Life Everlasting

By R. READER

IT WAS on April 1st, 1959, that Gustave Plunck announced his discovery to the world. There could be no doubt whatever. The cat had now passed its 60th birthday—indeed, it was considerably older than he—and the curious experiment begun by his father before World War I now showed conclusive results. Life everlasting—and so far as science and Gustave Plunck could see, it would work out at 7/6 per bottle.

The Archbishop chewed his nails. The experts had come and gone; initial scepticism had passed; and the manufacture and dispensing of the drug made a major felony. The possibility of a freethinking chemist distributing divine favours was too much, even for the private logic of religious neurosis. But several highly-placed people were living to suspiciously great ages. Obviously the law was being flouted, and earthly eternal life finding more customers than the heavenly variety. As one revoltingly-cynical acquaintance had put it: "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." If things went on like this, the sky-pilots would have no more travellers to guide.

With a sigh, the Archbishop tensed himself for the mental jump. It was a long one—even for him—but he made it. "The nature of this marvellous gift of science is divine—it therefore must be consecrated and dispensed only by God's appointed ministers on earth. Scientists propose, but Ministers dispose." By this desperate expedient, the church kept a shadow of its old pretention to dominate, and, even if some people thought it odd that a priest should make it impossible for a man to enter the heavenly kingdom after having prescribed it to him all his life, well, at least, nobody dared think it funny.

It was a desperate expedient, and a clever one, but, as things turned out, not to have used it would have been cleverer still. For, little by little, an extraordinary situation arose. Aged men and women, tottering on the brink of the grave, were snatched back, and physically and mentally "stabilised" (the word was Plunck's) to what they were at 60 or 70. More, the Plunck vaccine couldn't do. But its effects were permanent. Henceforth, death could occur only from *unnatural* causes, and the death rate dropped considerably. The birthrate, however, continued to rise. The young continued to multiply—and it was even whispered that the Plunck vaccine conferred enhanced sexual potency on the young (who obtained it clandestinely). As time went on, there was manifestly less and less of more and more. Standing space and breathing space became taxable—and a bitter conflict began to develop between the young and the formerly-aged. As conditions worsened, violence began, and the "death from unnatural causes" curve rose giddily. Nature, in her wisdom, was taking a leaf out of Plunck's notebook. The general spirit of the crowds grew even more ominous. People were sick and terrified of eternal life in a world of sudden terror, violence and continually-falling standards. On the other

hand, as living organisms, they clung to life and ran desperately for their 6-yearly doses of the drug on the appointed day. Hamlet-like, they debated the pros and cons, utterly overwhelmed by a hostile fate, tired of living but scared of dying—for death promised no release. On the contrary. It was either eternal torture—and what torture could be worse than this?—or *eternal life again*—the priest had said so—and the heavenly eternal life was, by all accounts, even more austere than this one. *And there was no return passage.* In this ghastly predicament, the mob instinct roved round, frantically seeking some object upon which to vent its helpless fury. Someone said "Who started this 'eternal life' business, anyway?" and the thing was done.

The unfortunate Plunck, still hale and hearty at 185, gave a good account of himself, surprising in one of his years, but was finally dragged out of his laboratory and brutally despatched to another eternity. He was closely followed by the Church hierarchy, and it was surprising, also, with what alacrity the ordinary priest slipped off his vestments and melted into the crowd. Some, in their terror, even got down to practical useful work.

Formerly, humanity had dreaded death, erecting all manner of neurotic barriers against it. The Plunck vaccine had brought it to its senses. The remedy was neither suicide nor a frantic scramble to amass money, territory, or other neurotic defences. It was to accept the fact, philosophically, that man is no different from the rest of living things—that our time is limited, and that the only logical thing to do is to make the best of it consistent with the needs of our fellows. Furthermore, that this can only be done by limiting the numbers of the young, since as individual lives expand, total numbers must decrease.

## From Poland

AFTER NEARLY TWO YEARS OF WORK, the Polish Society for Secular Schools (founded January 1957), has a membership of over 28,000. The Society has 223 district sections and 1,015 circles, of which 295 are in schools and 720 in factories, institutions and villages. There has been a gratifying increase in the number of schools without religious teaching; six months ago there were 60 in all, while in the current school year the number has risen to 199. It should be emphasised that all decisions to do without religious teaching in schools are fully voluntary, with the consent of the parents involved.

—(From *Zycie Warszawy*, 15/11/1958).

—NEXT WEEK—

ON LEARNING AND UNLEARNING

By G. I. BENNETT

# The Character of God

By DR. J. V. DUHIG

A PERSON'S CHARACTER can be judged from what he says and does in the infinite variety of daily life and from his reactions to what other people say and do. If he says things which do not accord with verifiable facts, we tend not to trust him; if he does things outside the limits of certain reasonably flexible norms, we think him, at least, peculiar or possibly eccentric; if his reaction to others is to seek their applause, like a politician, in every conceivable set of circumstances, we think him vain and his objects, therefore, other than praiseworthy and possibly meriting censure, if we believe the end of man is to do all for the benefit of man. A person, then, is known by the totality of his acts and their effects.

From such a test as this implies, the Christian god emerges with little honour and with a heavy load of responsibility for a vast amount of evil. In making any estimate of the character of the Christian or any other god we must base it on human standards; we cannot possibly go outside the human imagination for any guide since what we know and conceive is necessarily derived solely from human experience so that God's character and qualities must be human character and qualities and God's acts are good, bad or indifferent by human standards. (A Martian might take an entirely different view, which to us is, of course, at present irrelevant.)

Another consideration is that, by definition, God must be held responsible for what happens throughout the Universe, a tough assignment undoubtedly. But the Christians say their god made us and the Universe the way we and it happen to be. Having done 15,000 post-mortem examinations, I have no hesitation in saying that if I had the omnipotent creative power of this god, I could have made a much more efficient human body than the present ramshackle job. But there it is, God has to take the full responsibility for a botch of a job and we have to take the consequences. At least, that's what it says or means in the Christian mythology. It is fatuous to go into the old argument about Free Will since no philosopher worth tuppence would dream of suggesting that human choice of action is not in some way conditioned, the conditions precedent to action having been inherent in life as it is. We inherit grades of intelligence as well as grades of moral and social responsibility; we are conditioned both by environment and heredity.

Looking at God both by what he does, personally, or through allegedly accredited agents, and how he reacts to others, I find him, to say the least, rather peculiar and not at all what one would expect on a decent human ethical level. If I, allegedly, offend God by doing what I cannot help doing, I may be tortured (at God's pleasure) for millions of years. But if God offends me, as he constantly does, what happens? Nothing that I can do anything about; so I either write God off or treat him with the contempt he deserves.

God, obviously, by definition, is the ultimate cause of all natural catastrophes. As one of the impious doctors, I have all my lifetime striven to counter God's will to murder; he inflicts paralytic poliomyelitis on defenceless children and cancer on their mothers. On the basis of human ethics (which I prefer to God's) this is criminal. God's accredited agents, Popes, priests, emperors, parsons, inquisitions, establishments, kings, Hitlers, Mussolinis, Stepinacs, etc., etc., have murdered, tortured, driven mad millions of decent human beings. The history of Chris-

tianity is one long record of *common criminality* of the most bestial kind. To talk of Christian love to a Hiroshima citizen is a cruel mockery; the bomb that destroyed his city was blessed by an air force Christian chaplain, probably a Catholic priest.

These crimes and brutalities are manifestly the crimes of God.

To a classical scholar, a comparison with other gods imposes itself, as the French say. The Greeks and Romans put up gods with, undoubtedly, some human frailties, but with, also, some lovable qualities; and I must say, if I had to choose, I would prefer Zeus to the person who runs the world so cruelly. But as they are all myth, I empty the lot into the ashcan.

One aspect of the Christian god's character rarely canvassed is God's reaction to "worship," out of which he seems to come as a vain, fatuous, puerile person, culturally on a very much lower level than, say, Gulf of Benin negro sculptors.

Nobody who has attended a solemn high mass in a Catholic church can fail to have been struck by the fantastically primitive ritual—the fancy dress, the dreary, unintelligible gabbling of rubbishy abracadabra, the posturings and the generally repellent proceeding on the level of the cultural ideas of Congo witch-doctors. Anthropologists have no need to go to the Congo or New Guinea to investigate human superstition; a Catholic church or, better, a cathedral, will supply him with a lifetime object of study.

In the cathedral of Toledo in Spain, I once saw 30 priests chanting all through a summer afternoon with lighted candles in their hands for the equivalent of £30 a month, while outside the church people were dying of hunger. The fancy dress, the "sacred" vessels of gold and silver out of which these nitwits perform their ritual cannibalism would have fed, clothed and housed hundreds of their destitute fellow-citizens. Try to imagine the mentality of a god who enjoys and, apparently, exacts that sort of flattery. Imagine the appalling monotony of hearing for century after century the same tired old word formulæ of praise and fullsome flattery and liking it. What a god!

The whole background of "worship" seems to me to be utterly crazy: a person who needs all that grovelling self-abasement and flattery cannot be anything but a flatulent, vain egotist, with not a semblance of dignity or common-sense. His agents seem to think he is pleased with miracles reported by moronic peasant girls, a reaction which is a *reductio ad absurdum* of all human culture and advancement to higher values. What a god!

A dignified human being must find all this disgusting and revolting, and to add to the revulsion we have god's partiality for saints covered by sores and ulcers from never having had a bath or a recent meal; God likes this sort of thing.

God's character on this estimate seems to me poor and contemptible and I think that the thousands of acres of print on Theology will one day provide the clean, healthy-minded young atheists of the future with an inexhaustible fund of comic reading for centuries: the Lives of the Saints, as I remember them, while often foul and disgusting, nevertheless remain, while they last, an incomparable source of riotously comic reading. At least the Christian god has made that contribution to the world's store of fun. But what a god!

## This Believing World

It was quite intriguing to hear that well-known and genial broadcaster and poet, Mr. J. Betjeman, admit on ITV's "About Religion" programme, that while he thoroughly believed every word of the Resurrection story, he just loved to hear it ably defended (no doubt against horrid infidels). He was googly-eyed with admiration when his fellow Christian, Fr. H. Bishop, proceeded to demonstrate its invulnerability to criticism by one of the most stupid defences we have ever heard. How, he unctuously asked, can anyone explain the "empty tomb," and the beliefs of the Apostles, and early Christians if the Resurrection was not true? And this in 1958! Why, a hundred years ago, even Dean Alford had to admit it was a question of "faith" only. The story of the Resurrection has been exploded into bits—even by Christian writers.

★

Whether Christmas in Jerusalem is still celebrated as literally true, we do not know; but it used to be celebrated by Christians of various sects glaring at one another, and only prevented from killing each other by the Turkish soldiers in charge. In any case, what is called "the Holiest Place of Christendom," the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, is beginning to fall apart. There is not, of course, a scrap of evidence that it had anything to do with the "Holy Sepulchre," or that there ever was such a place. Still, Christians believe it, and it has always been a source of revenue, and what else matters?

★

So even the Pope is sick of the constant grovelling before him. The picture of a number of new Cardinals, printed in most newspapers, all grovelling at the "honour" of being made Cardinals, must have made him decide that members of his own household should kneel before him "only" twice a day; and he admits—according to *News Chronicle*—feeling "humiliated when visitors kneeled"—that is, grovelled, before him. At all events, he recently told pilgrims to "stand up, everybody." We think it not unfair to say that THE FREETHINKER was perhaps the only journal in the country which protested at the way grown men and women grovelled before the Pope—and, for that matter, before Cardinals also.

★

On "The Brains Trust" the other Sunday, the question of levitation arose, and Dr. Bronowski, who was asked what he thought about it, hastily disclaimed any knowledge whatever, and would therefore give no opinion. Dr. Bronowski has made a big reputation for himself as a lucid expositor of science on the radio and TV, and it must have astonished most of his friends that he did not point out that for true "levitation," that is, a man flying up in the air, there was literally no evidence. As for the parlour trick of making a man bounce up in the air, that used to be known in our younger days as a joke, and has no more to do with levitation as such than with jam tarts.

★

We were delighted to see that an African girl of fifteen has been vouchsafed two visions of the Virgin Mary, each time "being promised healing powers." It is about time that the Virgin should recognise other countries besides Europe. In addition, if there ever had been such a person as Mary, whether as God's betrothed or Joseph's, she certainly would have been at least brown in colour as was Jesus. At all events, Mary gave the African girl a rosary with which she immediately cured an African child from a fatal illness.

★

We sincerely hope that the radio and TV in South Africa

will do their utmost to publicise this beautiful, supernatural event, and explain why the Virgin has so far left white Christians there severely alone. After all, the very religious Boers are almost to a man in favour of Apartheid—and it must come as a severe shock to learn that Mary preferred a little coloured girl to a white one. Perhaps Salisbury in Rhodesia will now become another Lourdes—in these days of crass credulity, who knows?

★

One of the latest "Saturday Reflections" in the London *Evening News* dealt with the Bible as if no one had ever criticised it! It was still the "Sure Anchor" of everybody, still God's Precious Word full of "God's Hope"—whatever that means—still the greatest "best seller," and so on. There was a time when at least some of its claims were vigorously supported by what was called "evidence." That is no longer necessary. The Bible has withstood all attacks—like the Rock of Gibraltar it stands as the great bulwark of Christianity, and cannot be touched. With the whole of our BBC radio and TV, as well as ITV behind it, is there any wonder at the *Evening News's* triumphant whoop of joy?

## The Freethinker Bound Volume

THE ATTENTION OF READERS—of new ones especially—is drawn to the yearly appearance of the Bound Volume of THE FREETHINKER, the 1958 edition of which will be making its appearance in due course.

From the specifically Freethought angle the major events of the year have been the centenaries of Darwinism and of Lourdes, and the Papal election. A good deal of space was devoted to these events. Indeed, in the case of the change of Pope, we can safely claim that no other journal in this country—and possibly in Europe—gave the affair such an adequate coverage from the standpoint of truth. The uncivilised ballyhoo surrounding the death of one Pope and the election of a successor was exposed in THE FREETHINKER with a thoroughness unrivalled in any contemporary; this is no empty boast but an undeniable fact.

Catholic practices of a more local character have also been frequently dealt with; and the account of Mr. O. C. Drewitt (ex-Father Norbert), "My Years as a Monk," ran through seven issues.

Other subjects which may be consulted in the 1958 volume include scientific matters such as the biological origin of life, anthropological finds in S. Africa, current developments in astronomy, the new science of Demography and the investigation of the claims made for E.S.P.

There have also been articles on the Robert Owen centenary and on astrology, Christian Science, Spiritualism, the growing strength of Islam, Sabbatarianism, Freemasonry, homosexuality and the need for reform, and frequent sundry notes critical of TV and radio programmes.

Altogether the 1958 volume should make a useful addition to the bookshelves of freethinkers. G.H.T.

## Youth Club Competition

THE LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY have taken up an offer from the Central London Branch to provide a money prize of £1 to the member of the Youth Club who writes the best essay on the Secular Youth Club. The local secularists have augmented this with other money prizes and the boys have responded excellently. The judges were Messrs. G. H. Taylor, Avro Manhattan and J. M. Alexander, and the winners were chosen from about fifteen entries.

# 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.

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

Central London Branch N.S.S. (The Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, January 11th, 7.15 p.m.: IVOR FINLAY, "The West in Conflict."

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, January 13th: Prof. T. H. PEAR, M.A., "The Nature of Prejudice."

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, January 11th, 6.30 p.m.: E. R. LEWIS, B.A., "The Gospel Parables and Critical Scholarship."

Loughborough College Literary and Debating Society.—Thursday, January 15th, 2.30 p.m.: "That this House will beware of the Papal Bull." Mover: T. M. MOSLEY; seconder, E. TAYLOR.

Opposed by two Roman Catholics.

NOTTINGHAM COSMOPOLITAN DEBATING SOCIETY (N.C.S. Public Relations Hall, Broad Street).—Sunday, January 11th, 2.30 p.m.: The Rev. C. W. HARRINGTON, "Expanding Our Horizons."

Orpington Humanist Group (Sherry's Restaurant).—Sunday, January 11th, 7 p.m.: S. PARKER, "Anarchism."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, January 11th, 11 a.m.: D. G. MACRAE, M.A., "The Case Against Originality."

## Notes and News

We were a little late in seeing the "psychic picture" story in the *Sunday Pictorial* (December 14th, 1958), but as the painting itself is eleven years old it can hardly be considered an urgent news item. However, the *Pictorial* urged us to compare a profile photograph of a four-year-old girl with the picture "painted by a psychic artist at a meeting at Sutton, Surrey, in 1947." The artist told Mrs. Kathleen Eatherton (then unmarried), "This is the child who is with you" and the lady "felt in her heart that this was the picture of my future daughter." She now describes her daughter as "the image of the painting," and the *Pictorial* considers that "the similarity of the line from forehead to nose to lips to chin is startling." Spoilsports that we are, we demur. The sketchy and rather doll-like profile in the painting might be almost any baby girl and, after all, babies are sometimes like their mothers.

★

THE *Daily Express* Literary Editor, Anthony Hern, asked us to ponder on "a religious success story" on Christmas Eve. It seems that Prebendary J. B. Phillips's *New Testament in Modern English* has sold 30,000 copies in three

months, and Mr. Hern thinks it will still be selling strongly when those other two best-sellers, *Dr. Zhivago* and Lord Montgomery's *Memoirs* have "come off the boil." The translation has, he says, "achieved a striking balance between stark modernity and a feeling for tradition." Whether it is any improvement to substitute "discovered to be pregnant—by the Holy Spirit" for "found to be with child of the Holy Ghost," we rather doubt. Nor do we think "astrologers" for "wise men" makes the story of the guiding star any more feasible. But we realise that Mr. Phillips was somewhat limited by his material. We suggest, though, that Mr. Hern should have shown a little more care in preparing his review. After quoting Mr. Phillips's translation of Matthew 2, "Jesus was born in Bethlehem, in Judaea, in the days when Herod was King of the province," he says it was "one thousand nine hundred and fifty-eight years since a child was laid in a Bethlehem manger." Doesn't he know that Herod died in 4 B.C.?

★

THE Divine Will International Assembly of Jehovah's Witnesses took place in New York from July 27th to August 3rd, 1958, and was described as the biggest religious gathering in history. Some 253,922 Witnesses filled the New York Yankee Stadium and Polo Grounds, and *The Watchtower* (November 1st, 1958) which, of course, announces "Jehovah's Kingdom," reported speeches and resolutions. We couldn't waste our time reading the fundamentalist rubbish, but one odd sentence did catch our eye. "The men most responsible for the world condition," said Vice-President F. W. Franz, "are the religious instructors and leaders; and the most reprehensible of these are the religious clergy of Christendom."

★

"ENGLAND is adopting the Continental Sunday, and this is a good thing," said the Rev. V. D. W. Hyde, vicar of St. Bartholomew's Church, Dover (*The Star*, 16/12/58), thereby making enemies for life of the Lord's Day Observance Society! Mr. Hyde thinks that Sunday afternoon is a time "for the whole family to enjoy themselves" indoors or outdoors, provided they have been to church in the morning. So he has switched his Sunday school from afternoons to mornings, and other Dover churches are reported to be following his example. The Roman Catholics, of course, have long believed in getting the religious business over as early as possible, leaving plenty of time for fun.

## Catholics at Work

[From *With a Carib Eye*, by Edgar Mittelholzer. Secker and Warburg, 1958.]

ILLITERACY in St. Lucia [the West Indian island] is higher than in probably any other Caribbean colony under the British... ninety-five per cent. of the population is Roman Catholic... You can go nowhere in St. Lucia without being aware of the Roman Catholic atmosphere. (p. 131.)

The one newspaper, *The Voice of St. Lucia*, is an extremely poor paper, both in respect to printing and journalistic contents. The truth is, I was reliably informed, no newspaper could hope to flourish in St. Lucia unless the editorial staff agreed to be "controlled" by the Roman Catholic priests. No opinions must be expressed which conflicted with R.C. policy, and R.C. policy in the island is not noted for its liberality. *The Voice of St. Lucia* has been controlled by the Gordon family, who have always been staunch Methodists. Not three years ago there was an uproar in the island when the R.C. Church tried to ban the showing of the film "Martin Luther" at the cinema in Castries. (pp. 132-3.)

# Christianity Galore

By H. CUTNER

A NUMBER OF BOOKS published during the past few years have reached me (through the kindness of my friend Tom Mosley) which, in the ordinary way, I would have ignored. But these books are not by more or less ignorant tract-writers but by men with university or other degrees. I read them with astonishment, and I must confess with not a little sadness. Here we have a number of well-educated men, able to write well, one or two of them adding to this a considerable knowledge of modern science, yet ready to support a bunch of Oriental myths with all the eloquence and power at their command. One hundred years ago, or even fifty years ago, some readers would have been impressed, no doubt whatever; but if these books have any genuine circulation, if they really do or can appeal to our young people (and those not so young) as a scientific exposition of Christianity, then indeed our Freethought propaganda over the years seems to have egregiously failed.

*Why I am a Christian*, by O. Hallesby, PH.D., dated 1953, is a typical example of the kind of book I mean—a Doctor of Philosophy writing a most eloquent appeal for his readers forthwith to become Christians not just in name but in fact. This particular work does not appear to me to rise in thought and exposition much above the 100 for sixpence tracts which used to flood Protestant homes last century—there is hardly a line in the whole book which has not been answered a thousand times by Freethinkers—but with astonishing courage the author sets out not so much to convert unbelievers as to prove that “no one is saved merely by regarding the Bible as the Word of God.” To be saved, you must humbly acknowledge yourself to be a sinner, and must in consequence accept everything in the Bible, particularly the teaching that you can only be saved through unswerving belief in Christ Jesus.

For about 130 pages Dr. Hallesby keeps on and on on this note, and never slackens up in the least. Christ Jesus made *him* the happiest man in the world, and you can be the same. But—no doubts, no heresy. You must believe *everything*.

Whether Dr. Hallesby is a Roman Catholic or a Protestant or one of the other 658 sects who all claim to be true Christians, is very carefully avoided by the author. All you need believe in is the “Church of God” and you are saved. I could not discover what being “saved” really meant, but no doubt, if pressed, Dr. Hallesby would sadly admit that all—and by all is meant everybody—who do not accept Jesus as he does, would not, could not, escape (as Jesus himself so graphically put it) from “the damnation of Hell.” Thank God, Dr. Hallesby himself is sure that he, at least, is saved.

Unlike Dr. Hallesby's book, which has had two editions, the second book I read, *The Universe: Plan or Accident?* by Robert E. D. Clark, M.A., PH.D., published in 1949, has had only one edition. Mr. Clark is very, very familiar with the marvels of modern science, and his chapters on the impact of modern science—he has a sub-title, “The Religious Implications of Modern Science”—on religious beliefs are thoroughly worth reading. For example, what Mr. Clark says about Evolution should not be lightly dismissed, even if we cannot agree with him. He quotes H. Ward's *Exploring the Universe*. “The ultimate analysis of a cell must be as difficult as the analysis of a robin. When you give a common name, protoplasm, to the substance that you find in all the cells, you are not saying anything.”

Mr. Clark is one of the most convinced exponents of the Design Argument, and does his utmost to prove that “the reality of design in nature is becoming increasingly apparent in modern science.” People right throughout history have always believed in some form of the Design Argument, contends Mr. Clark, and gives a short historical sketch of its development. He even quotes a Job of Edessa (ninth century), who said: “God acted wisely in making mountains for the help of mankind”—but naturally Mr. Clark does not give us, say, a dozen names of eminent modern scientists who agree with Job in this or in anything else the poor but rather dismal old gent said so long ago. We readily admit that then and later, indeed right down to our own age, believers always use the Design Argument when they can. You see the wonders of Nature, from a jumping flea to enormous galaxies of suns, stars, and planets, in the skies—and, of course, they couldn't have made themselves; so God made them all. It is the easiest way out of accounting for the mysteries found in the Universe, and it saves a lot of time explaining. God did it all—what more do you want or need?

Mr. Clark, however, admits that, during the 19th century, a “reaction” set in—the religious apologists were accused of “protesting too much.” In spite of this, however, the Design Argument stood firm, for it “has stood the test of thousands of years”; and from it he insists that we can prove that there must be a Designer. Materialism and what it has to say about “mind” has “probably had its day,” for “recent work in the field of psychical research is hardly consistent with a materialistic picture of mind.” So Mr. Clark drags in telepathy in which he believes, and which is for him “science.” And even “philosophical reasoning leads to the same conclusion,” so that “the progress of science has made the old materialism less plausible than it was once held to be.”

Of course, here a lot depends on what is meant by the “old materialism,” and who were the “old materialists.” Reading this kind of apologetic literature, I find that only very rarely, if at all, are we given the names of the “old materialists” and what they actually say. That modern science may have modified some parts of the “old materialism” is obvious; but are we any nearer a “Creative Designer”? Is it not a fact that the more discoveries are made by modern science the more emphasis is laid on the utter absence of a Designer?

In any case, Mr. Clark recognises that if you insist that the Universe must have had a Designer, then the Designer himself must have had a Designer, “and so *ad infinitum*.” And to answer this, he retorts that in such a case “we should know nothing about the world we live in.” In other words, please, please, don't force this argument upon believers. But why not? It is the logical answer, and it was because this was so that so many Theists and Christians turned with despair to the argument *a priori* (as it is called) and agreed that the Design Argument had utterly failed.

If the Design Argument is so valid (admits Mr. Clark) how is it that no Theist can tell us “what holds the world in space”? Is it “gravitation”? Then, he asks, “What holds the sun in space?” The questions are “unending.” So the best thing is to stop arguing, and accept a Creator, a Designer.

One way to dispose of the critics of the Design Argument is to stop talking about a God or a Creator or a

Designer, and concentrate on a (or the) "Cosmic Mind," about which (or whom) Mr. Clark devotes a chapter. Needless to say, he has no more use for critics of the "Cosmic Mind" that he has for critics of the "Creator. . . ." Is the Creator or the Cosmic Mind "personal?" Answer: "Not exactly." We must not comprehend God as a "giant man." Is he "supernatural"? Ah, it all depends on what you mean by "supernatural."

And what about Evil—is God or the Creator or the Cosmic Mind or the Designer responsible for all the evil in the world? Here Mr. Clark is rather shaky and falls back on poor old Frank Ballard, who never could stand Robert Blatchford and his *God and My Neighbour*, and wrote (over fifty years ago) *The Miracles of Unbelief*, which somehow fell quite flat except for people like Mr. Clark. In the ultimate, we must all believe that "Nature is the handiwork of a good and loving God." But don't argue about it. Just accept it.

For one thing we ought to be grateful, and that is Mr. Clark drags in Jesus only at the end of his book, though we are not told if he is God or the Son of the Cosmic Mind or what. Naturally, the Gospels are quoted as if they were literally true and Jesus actually said what he is there reported to have said. To put it another way, in the end, Mr. Clark reverts to the position of an out-and-out believer in Christianity, exactly as if he were a Salvation

Army girl or a Jehovah's Witness. His latent Fundamentalism peeps out in spite of his brave showing of Science; just as another completely unabashed Fundamentalist is not afraid of admitting it in the *Battle of Belief*, by A. E. Shiner.

I intended to devote a whole article to Mr. Shiner, but to explode his naive attempts to bolster up the Bible—he knows it only in the Authorised Version—would bore readers as much as it would bore me. He believes that the Serpent in the Garden of Eden was the Devil who spoke perfect Hebrew to Eve, he tells us exactly where the Garden really was, he ridicules Evolution—all Evolutionists being fools—and so on. God is exactly as described in His Precious Word. Mr. Shiner even believes every word of the story of Jonah—and for this he furnishes literal proof by repeating the idiotic story of a sailor who, a few years ago, after being swallowed by a whale, was ultimately spat out and lived. This hoax is repeated as "Gospel" truth! Mr. Shiner is not only a whole-hogger but a thousand times more than a whole-hogger. He and his kind are a slowly dying race, so we can let them end their days in peace.

That such books can find a publisher at all is the only miracle I can draw from them all.

But do the public really buy these books?

## Religious Advertising on Postage Stamps

By D. SHIPPER

THE HUMBLE POSTAGE STAMP provides a fine opportunity for religious advertising, and many countries regularly lend themselves to this perversion. We believe those acquainted with philately will agree that the Vatican State easily leads the field in this respect, but a thematic collector who concentrates on religious stamps can display from many countries in his album.

It is common knowledge in the philatelic world that many small countries indulge in the shrewd money-making practice of issuing more stamps than required for internal consumption. The excess number is released purely for the collectors' market and in this respect the Vatican shows itself remarkably materialistic. For instance, the death of Pope Pius XII brought the speedy issue of a special "Sede Vacante" set of three stamps and the canny financiers of the Vatican Post Office anticipated the demand by printing a larger number than usual—700,000 copies of the 15-lire value and 750,000 each of the 25- and 60-lire stamps. However, even this number failed to meet the demand and during the four days the stamps were on sale (October 21st to October 25th) enormous queues could be seen outside the Vatican Post Office (reported the Italian philatelic journal *Il Collezionista*) and purchasers had to be restricted to five sets each. Similarly, the Philatelic Department of the Vatican Post Office, a special department which handles the orders of overseas dealers, was unable to supply more than a small percentage of foreign requirements.

We believe they missed an opportunity by not ordering a special second printing, but perhaps the impending issue of the Pope John XXIII Vatican Radio and Valeriano Martyr commemoratives convince them a hungry market is best?

Incidentally, the repercussions of the "Cold War" are felt in the philatelic trade and the U.S.A.—to the disgust of many collectors—bans the importation of stamps from Communist China. A court case now pending concerns the

prosecution of a New York stamp dealer for illegally importing Chinese stamps (if he is shot at dawn we hope the perforations can be kept evenly spaced).

An interesting member of the world-wide fraternity of philatelic associations is C.O.R.O.S., or, to give them their full title, the Collectors of Religion on Stamps Society. In presenting their annual awards (to the Embassies of the countries concerned) they decided that the best over-all religious stamp design of 1957 was the Guatemalan stamp depicting a thorn-crowned Christ (sold to finance the construction of a new road to the famous R.C. shrine at Esquipulas—a worthy cause, if ever there was one!). The U.S.A. received the C.O.R.O.S. award (for the first time) for issuing their Flushing Remonstrance commemorative, showing a Bible, tall hat and quill. This commemorated the protest signed by Flushing (Long Island) settlers (on December 27th, 1657) after Governor Peter Stuyvesant had issued an order barring Quakers.

The best Jewish stamp was the Israeli "Lion of Judah," and Spain collected the award for the best R.C. design. This was for the stamp showing St. Margaret Mary Alcoque having her Sacred Heart of Jesus vision (a rumour that Spain plans a Holy Ghost stamp in aid of child welfare has not, as yet, been officially confirmed).

To balance the foregoing we would state that many famous freethinkers have been depicted on postage stamps and that philately is an instructive and entertaining pastime, particularly suitable for children—between the standard ages of nine and ninety.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### FAIRY TALES

I had been invited to take part in a quiz, organised by the International University of Theological Revolutionary Research, and the subject was "Name ten fairy tales from ancient or modern times." I was the first on the list, and the prize was a guinea. The judges were a Doctor of Philosophy of Oxford University, a

Director of Education, and a Christian biologist. Two minutes was the time given, and when they gave me the "go" I rattled away: First, the making of an educated talking man out of dust by the Architect of the Universe; second, the manufacture of a woman out of a man's rib by the same architect; third, the talking serpent in the Garden of Eden. And on I went until I came to Lot's Wife being turned into a bar of salt. Then the Oxford-trained philosopher shouted "Stop"

These, he said, were historical facts and not fairy tales, and I was disqualified. I protested against this, and was informed by the distinguished judges that even if the historical records in the book written by the Architect of the Universe were fairy tales, it was a social necessity that the lower orders of society should believe them as true, or civilisation would wither up and die, and the chairman's decision was final. But I still contend that these are amongst the greatest fairy tales that have ever been told.

PAUL VARNEY.

#### JOHN MILTON

I was very pleased with Mr. McCall's article on the great poet. (THE FREETHINKER, 5/12/58.) Through a Board School teacher I became interested in him at the age of twelve. A few years later, in a review in an exercise book, I said that really God ought to review *Paradise Lost*.

Apropos of Satan being the real hero of the poem, there is a good story anent Lord Eldon, Lord Chancellor at the beginning of the last century. He was famous for his strong language. A fellow passenger in a coach, to save his ears from pollution, proposed to read to him. He chose *Paradise Lost*. When Satan's speech had reached its crescendo point, "Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven," his Lordship burst out with "And a damned fine fellow, too. I hope he may win."

I have heard of Milton being in hiding at the time of the Restoration, but not in prison. I am sure Masson said nothing of this in his voluminous biography. What is Mr. McCall's authority?

WM. KENT.

[Colin McCall writes: Mr. Kent is quite right. Milton was never actually imprisoned, though it was intended that he should be. The Indemnity Bill of August 1660 provided the pardon, though during its passage through Parliament he had been named for special punishment.—ED.]

#### BALLYMENA

I was delighted with N.F.s humorous story about the Orangeman. I think, however, she is mistaken about the name of the town mentioned. Neither my friends nor I have ever heard of Ballanomena. She may, however, have been thinking of my own home town, Ballymena, which is 28 miles from Belfast. WM. SHANNON.

#### RELIGION IN ULSTER

As a regular reader of your very essential journal, I appreciate the fact that you cannot verify every statement made in the paper—even those of your very learned contributors.

In a recent issue, Dr. J. V. Duhig says, on page 386: "Ulster Protestants have inflicted unspeakable torture on Catholics." Is this quite true? I have lived here for 86½ years and have had no such experience.

As a well-known Atheist and a democratic independent Unionist, I have suffered a great deal of ignorant criticism and social hindrance from the mad Orange element, but never torture.

Please ask your contributor to state his grounds for the statement.

R. J. HALE.

[Dr. Duhig writes: It was actually on the authority of a letter from a Southern Ireland source in the *New Statesman* that I wrote as I did. Unfortunately, I did not wait to post my article until the next week's *Statesman*, in which there was a complete repudiation of the I.R.A. correspondent's claims of torture. Naturally I accept the official repudiation and I would like to express my sincere apology to the Northern Ireland Government.—ED.]

#### "MADONNA"

"Monitor" is one of the few television programmes for intelligent people; yet it appears that even on such occasions fundamentalist propaganda cannot be resisted by the BBC wallahs. On December 21st, Huw Wheldon, when showing some paintings of the "Madonna," called her "The Mother of God." Apart from the fact that even not all Christian sects believe in the divinity of Jesus, others find it ridiculous that a God, i.e. prime cause of everything and everybody, could have a mother at all. For Jews (and Mohammedans) the very idea that God was married is blasphemous. Perhaps it could some time be brought home to our radio and television authorities that they are being paid and have to cater for other people, too, than Christian fundamentalists.

O. WOLFGANG.

#### THE GOD OF THE QURAN

I have read with interest the article of Mr. F. A. Ridley under the heading "The God of the Astronomers" in your issue of January 2nd, 1959.

I can quite understand the learned writer exposing the story of

creation as given in Genesis in the light of modern scientific penetration into the mysteries of space. But when he brackets Islam with Judaism and Christianity in respect of the creation story, obviously he takes Islam's position for granted. If he had taken the trouble to consult the Quran on this particular point, he would have hesitated to put Islam in the same boat with the other two sister religions. Indeed, the light thrown on the starry creation in the Quran should have made him revise his whole attitude towards the question of God's existence and His creativity. For the present I would call attention to three statements made in the Quran in this connection:

1. That this creation is so unbounded that even if there were oceans of ink, it would be insufficient to cover its full extent. (Chapter 18: verse 110.)

2. That all planets are in constant motion in their respective prescribed orbits. (Chapter 21: verse 33.)

3. That the sun and the moon revolve along their respective orbits, and each is debarred from encroaching upon the other's orbit. (Chapter 36: verse 40.)

I would leave it to Mr. Ridley's judgment to say whether:

1. This is not in exact conformity with the facts as disclosed by modern astronomy?

2. And if so, what quarrel can he, in all fairness, have with the God of the Quran?

MUHAMMED YAKUB KHAN, Imam, The Mosque, Woking, Surrey. [Mr. Ridley writes: "I merely stated that Islam, like Christianity and Judaism, believes in creation by God out of nothing. I have always understood that Islam accepts the Old Testament as divinely-inspired, and regards Moses—the reputed author of Genesis—as one of Muhammed's greatest predecessors in the role of Prophet. Does our correspondent deny this?"—ED.]

#### OBITUARY

WE are sorry to learn from our reader Mrs. Frances Coles (of Boksburg, Transvaal, South Africa) that her husband died on 31/10/58. Mr. Coles passed away peacefully at the age of 60 as a result of a stroke. He had spent a happy afternoon visiting friends in his car and died six hours later.

The cremation began to the strains of the Intermezzo from "Cavalleria Rusticana," one of his favourite tunes.

We extend our heartfelt sympathies to Mrs. Coles.

D.S.

**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. By 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.