

# The Freethinker

Volume LXXLX—No. 31

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Fivepence

IN A RECENT ISSUE of *The Empire News*, an interesting and amusing article by Charles Curran, appeared on the subject of astrology. As far as his positive conclusions were concerned, the writer indicated a decidedly sceptical attitude towards "the royal art" of divination as currently practised at large—and at length—in our contemporary press. Such an attitude is, in fact, rather surprising; the more so since his own periodical regularly runs a column on "What the Stars Foretell" and this column evidently satisfies one at least of its readers who recently wrote to congratulate the astrologer responsible, Mr. Frederick R. Ward, on the accuracy of his forecasts. In view of such a compelling testimonial, published under the heading, "Star of the Stars," we fear that Charles Curran must be a bit of a freethinker! Can the serpent of scepticism steal in surreptitious fashion not only into the Garden of Eden, but even into the holy sanctuaries of Fleet Street?

### Our New Religion

One of the most curious—and to a Rationalist, disheartening—facts about the present period is to be found in the fantastic current revival of the hoary delusion of astrology; the prehistoric conception that the individual future of the microcosm, man, can be read accurately and in detail in the face of the Heavens. This idea, which was already of immemorial antiquity when the oldest books in the Bible were composed—several of which, e.g., Job and Revelation indicate strong traces of astrological influence—undoubtedly represented in its early development a congruous feature in the geocentric outlook on the Universe. One has, for example, only to read the account given to Genesis—one based on much earlier Mesopotamian legends—to see that the creation of man—*Homo sapiens*—was what really interested the writer; the Universe was put in as a kind of afterthought; "He made the stars also." Astrology essentially perpetuates that kind of attitude; the principal function of the celestial bodies is to foretell, down to the minutest details, the terrestrial fortunes of mankind. The "royal art" is shot through and through with the primeval notion that man and his doings represent the primary interest, not only of man, but of the physical Universe of which he is the centre. One can, of course, understand and make allowance for such a view in a prehistoric age; it was then perhaps inevitable and was even useful in promoting genuine scientific discovery, since astronomy, the genuine article, is historically a kind of stepdaughter of astrology. The true grew out of the bogus. In looking for his alleged destiny in the stars, mankind laid the foundations of his present knowledge of the stars themselves. But all this was a very long time ago. Today, in a land and age that claim to be scientific, and which at least possesses a great deal of genuine scientific knowledge that was denied to the ancient "Wise men of the East" who cultivated their starry lore, the current wellnigh universal revival of astrology is most peculiar. For, from the number of its adepts, one might

almost describe astrology as our new religion or, to speak more accurately, as our old religion artificially rejuvenated. We are confronted with the disconcerting vista of evolution backwards.

### Why Astrology?

Mr. Curran points to some obvious objections to the cult, e.g., if astrology were really true, surely it could easily be proved to everyone's satisfaction by empirical observation and so forth. We need not pursue such arguments any further—except perhaps to indicate our complete fairness: our recognition that astrology is a rather more complex affair than suggested by the indiscriminate, mass-produced prophecies, each

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

## Why the Stars Foretell

By F. A. RIDLEY

catering for about one twelfth of mankind born in each "House" in the Zodiac. Even from the standpoint of the "art" of judicial astrology properly so-called, the kind of wholesale predictions indulged in by Messrs. Naylor and Company, appear more than somewhat dubious, as I was once informed by an undoubtedly erudite astrologer whom I met in the Library of the British Museum. He had nothing but contempt for this wholesale commercialised star-reading. However, we assume, here at least, that it is not necessary again to refute the high-sounding claims of the "royal art" to objective validity. It has often been done and perhaps most notably of all by that eminent Father of the Church, St. Augustine of Hippo who, when fighting a rival superstition, pulled out his heaviest rationalistic artillery (*cf Confessions*). But while it ought not to be necessary in 1959 to ask if astrology is true, it is very definitely necessary to ask the related question, why is astrology now able to make so spectacular a comeback? That is the proper question to ask. For, just as Chapman Cohen used to argue so devastatingly in relation to religion and in the case of astrology also, what we have to discover is not if it is true (we know that it isn't and can't be true) but why in an age of unprecedented scientific knowledge, this hoary prehistoric delusion still not only keeps going but appears even to possess more devotees than either Christianity or Spiritualism, to name only two of our most widely held ostensibly religious cults. The important question for us is not, "What the Stars Foretell" but why they do so, and in particular, why so many people believe—or at least half believe them.

### An Age of Fear

There is, unfortunately, no room for doubt about the present popularity of the starry cult; it stares one in the face whenever one opens a newspaper, particularly those which aim avowedly at monster circulations by the time-honoured method of giving people what they want—and not what they ought to want. No names, no pack-drill, as the old army saying went; and this current phenomenon is, we learn, by no means peculiar to this country. Why, again, this fantastic revival? Mr. Curran states the problem quite fairly, but his explanations, while no doubt true as far as they go, do not seem to be entirely adequate.

No doubt women are, in the mass, more prone to superstition than men, but I do not think that this fact, which is due to social causes and not to the lapse of Eve in primeval Eden, really goes far to explain the present meteoric revival of astrology—or at least, of a commercialised version of it. When Mr. Curran invokes the spectre of nuclear war he seems to be on firmer ground. In general, we would ascribe the current come-back of astrology to ultimate reasons of a sociological, rather than theological nature. Our age is one of fear and of insecurity, with even professedly rationalistic believers in evolution (like Bertrand Russell) only giving our species a 50-50 prospect of surviving this century. In such an age where hide-outs are becoming increasingly rare, the perennial uncertainty of the future induces a desire to know it. (Perhaps one day, space-travel may take us to the stars

instead). Hence the present growth of the star-cult *pari passu* with the ever-augmenting terror of war and proximate social breakdown. In earlier ages during which astrology has flourished, such as the Decline of the Roman Empire and the Reformation, similar conditions of fear and insecurity prevailed. The stars—or rather their terrestrial interpreters—satisfy the fearful curiosity and, since we live in an acutely commercialised era, hasten to cash in on it. In which connection, Mr. Curran's concluding argument does not appear to be very convincing, for he tells us that he will only take astrology seriously when "all the fortune tellers have been able to make fortunes for themselves." But at least, if we are to judge from their circulation, a good many of our contemporary astrologers must be doing quite nicely, thank you—and their lucky stars!

## Public Freethinking

By OSWELL BLAKESTON

"PUBLIC RELATIONS" has become such a respectable activity that the experts are known as "officers." One has to remember that the public relations "officer," for a firm or a political party or a government, is only concerned with getting the public to accept whatever his employer is doing.

Some of the techniques have been borrowed from the advertising practitioners, and they deserve public examination. For instance—imagine a room full of files with the names and addresses of people holding conflicting beliefs. In one file, let us say, there is the name of a professor who asserts that the absence of a certain trace element of metal in diet is responsible for arthritic pains; and the same file also holds the name of a professor who is sure that the presence of this same trace element is the cause of all arthritis.

Now, when the client places his order for an advertising campaign with the agent, the publicists can look up the files and contact the professor whose belief suits the claims of the advertiser.

Has "truth" ever fallen to such depths? For now it is prefabricated against eventualities. It is foreseen as something which is a choice of possibilities, a choice to suit the line chosen by whoever is out to exploit a line.

Note, too, the new respectability. The endorsement is not a bribed signature, a name given to (say) a brand of cigarettes by someone in the public eye who is merely willing to mumble with his tongue in his cheek that this is "the cigarette to end all cigarettes" in exchange for a pretty cheque. This backing up of the "truth" will be a sincere statement by a man who believes what he is saying, and it will carry just that much more insidious conviction.

"Oh," says the man in the street, "it was all just a stupid scare about the strontium in the milk. The experts have come out with a clear denial." They have—and they believe it. There is no trickery here. But if the authorities had wanted to say the opposite, the public relations department would have been able to produce the names of experts who maintain the opposite opinion.

This, surely, is a fine sort of relationship to have with the public—one which denies the public any chance of public freethinking.

It is quite terrifying to see the documentation in a good public relations office. Our advertising firm, for instance, might have the name and address of some old lady who worked as a nurse with a famous doctor and who is ready to swear that the doctor placed psychological factors above

hygiene; and the name and address of an old lady who also worked as a nurse under the same doctor, and who is ready to swear that he always put hygiene first.

Maybe one of the old ladies has a faulty memory, or perhaps she worked for the doctor at a different time, when he was holding different views; but the point for the public relations department is that both old ladies exist and both have a genuine claim to inner knowledge, which can be attested in headlines offering contradictory statements.

Infinite trouble is taken by research workers to compile such files. It is enough for the "officers" to know that selections of "truths" are waiting should the occasion arise when one of the variants might suit the inspired propaganda of the moment.

"Truth," in fact, has been reduced to the level of another secret weapon.

What can be done about it? First, freethinkers should make sure that they realise what is happening, and then that they should make others aware of this despicable stratagem. It is no use attacking the experts who say that lots of strontium is good for you, for they undoubtedly are sincere men who have their own data to back up their eccentric hypothesis. What we must attack is the system—blandly blanketed under the "public relations" departments—which files away the names of sincere experts who will be prepared to vouch that strontium is a threat to future generations (to be used in the case of "the enemy" dropping a bomb) and sincere experts who say that strontium builds bonny babies (to be used when we explode a bomb).

How do we restore the "truth" to its position of dependability? Need I say that the answer is—by freethinking. Freethinkers can point out that all this docketing by public relations workers is bound up with a false attitude—an assumption, inculcated by the old school system, that everything in life can be judged in part on the level of a game, when one side is bound to "win."

We all know the dire consequences of such an attitude in the case of war; but we must also realise the application when experts are produced to offer their guarantees for an opinion in a field of controversy. It is not necessary for one lot of experts to "win," for there may be some truth on both sides. It is for freethinkers to remind others that (say) Christian experts on both sides believe their country is "fighting for Right" in a war. Experts, in fact, must be regarded as men with limitations, who perhaps lack common sense or ethical awareness.

# An Open Letter

By ROBERT H. SCOTT (U.S.A.)

[The following letter was written to several Texas Legislators who had introduced a Bill to compel all school teachers to take a religious oath.]

GENTLEMEN,—As reported by the Associated Press, you have asked the Texas Legislature to pass a Bill requiring that teachers in that State's tax-supported schools and colleges and universities annually take an oath that they believe in the existence of a Supreme Being. You are quoted as saying that any person who does not believe in a Supreme Being ought not to be allowed to teach in such institutions.

This procedure speaks badly for the quality of intelligence and learning of you four gentlemen and of the men and women who elected you to legislative office. The procedure violates the fundamental democratic principle of equal freedom of speech and of conscience for everybody in all matters of opinion. No person who serves, or who aspires to serve, in a legislative capacity, should be ignorant of the fact that the existence of a God—any kind of God—is not a demonstrated truth but is purely a matter of opinion.

"God" is a religious belief; a belief is always and necessarily an opinion; and every opinion falls short of being certain knowledge. Therefore the existence of a Supreme Being is controversial. Atheism is one side of a controversial question or subject, of which theism (or Godism) is the opposite side.

It is fairly common knowledge that atheists, who disbelieve in the existence of a God, and agnostics, who suspend judgment as to the reality of such a being, are to be found principally in the higher intellectual and cultural levels of society, especially among the greater scientists. And scientists, inasmuch as they are the ones who know most about natural products and processes, would undeniably be the most likely to perceive in nature any traces (if any there were) of a Supreme Being.

The United States of America is, in the intent of its Founding Fathers, a free country. In a free country there is complete separation of religion and government and equal freedom of expression for all sides of any controversial question or subject. Consequently, in such a country a person has as good a right to say and to teach that there is no God, or that there may be no God, as he has to say or to teach that a God exists. In any country where, in practice, freedom of speech exists for one side of a given controversial subject or question but where equal freedom is denied to the opposite side, the tongue and the pen of every one of that country's citizens are to some degree shackled. Not one of its citizens is truly free.

Hence, it is an act of intolerant, benighted, and injurious bigotry for a legislator in any of the States of the American Commonwealth to seek to prevent a man or woman who is avowedly an atheist or an agnostic from teaching in a tax-supported school, college, or university; unless, of course, the ban is also meant to extend to include teachers who are professed God-believers. To seek to disable a person socially and/or economically on account of his or her atheism or agnosticism is to reveal not only an intellectual and cultural inadequacy; it also evinces a lack of understanding of the meaning, and a want of appreciation of the value, of equal freedom of expression for everybody in all matters of opinion.

Thomas Jefferson, the revered author of the American Declaration of Independence and twice a President of the United States, was keenly aware that the existence of a

Supreme Being is by no means an indisputable fact but is very much open to question. On August 10th, 1787, in a long letter to his young nephew, Peter Carr, he advised him to call to the tribunal of reason, "every fact, every opinion," and to question with boldness even the existence of a God, because if there be one, he must more approve of the homage of reason than that of blindfolded fear." And Jefferson, an anti-Christian, non-church-attending deist, who was Mr. Democracy himself, was a man of very superior intelligence, wide learning, and high moral character. (For Jefferson's anti-Christian sentiments, see his private correspondence, particularly as compiled by his grandson, Thomas Jefferson Randolph.)

The First Amendment to the Federal Constitution of the United States, conjointly with its clause respecting the free exercise of religion, specifically forbids Congress to make any law abridging the freedom of speech or of the Press. Clearly, that First Article of the precious American Bill of Rights throws its protective mantle over the atheist and the agnostic as well as the God-believer. And the First Amendment, as the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled, is made applicable to all the States of the American Union by the provisions of the Fourteenth Amendment which forbid any State to deprive any person of liberty without due process of law or to deny any person the equal protection of the laws. In its Everson Decision of 1947 the Supreme Court declared that "no person can be punished for entertaining or professing religious beliefs or disbeliefs." That declaration was repeated by the High Court in its famous and virtually unanimous McCollum Decision of 1948.

In my own home State of California its present Governor, while serving as State Attorney General in 1955, handed down a legal opinion on June 10th of that year in which he said: "Even atheists and agnostics are protected in their beliefs by the Constitution" This particular pronouncement, made by a practising Roman Catholic, is of special interest to me, for I have twice spoken on the radio in California as an atheist and in support of atheism as a point of view and as a way of life.

If you four gentlemen of the Texas Legislature really believe that the God-idea is a sound one—why should you object to the utterance of atheistic or agnostic views by public educators as long as equal opportunity of expression is afforded God-believing teachers? As the poet John Milton inquired: "Who ever knew Truth put to the worse in a free and open encounter?" As Jefferson said in his first inaugural address: "Error of opinion can always safely be tolerated where reason is left free to combat it." And as he said in his Notes on the State of Virginia in his answer to Query VII: "It is error alone that needs the support of government. Truth can stand by itself." If "God" cannot stand criticism on these terms, either in Texas or elsewhere—if, in short, the God-idea is unsound—then, assuredly, the God-belief is detrimental, not beneficial, to the human race, and the sooner it disappears from the human mind the better will it be for mankind.

Certain it is that neither the disbelief of the atheist nor the suspended judgment or incertitude of the agnostic as to the existence of a Supreme Being is inimical to personal goodness in any of its manifestations. Avowed atheists and agnostics are rarely to be found in prisons, jails and reformatories. The truly good man or woman knows as did Jefferson, that good conduct is its own ample reward and that bad conduct carries its own retribution.

## This Believing World

A correspondent to "News Chronicle" recently quoted a famous verse from Omar Khayyam—" . . . that of the myriads who Before us pass'd the door of Darkness through, Not one returns to tell us of the Road . . ."—and of course he was at once assailed by a Christian and a Spiritualist. The Christian waded in with, "In the New Testament we read of One who travelled that road and returned to assure us," just as if there was not the slightest doubt about it. It *must* be true because it's in the New Testament, and the New Testament must be true because Jesus returned "to assure us."

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**But the Spiritualist goes much further.** According to him, there are 250,000 people every Sunday night all over the country who prove that poor old Omar is "out of date." They all get (and believe in) regular communications from the "so-called dead." In fact, we now know much more about "the After-Life" than we know about "some regions of Brazil." From this it appears that both Omar and "the One who returned" have to take a back seat when faced with such overwhelming evidence from 250,000 people every week. All the same, we cannot help wondering why the "gifted folk" who provide us with such proof of the After-Life should so often be caught red-handed in unblushing fraud?

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**With the great tact which has always distinguished Mr. Krushchev, he told the Poles the other day—**Poland in spite of being a Russian satellite is predominantly Catholic—that he also attended church schools and "won a prize from the priest for knowing the Gospels by heart." All the same, he thought the best school was "the party school." We often wonder which of the two religions, Romanism and Communism, the patriotic Poles will eventually succumb to? Perhaps—dare we whisper it—it may be neither, but Freethought!

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**The Protestant Duke of Rutland** who married a Catholic girl in a register office—which after all is a legal marriage in this country—had his two-month-old son baptised a Roman Catholic. Poor little babe—he could not prevent this, and may indeed live to repudiate the religion thus thrust on to him. But what a farce it all is. And does the Roman Church *recognise* the marriage of the baby's mother?

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**The Church Assembly is very worried** because the relations between the Church and Industry are not exactly harmonious. Industry, by which is meant the "workers," appears completely apathetic towards everything that the Church can offer, even rejecting the claim, no doubt often made, that Jesus was not only a working and humble carpenter but also the greatest Carpenter that ever lived. A Report just issued admits that "the vast majority of our manual workers in the big industrial areas of this country are not active members of our Church, and since the war they have been exposed more than ever to secularising influences . . ." But surely "our Lord" could never have any difficulty in countering these horrid "secularising" influences?

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**It cannot be too strongly urged** that if the Church has failed to capture the workers, it is not the fault of the radio, TV, and practically all our newspapers, national and provincial, all of which are almost solid behind Christianity. Freethinkers, if they do appear on the radio or on TV, have to guard what they say—in other words,

they have carefully to censor themselves. Everything that can be humanly done by everybody in authority is done to see that the workers get religion rammed down their throats as much as possible—and yet we get this dismal Report of the Church's utter failure to rope in "Industry." What a tribute to the way we have undermined Christianity!

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**With one exception, Mr. Michael Redington** on TV the other Sunday brought a number of people who, pathetically and piously, told us what the Lord's Prayer meant in their lives. All these people were polished actors and actresses and talked as no mere believers could ever have talked—but it was so impressive to hear a negro, a charlady, schoolgirls, a housewife and of course the inevitable verger. This gentleman found no change in the Church after 40 years service, but there—think of what God meant to him, through the Lord's Prayer! How desperately is religion fighting for its life when this quite futile nonsense has to be brought in to save it!

**And here is a problem which** we hope that Jesus Christ in Heaven will do well to ponder over. In his Parish Magazine, the Rev. F. Simpson of Long Melford in Suffolk tells us of a parishioner who was on the point of death, and how he was asked to visit her, no doubt to give spiritual comfort with his last ministrations. Unfortunately, she was looking at an interesting programme on TV and did not wish to be disturbed! The problem is, ought she to have been disturbed or what? What would Jesus have done?

## Meditations

AS PROMISED, we print here some of the Meditations which Miss Nan Flanagan gave to children in the Catholic schools where she taught.

### Dying and Dead

Your end is nearing; you already have one foot on the line which separates this world from the next; the earthly house of your miserable body is breaking up; your veins are opening; your extremities are getting colder and colder; your chest is heaving in the increasing difficulty of breathing. Your family has bid you a last good-bye. The priest comes to administer Extreme Unction. Your friend puts a blessed candle in your hand and helps you to hold it; the prayer for the Last Agony is chanted; the servers respond: "Ora pro eu, Ora pro eu." Your pains and paroxysms increase; in your accelerated breathing, in the dimming of your sight you feel that your soul is tearing itself from your body.

Think of your dead body, already beginning to rot, being lowered into the tomb and covered with earth.

Meanwhile the supreme Judge at the wave of whose hand the heavens and earth tremble, calls indignantly to you: "Out of my sight, you cursed one!" Your Angel Guardian flies from you; you are surrounded by devils with their claws ready stretched out, to clutch you and fling you into those flames lighted by the Omnipotent God to torment those who have sinned against him. The flames lick your eyes, your throat, your entrails while the devils dance round jeering at you . . .

—NEXT WEEK—

THE HOLY COAT

By WALTER STEINHARDT

# THE FREETHINKER

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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.

Inquiries regarding Secular Funeral Services should also be made to the General Secretary, N.S.S.

## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### OUTDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (rear of Morley Street Car Park).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Messrs. CORINA and DAY.

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

London (Finsbury Square, E.C.2).—Every Wednesday, 1 p.m.: Messrs. L. EBURY and C. MCCALL.

London (Marble Arch).—Meetings every Saturday from 6 p.m. and every Sunday from 5 p.m.: Messrs. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER, C. E. WOOD and D. TRIBE.

London (Tower Hill).—Every 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).—Wednesdays, 1 p.m.; Sundays, 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.

Orpington Humanist Group.—Sunday, July 26th.: Mystery Raffle, assemble Chislehurst Railway Station. Bring packed lunch; tea available (No time given).

### INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Midland Institute Cinema, Paradise Street).—Sunday, August 2nd, 6.45 p.m.: A. R. WILLIAMS, "Are We Progressing?"

## Notes and News

THE ETHICAL UNION will be holding a Week-end Conference at High Leigh, Hoddesdon, Herts, from September 11th to 13th, 1959. After Dinner at 7 p.m. on the Friday, Mr. H. J. Blackham will open a discussion on "Humanist Thinking." Other speakers include Dr. Ronald Fletcher, on "Morality and Justice," Dr. P. M. Butler, on "Biology and Human Nature," Mr. Donald Ford, on "Humanism and Social Action," and Mr. Brian Groombridge, on "Is there a Humanist Art?" There will also be social events. Members of the National Secular Society are cordially invited to attend at the reduced fee of £2 15s. available to Ethical Union members. Full details may be obtained from Mr. M. L. Burnet, The Ethical Union, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London, W.8.

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In what the *Kentish Mercury* (19/6/59) calls "a scathing attack on television and the weekend motorist," the Rev. Frederick Pizzey, of All Saints' Church, Shooters Hill, blamed the car for keeping children away from Sunday school and people away from church, and TV for keeping people away from evening meetings. The

## The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged £239 0s. 3d.; Miss Brookes, 10s.; F. E. Papps, 5s.; C. E. Ratcliffe, £1; W.H.D., 2s. 6d.; B. Areff, £1 1s.; J. Barron, 10s.; Mrs. E. Gubbins, 5s.; T. H. Grimley, £1; Wm. S. McNeil (Glasgow), £2.—Total to date, July 24th, 1959, £245 13s. 9d.

latter have become almost impossible now, he tells us, and as for evening visiting by the clergy, it is "unwelcome" and "unrewarding." This was shown by three occasions recently when Mr. Pizzey visited families "about important matters calling for their attention." There was, he says, "no attempt to turn off the television set while I was trying to get my message home." Ah well! opinions must differ on what are "important matters."

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WRITING in the *Daily Express* (3/7/59) John Redfern is rather hard on the revisers of the Baptism and Confirmation services. They have, he says, "got rid of much richness. Instead of the grand march of the words in the Prayer Book they produce sometimes a spiritless shuffle." And he gives illustrations of this. But he should spare a little sympathy for the "20 scholars and noted parish priests" who tried to simplify the language of the Prayer Book. Renouncing "the devil and all his works, the vain pomp and glory of the world, with all covetous desires of the same and the carnal desires of the flesh" (the original wording) may, as Mr. Redfern thinks, be a "splendid terrifying question." "Do you renounce the devil and all his works, the covetous desires of the world, and the sinful lusts of the flesh?" (the new wording) may, be spiritless. The plain fact is that both are silly and no amount of simplification can make sense out of nonsense.

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We are indebted to the *Daily Express* for the latest proof of America's religious revival. "Three teenage convicts"—we read in Peter Chambers's "This is America" column (20/7/59)—"escaped from a prison road gang in Alabama, yesterday. State troopers recaptured them in a Baptist church, where they were praying for their freedom."

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EVEN Roman Catholics must have winced to read the pronouncements, of the Primate of Spain, Cardinal Pla y Deniel, Archbishop of Toledo. The 82-year-old celibate declared it was a mortal sin for engaged couples to walk the streets arm-in-arm, or to be anywhere alone together (*Daily Mail*, 11/7/59). Among other horrors, he listed mixed bathing, to be avoided "at all costs" as constituting a state "very close to sin and scandal"; and dancing. Indeed, among "diversions," he said, "probably none constitutes a graver and more frequent danger than dancing." "Modern dances," he continued, "among which we classify all those involving an embrace, are a serious danger for Christian morals, because they are very close to a state of sin." Oh! and the Cardinal also forbade the faithful to walk in the streets in shirt sleeves or low-cut dresses. We wonder how many young Spaniards will take him seriously?

**They know it all!** The Roman Catholic Church declared the belief in the Antipodes false and heresy.—This is papal infallibility.

[See *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*. A. D. White, vol. 1, page 105.]

T. T. PLUS.

# "Are the Gospels Really True?"—1

By H. CUTNER

THE ABOVE is the title of some articles which have been appearing in the *Sunday Express* written by (we are confidently told) a Mr. Geoffrey Ashe whose portrait is given, and who is an "author and historian." No doubt he is an author; but what interested me in these articles was that, as an historian, he seemed to belong to those Christian writers who flourished even before Renan wrote. Of what may be called New Testament Criticism, he seems to me to know almost nothing.

Mr. Ashe belongs to the school of Biblical historians who, let us say, find traces of a town or towns on the Jericho site; therefore the stories in the Bible connected with it prove the Bible must be true. There was a time when—quite rightly—Christians despised positive proofs of the authenticity and credibility of the Holy Book. It was completely *inspired* by God Almighty, and how can the Creator of all things be wrong? They stoutly refused to enter into any debate on a Book which had all the marks of God's Goodness, Mercy, and Unfailing Help. To discuss the Bible with blatant infidels was something which all Christians should shun as Devil's Work.

Mr. Ashe goes into Bethlehem—this proves that "our Lord" was born there. He goes into Nazareth—this proves that Jesus spent his boyhood there, otherwise how was he called "Jesus of Nazareth"? The fact that there is no mention of Nazareth anywhere whatever at the time Jesus and his parents lived there, is literally of no account. As Mr. Ashe would scornfully point out—is not Jesus named "of Nazareth," and do we not find the town named in God's Precious Word? What can infidels do when we get God Almighty himself speaking?

Mr. Ashe believes *both* birth stories. The reason is very simple. It appears that the shepherds, Herod, and the Wise Men, all *expected* a birth. How does Mr. Ashe know? It says so in Matthew and Luke. These Gospel writers *must* be telling the truth because the shepherds, Herod, and the Wise Men, expected a birth, and as all these gents expected the birth, Matthew and Luke *must* be true. And this also goes of course for Mark and John. Whether Mr. Ashe has ever heard of the logician's "arguing in a circle," I don't know. Probably not; but this particular way of proving that the Gospels are true seems the prerogative of so many really modern writers on our national newspapers wherever they are allowed to prove the Gospels are true.

It appears also that Jewish rabbis made a study of Old Testament prophecy—and what did they discover? That the birth of the Messiah would be in Bethlehem—and if that does not prove that Jesus was the Messiah, then nothing else will.

Now it is quite true that in the Old Testament, a few passages can be found in which the writers "prophecy" the coming of a Messiah, a descendant of David, who would be born in Bethlehem at some time because David was born in Bethlehem. But this is quite a different thing from saying that the prophesied Messiah was bound to be Jesus Christ.

At a time of great stress, when the people of Palestine began to feel that they were a nation, they were ready to fight for freedom, and looked forward to a Messiah who would bring about that freedom. But what happened? Palestine was made a kind of battle ground for the Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Assyrians, but above all the Romans, who did their best not only to abolish free-

dom in their conquered countries, but had no scruples in exterminating all who opposed them if possible. Their greatest generals were sent to Judea—Vespasian, Titus, and later Hadrian. Their trained legions made mincemeat in the end of the unfortunate inhabitants; and the surviving Jews later derided one of their Messiahs, Bar Cochba, as a fraud. Did Jesus ever help the Jews to overthrow their Roman tyrants?

That there were Jewish converts to the new cult later called Christianity is of course quite true. And no doubt they helped to perpetuate the myth that Jesus was the Messiah of the Jews. No contemporary Jew says a word about Jesus as a Messiah or as anything else. He was completely unknown. Not until the four Gospels began to circulate, that is, after the year 180 A.D., was there any talk about Jesus being the Jewish Messiah with any canonical authority. As is well known, the Jews have always enjoyed being called the "Chosen Race"—why? Because they call themselves so in the Old Testament. In the same way, Jesus is the Messiah of the Jews because the Christians say so. No Jew—except renegades—has ever said so. The prophecies in the Old Testament are no more prophecies of Jesus than they are of jam tarts. If Mr. Ashe will provide me with a few, I'll gladly examine them. Those I have examined at the behest of Christians are simply passages which they have taken from the Septuagint and woven into their mythical life of Jesus. As the late Rev. R. J. Campbell said when he was trying to put some truth into Christianity in the days of his popularity—"The noble 53rd of Isaiah, for example, and all similar passages about the prophetic conception of the suffering servant of God have literally nothing to do with Jesus." But to people like Mr. Ashe, who has walked in Bethlehem, it may well be useless to expose the deliberate lies about Jesus being the Jewish Messiah so fervently believed in by all Fundamentalist Christians. The only prophecies which can be said truly to have happened are those written after the event.

To show his erudition, Mr. Ashe quotes Professor Gilbert Murray on astrology to prove that after all there might have been a "Star"—the Star of Bethlehem. It might have been the conjunction of "two planets." In fact, visitors recently have been told in the London Planetarium that "astronomical calculation" proved that there was actually a "conjunction" between the "royal" planet Jupiter and Saturn "at the right time"—that is, "in the constellation of the Fish." This accounts for Jesus being called a Fish. Well, well. Here, Mr. Ashe has hit the right nail on the right head, more or less. For somewhere during the period about 2,000 years ago, astrologers discovered that the sun had left the sign of the Zodiac called Aries the Ram (or Lamb) and was now in Pisces the Fish (or the Fishes). So Jesus, who had been called the Lamb of God, was hastily changed into a Fish and every effort was made to give him a Fishy title. But though we are still in the sign of Pisces, Christians after a few centuries, preferred Jesus to be called a Lamb rather than a Fish, which is why the Fish symbol for him has largely disappeared. Perhaps Mr. Ashe can bring it back.

After the miraculous "birth" of Jesus which, when compared with the miraculous births of Buddha, Krishna, and many other Gods, all of whom had at least as veritable existence as Jesus, we hear nothing of him except when he made a solitary appearance at the age of twelve

## The Christian Way of Life

By E. A. MILES

WE HAVE HEARD of the British Way of Life, and the American Way of Life, and the Democratic Way of Life, and now we are being bombarded with assertions regarding the Christian Way of Life.

The phrase "way of life" seems to be a convenient title for impressing people without the necessity of providing a definite philosophy or exact evidence as to what the title means. It is one of those nebulous phrases that Christians are apt to use, the implication being that the Christian Way of Life is superior to any other Way. But is it?

What exactly is this way of life? If a person with no preconceived ideas on the subject were to be faced with this question, he would pursue two courses in order to find an answer. He would go to the Bible, the sacred book of the Christians, and he would study the lives of Christians, prominent or otherwise, in order to find the Way.

Let us take the former course first. Let us look for guidance in the Bible. Matthew VI: 25 says, "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on." In relation to this definite directive, now let us look at the Christians we know. First the prominent ones—the Pope, the Cardinals, the Archbishops and the Bishops. Do they take thought for what they shall eat and drink, or what they shall "put on"? Let your minds consider for a moment their purple and fine linen, their velvets and laces, their palaces. And their paunches.

Then let us look at the smaller fry, the Christian businessmen. Do they eat less, drink less, give less thought to their apparel than the non-Christian? Does their religion come first and their business second? It has been my experience to observe that the higher one looks in the business world, the more does the attitude to business become a religion.

Let us now consider family life, Matthew X: 34 says, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household."

Matthew XIX: 29, "And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life."

Luke XIV: 26, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple."

And yet we are told *God is love*. Now, when ministers of religion speak of the "Christian Way of Life," which way do they mean? Do they mean the way advocated by Jesus, according to the Bible? That is, desertion of the family, dissension within the family, hatred of the family? Or are they superimposing the morality that has grown out of the experience of mankind on to a Christianity that is full of confusion and contradiction and absurdity?

War is a very vital issue at the present time. What does Jesus say about war? He says, Matthew X: 34, "I came not to send peace, but a sword." Matthew XXIV: 6, "And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars; see that ye be not troubled; for all these things must come to pass—but the end is not yet." Luke XIX: 27, "But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over

beating a bunch of rabbis in debate to a frazzle. After this striking appearance, we know nothing from the Gospels of what happened to him until he was thirty. But surely Mr. Ashe knows that the Apocryphal Gospels tell us quite a lot about him as a boy and youth, and even after his "Crucifixion"? It is true that the Roman Church has condemned these Gospels as "Apocryphal," but nobody knows why—not even Mr. Ashe. The incidents they record are at least as credible as those in the "true" Gospels. Miracles are miracles whether in one or the other, and of course Mr. Ashe believes in miracles, as indeed he ought to. He claims they could not have been "invented"? But why? Because you have to account for Jesus!

The Gospels are in fact all quite true because they tell us of Jesus. Jesus is God and the Son of God because we are told about him in the Gospels. What an adept is Mr. Ashe in this "arguing around a circle"! And what a pity it is that one of his friends does not give him a simple lesson in logic.

It would be useless to discuss all the articles which Mr. Ashe has given the world. They are quite "infantile" as, for example, when he gives us the "dates" for the Gospels. Nobody knows *when* they were written, or *where*, or even for sure in what language. Nobody knows how, according to Christian history, some "unlearned" Jews managed to make perfect translations of all that Jesus said—or nearly all—from Aramaic into Greek, so that Romans, who spoke Latin, would be able to read them. Nobody knows how it is that the Gospels were quite unknown by name until about the year 180 A.D. in Lyons — of all places. Nobody knows why they were not known in Palestine.

As for Jesus, there is not a scrap of contemporary evidence outside these Gospels and a few Christian writers (about whom we know almost nothing) that there ever was such a person.

If Mr. Ashe can provide evidence which would stand up in a court of law, let him produce it.

Christianity and belief in Jesus depends on "faith," and not on evidence, as most Christians who really believe, know perfectly well. Articles like those of Mr. Ashe have never convinced a well-read unbeliever, and are in general treated as they should be with derision by anybody who knows even a modicum of New Testament criticism.

### FROM SOUTH AFRICA

WRITING IN THE FREETHINKER on June 5th, 1959, D. Penketh said he would not be surprised if the ban by the South African Government on Bertrand Russell's *Why I am not a Christian* had caused the demand for this book to rise tremendously. Here in South Africa the importation of banned literature is forbidden under severe penalties, but there is no internal censorship. The Rationalist Association of South Africa plans to publish the essay in Afrikaans. In the meantime duplicated copies in English have been distributed in hundreds to satisfy local curiosity. Requests for further copies have come in from many parts of the country and the Association has gained many new members.

★

At a meeting held in Johannesburg on July 5th, representatives of the local and Cape Town rationalists decided on the formation of a Rationalist Association of South Africa. The Rationalist Association of Johannesburg, after nearly four years of existence, thus becomes merged in a national organisation, with branches in the two largest cities and good prospects of development.

them bring hither, and slay them before me." Luke XXII: 36, "And he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one."

Now certain people engaged in the manufacture and testing of hydrogen bombs and missiles with nuclear war-heads should feel quite easy in their minds. What matter if radioactive fall-out causes the deaths or disfigurement of thousands of people? What matter if we teeter on the brink of a devastating war? "Dinna fash yoursel."

Jesus said, trouble not about war, for these things must come. Luke XXI: 9, "When ye shall hear of wars and commotions, be not terrified, for these things must first come to pass." So that settles it. Although why we have Christian Pacifists, I cannot imagine. Haven't they read the Bible?

And then, of course, we come to the status of women. Count ten, ladies, and don't let your indignation get the better of you. 1 Cor. XIV: 34, "Let your women keep silence in the churches; for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home; for it is a shame for women to speak in the church." So there you are, ladies, the next time you want to know anything, ask the man of the house. And if he doesn't know, show him the Bible. 1 Tim. II: 11, "Let woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence."

Shades of Baroness Wootton, who refused to take the customary oath of allegiance on the Bible when she was installed in the House of Lords!

What exactly do Christians have in mind when they advocate the Christian Way of Life?

It would be illuminating, perhaps to try an experiment. Let us suggest to the parson and the Christian businessman that he give up his salary or profit, that he forsake his family, and if he think about his wife and children at all, he think about them with hatred; that he go about urging people to trouble not about war, but to sell their clothes and give the proceeds to the Government towards the cost of making hydrogen bombs.

[Reprinted from the *New Zealand Rationalist*.]

## CORRESPONDENCE

### RELIGION IN SCHOOL

Mr. J. Toudic's letter on page 192 is the sanest yet published on the subject of religious education of children. Let us hope that many parents will follow his lead. Comparative religion is a fit subject for lessons in history, geography, etc. Morality should be taught with literature and language. Has Leigh Hunt's little poem "Abou ben Adhem" ever been taught to little children in school? It is eminently suitable for them. Similarly there are many delightful little French poems which teach a high morality divorced from religion, such as "*Donnez-vous la main*." Somewhat similar little poems no doubt exist in all languages. Christian morality is slavish and degrading because based on rewards. Children should be guarded from it, and taught the higher morality of Atheism, viz., that virtue is its own reward.

W. E. HUXLEY.

### THE TWO-FACED GOD

After the Sputnik God . . .! In the *People* (July 5th) we find a letter referring to a "back number" and to Christ's face in the snow, re-printed *ad nauseam*. Originally this picture appeared in *Psychic News* some 40 years ago, and it was explained away as a fraud by the Editor of *Psychic News*, a few weeks after it appeared in the *People*. However Jesus's face will keep nosing into the news and it seems that in the *Sunday Mail* of June 28th, we again find him peeping at us through the snow (he must

be a little frozen by now)—a variation on the idea we used to be given of the Lord peeping through a gap in the clouds to see if we were all being good God's children. On April 9th, 1955, a series of "photographs of the Holy Shroud" appeared in *Picture Post*, showing another face of Jesus; this being the face he showed to the world at his crucifixion. A far different kind of face, with features very much different from those in the snow of the *People*, *Psychic News*, etc.

In the *Picture Post* version, which was the one given by the grace of Group Captain Cheshire, we find all the marks of the suffering of "Our Lord," namely the Crown of Thorns, Holes in holy wrists, Side and Ankles, Scourging, etc.; and also a rather noble-looking beard, which unfortunately more-or-less covered this face of Jesus, giving a rather old looking face, and at 33 years of age!

To what I suppose we should call our sorrow, I find that this "Holy Shroud" was the result of a painting by an artist who confessed to his "sin" and I find in Addis and Arnold's *Catholic Dictionary* that the Bishop of Troyes appealed to Pope Clement VII in 1389 to stop veneration of the "Holy Shroud." The Pope therefore decided that the shroud should be exhibited only as a representation of the "real shroud" of Christ. Will other faces of Jesus please make a speedy application to me, Medicate, c/o THE FREETHINKER. They will receive due consideration for inclusion among my "sacred relics!"

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