

The Freethinker

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IN AN EARLIER ARTICLE, I drew attention to the conspiracy of celestial origin which nowadays appears to have been hatched against both THE FREETHINKER and against me in particular. It is not often that writers in these columns are requested to deal with not only the Christian God, Jesus Christ of dubiously historical memory, but with two much more ancient deities, Mithra and Jehovah, of whose historical existence there does not, or at least so I gather from the experts, appear to be any proof whatsoever. Taking gods as they should be taken—that is as a reflex of the religious longevity of their worshippers, it can scarcely be doubted, even by our Hampstead Heath fraternity of neo-Mithraists, that Jehovah (or Jahveh, to be particularly accurate) has — shall we put it? — demonstrated more divine staying-power than has Mithra. For Jehovah, by a most remarkable combination of circumstances, has not only been able to live in exile for some eighteen centuries as the still operative god of the faithful Wandering Jews, but has in recent years staged a remarkable come-back as the Palestinian deity of his resurrected Chosen Race. For the modern Zionist State of Israel, under David-Ben-Gurion, has again achieved in 1948 the self-same conquest of the Holy Land by methods broadly similar to those by which — according to the Old Testament records, Joshua-Ben-Nun succeeded in extirpating the Canaanites at some unknown period, probably in the second Millennium B.C. Jehovah is consequently a going concern now in 1959. One might almost say that, due to International Jewry, he is still a figure in world affairs and not like his former celestial competitor, Mithra, merely a curiosity on Hampstead Heath. For the Jewish worshippers of Jehovah have survived the systematic Nazi attempt to exterminate them, *viz.* to treat the Jews as the Canaanites were treated by Joshua; and have restored their tribal god to the Holy Land and to the Holy City which he graciously bestowed upon them in ancient times, though in a most undemocratic manner.

Zionist arguments

[N.B.—In the following paragraphs I use the term "Zionists" exclusively for the present supporters of the State of Israel, since the current terms, Jews and Zionists are not synonymous.]

Broadly speaking, a supporter of the modern State of Israel, founded in 1948 as a result of a prolonged campaign of violence and terrorism against, first, the British Mandatory Power, and later against the aboriginal Arabs, could rely on one of three possible lines of argument: either the Zionists have an inalienable right to reoccupy Palestine because Jehovah gave it to them for ever by a special covenant recorded in the Holy Bible of Judaism, the Old Testament, which is the consistent argument of the religious Zionists; or else they can adopt one of the mutually contradictory arguments for secular justification taken up by my secular Zionist critics in THE FREETHINKER, *viz.* either Israel has a legitimate judicial right to exist because bestowed upon it by some international body (the former

League of Nations) or by some international diplomatic covenant (the Balfour Declaration) or else one can invoke the simple right of conquest, the verdict of history! Of my two secularist critics, one, Mr. Shorrocks, adopts the former of these positions and invokes the now somewhat ancient shades of Mr. Balfour and the League of Nations. Whereas Mr. Hull plunges in boldly with the argument of naked force with which Hitler would certainly have agreed.

By exactly the same argument, he was justified in exterminating the European Jews, just as his ancient Zionist predecessor, Joshua, was entitled to exterminate the ancient Canaanites, or the Jehovist prophet Samuel was entitled to "hew Agag in pieces before the Lord."

Please be logical, Mr. Hull, since you yourself have invoked the logic of conquest, and admit this.

An Anti-Zionist Critique

As I have already noted in my former article, "Remembering Zion," there is one, and only one, logically consistent argument for the present State of Israel, and it is one that no Freethinker could use. The Jews have a moral and inalienable right to own Palestine because Jehovah gave it to them.

Naturally, I do not myself believe it since I am both a Gentile and a sceptic. But I do not deny that it is a logically consistent argument; it stands or falls on one's own belief — or non-belief in Jehovah. As for the arguments of the secular Zionists of which Messrs. Hull and Shorrocks furnish us with examples, I am surprised to see such mutually contradictory misstatements appearing in THE FREETHINKER. If Mr. Hull's appeal to the rights of conquest justified a million Zionists, armed with the weapons of the Industrial Age in conquering the still-feudal Arabs, the self-same argument as I have already noted, justified the Gestapo in exterminating the unarmed Jews in Europe with equivalent modern military techniques. Does Mr. Hull really believe this? And exactly the same reasoning would and still may justify the forty-odd millions of Arabs in reconquering Palestine; when their present newly discovered revenues from oil enable them to buy enough modern weapons to get their own back. Mr. Hull, on his own logic could only applaud such a reconquest, for "might is right" everywhere. What an argument for an alleged Freethinker! It would justify *anything* — the Inquisition included! As for Mr. Shorrocks, he contradicts his fellow-Zionist flatly, for the League of Nations, whose authority he invokes, was, however ineffectual in practice, at least founded with the aim of substituting the "reign of law" in international affairs for precisely that arbitrament of violence which Mr. Hull invokes in the more recent case. Actually, Mr. Shorrocks is wrong even in his facts. Neither the Balfour Declaration made during the 1914-18 War, nor the League of Nations intended to set up a *State* of Israel, armed to the teeth and ruled by a few Rabbis like the present one. What they did intend to do, was something

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

Jehovah and Modern Zionism

By F. A. RIDLEY

quite different: to establish a Jewish National Home, a bi-racial society in Palestine under a British Mandate derived from the League of Nations. The Zionists eventually got their State by wholesale terrorism, assassinating both British soldiers and Arab Nationalists, thus making the continuance of the Mandate impossible. The same terror was ruthlessly applied against non-Zionist Jews. My friend, George Maranz, the Jewish — but anti-Zionist — publicist, was literally expelled from Palestine at the point of a revolver by armed Zionists of Ben-Gurion's own organisation, who gave him 24 hours' notice to quit Palestine or be killed! Messrs. Hull and Shorrock can find the episode described in detail in Maranz's brilliant book, *Le Malediction d'Esdras* ("The Curse of Ezra"), but they will have to go to France, as it appears to be unobtainable in this country. Superior armaments and naked terror were the real foundations of the Zionist State; not Geneva or Balfour.

Chosen Races, Old and New

In his book, Maranz made a remark on "Chosen Races, old and new," which deserves to become classical. He wrote: "Both the Nazis and the Zionists know *what* a chosen race is; they only disagree *which* it is." Precisely; but I would remind my critics that the history of chosen races and their States forcibly set up by conquest, is not an encouraging one to would-be imitators. The ancient Zionists were driven out of their Holy Land for 18 centuries, and their Temple was burnt to the ground. The modern German apostles of the Aryan chosen race similarly brought devastation upon their unhappy land. The Zionists of today had better beware lest history should repeat itself, for they, too, are surrounded by enemies. They should take to heart one of the wise sayings of their sacred book: "Agree with thine enemy whilst thou art in the way; lest, perchance misadventure shall overtake thee." *Verb sap!*

An Atheist in the Garden

By LESLIE HANGER

"ALL THIS IS EXCELLENTLY OBSERVED" answered Candide, "but let us cultivate our garden." These words may be said to be the fruit of all the wisdom of Voltaire. Bernard Shaw in his *Black Girl* could come to no better conclusion. After various theological adventures, the comely young negress could find no better deity than a red-headed Irishman who employed himself with a spade in the intervals of providing her with children. Alexander Pope was another who sang the praises of a horticultural life.

Happy the man whose wish and care
A few paternal acres bound,
Content to breathe his native air
In his own ground.

There is another quotation that springs to mind concerning gardens; the one about being "nearer God's heart in a garden." As a simple atheist, I have always been puzzled by this for, if the almighty deity is omnipresent, surely it is blasphemous nonsense to suggest it is possible to be nearer to him in one place than another? Yet many pious persons set up this statement in their gardens. I suspect the silly people don't understand their own religion.

An equally silly quotation springs to mind: "God made the country and man made the town." Far better to pay tribute to the toil and sweat of the farm worker, whose back-breaking task has been to make the countryside vastly different from its natural state. Even the New Forest, which looks wild enough to the passing tourist, has been so changed by the forester that the Conqueror would not recognise his own. And, when digging one's own garden, it seems certain that the creations of the deity are mostly weeds. Weeds, pests, diseases — springing up, scattered and haphazard without plan or direction; only united in a common tenacity, under whose attack the garden would soon degenerate into a formless jungle. Weeds, all struggling to strangle each other, ignorant of mercy or compassion. If there is a deity behind this attack, then the gardener is opposed to, and in constant conflict with him.

What is a weed anyway? A comprehensive, though not altogether satisfactory definition would be, a plant growing where it is not wanted. In a hedgerow, charming little flowers with romantic names like Mountain Willow Herb or Shepherd's Purse add beauty to a country walk; but in the garden, when one is trying to grow lovely flowers with such unlikely names as President Hoover, Loomis

V20, or Glory of Heamstede (wherever that is) wild flowers become annoying weeds to be ruthlessly destroyed. In the light of divine creation, these weeds must be part of God's primitive plan for "preserving the balance of Nature" as it is usually known; by which means those forms of life that have evolved with a tendency to over-produce get their surplus destroyed by disease or starvation, or get killed and eaten by predators. So we have fish that produce millions of eggs, and oak trees producing millions of acorns in order that their species may survive. The waste of life, animal and vegetable — by God's methods — is staggering.

The quality of our present day grain — originally a wild grass — is perhaps the greatest triumph of human skill over God's passion for weeds, pests and diseases. Yet approximately one-third of the world's production of grain is destroyed annually by pests alone, while a large proportion of the world's population never in their lives have enough to eat and millions die of starvation every year.

It is interesting to reflect that there are still hordes of people who believe the Bible story that the progenitors, two by two, male and female (including those not generated sexually?) of those pests and germs and swarms of other bacteriological horrors, were preserved with the utmost care in Noah's Ark under the personal supervision of their Creator. Incidentally, what happened to the whole world's vegetation (including our weeds) which was forgotten and left outside?

On top of this appalling loss of grain, we have the colossal destruction of foodstuffs caused every year by storms, floods, droughts and diseases. These unpleasant truths are conveniently forgotten at our Harvest Thanksgiving services. Yet all major disasters are legally classified as "Acts of God" and are presumably held as secret mental reservations among our thanksgivings.

So, as we place our hand on the spade and the hoe and resolve to "cultivate our garden" it is with the sobering thought that if there is a deity, he is not on our side!

NEXT WEEK

RELIGION & POLITICS IN EASTERN NIGERIA

By A. N. EZEABASILI

What is the Anti-Christian Case?

By GEOFFREY ASHE

TO APPEAR IN THE FREETHINKER is a novel experience for me, and in accepting the invitation to do so I am not concerned so much with controversy as with clarification. Christian belief obviously presents difficulties, but I am not persuaded that a coherent anti-Christian position exists at all. On what grounds is it maintained, now, in 1959, that the events in the New Testament did not happen; and if they did not, then what did? Coming down from Voltaire to the present, I do not find a case gradually building up, but only a series of anti-Christians contradicting each other.

I would like to comment here on three major lines of attack: the attack on the Miraculous, the attack by way of Comparative Religion, and the more complex and detailed attack on the New Testament as history.

A miracle, in Christian terms, means a divinely-ordained exception: an event outside all rules, not humanly explicable, predictable, or repeatable; not effected by human will, but by God for his own purposes, through Christ or otherwise. Such things may supposedly happen in response to the prayers of saints, but the saint is no thaumaturge, working controlled wonders through some secret of his own; miracles are not magic.

Does the opposition give any reason for rejecting them? Apparently not. It begs the question. Here is Renan:

That the Gospels are in part legendary is evident, since they are full of miracles and of the supernatural.

(*Life of Jesus*, Thinker's Library, 1935, page 6.)

But why does that make it evident? We are left to infer that Renan subscribes to the same dictum as Matthew Arnold, "Miracles do not happen." Further on (p. 22) he seems to say otherwise, but his example shows that he is thinking of magic, and miracles remain untouched. Lazarus is resuscitated by a cheap and incongruous hoax, the Resurrection is almost skipped with a promise to explain later how the "legend" originated.

This is quite typical. The logic runs as follows: "Miracles don't happen, therefore these miracles didn't, therefore we are justified in going to any lengths to explain them away." Flawless — If I accept the major premiss. But why should I? It is a pure dogma.* Nobody can begin to prove it. The disproof of miracles A and B has no necessary bearing on C. Miracles, by definition, lie outside systematic induction; exceptions, by definition, cannot come under a general principle. You can accept Arnold's dogma, thereby getting a formidable amount of explaining-away on your hands, or you can reject it. If you reject it you are on firmer ground philosophically than the dogmatic anti-miraculist. I would willingly argue from Bertrand Russell's discussion of induction (e.g., *History of Western Philosophy*, 1947, pp. 699-700), but space forbids.

The views of scientists, as such, carry no more weight here than anyone else's, since miracles are outside the scope of their qualifications. I could name quite a number who have believed in miracles; including the Gospel miracles; but not because of a train of scientific reasoning. They have simply grasped that the anti-miraculous dogma is a redundant axiom, which science can do without.

* If God does not exist there may still be exceptional events. These, however, will not be miracles, and the New Testament in general will fall to the ground. But atheism must be either simply affirmed (question-begging again) or argued philosophically, in which case the entire debate shifts to another level. For a discussion in the present terms to have point on either side, God's existence must be provisionally regarded as possible.

I am concerned only to rebut the attack on miracles, not to argue in their favour. The case for a miracle not observed first-hand must rest on considerations of testimony, congruity, and other matters — criteria which, rightly used, have been enough to explode the vast majority. The unexploded remnant is small by comparison, but it does exist, and it includes the miracles in the Gospels.

Miracles overlap Comparative Religion, since those attributed to Christ are sometimes explained (though most imperceptively) as borrowed from other cults, with the aim of contriving a synthetic Saviour.

Comparative Religion, that great anti-Christian weapon, strikes me now as one of the strongest reasons for Christian belief. The case has turned out to cut the other way. The alleged parallels, Attis and the rest, fall short. Christian doctrine affirms what is not found in older religions and could not have been put together from them. We are confronted with the unique historical Incarnation of God — not a god, and not just one fairy-tale saviour among many. Behind this Incarnation hovers a swarm of convergent hints at it and dreams of it, but hints and dreams only. And this picture is what we would expect to see, if Christian doctrine were true: the Praeparatio Evangelica, and the fulfilment and transcendence of myth by the actual Deity.

This is so, not only with the main attack, but with some of the incidental ones, like the accumulation of "virgin births." There are a few dubious cases in mythology of parthenogenesis among the gods; there are legends of mortal women conceiving through supernatural intercourse; but there is not, I think, a single story before Christ of an historical person born of a virgin. (Gresham Machen's analysis appears conclusive on this point.) Hints and dreams, but no more: fulfilment and transcendence in Christ alone.

The heaping-up of Attises and Osirises and bulls and astrological fish only strengthens the Christian case. To weaken it, one would have to produce a Christ before Christ, and nobody has done so. The first Dead Sea Scroll interpreters, like Edmund Wilson, professed to have at last pulled it off, but Gaster and others have shown how much too hasty they were. Krishna comes nearer, but he does not work either, as anybody will see who studies the Mahabharata instead of studying summaries of it.

If the Incarnation did not happen, what did? Observe how strangely the Gospels handle it. Their central figure, considered as merely human, is an elaborately incredible blend of madness and shrewdness, arrogance and humility, ferocity and forgiveness. If he is the "Logos" as well as Man, the main paradox throughout is resolved. But could this enigma have been conceived and put into literary form by a scattered rabble of rather second-rate people, in an age when imaginative fiction was scarcely being written at all?

Group-theories of the authorship of Shakespeare are admitted to be fantastic, yet such a group-authorship would be child's play beside the manufacture of Christ. A Free-thinker may declare himself personally unimpressed by Christ, just as some readers are unimpressed by the works of Shakespeare; but the enormous impression made by each is an historical fact; something quite exceptional, not haphazard committee-work, was required to produce it. And it is no use murmuring "Paul" if you insist that the

(Continued on page 348)

This Believing World

So at long last some Protestant Theological Professor in New York has discovered that, after all, the Gospel of John is "historically the most accurate." He has come to this conclusion because "there is a remarkable similarity between John and the Dead Sea scrolls," and because "it is probable that John was actually a member of the Essene Community." But exactly how this proves that John is "historically accurate" at all eludes us. If the Dead Sea scrolls were written about B.C. 100, and John copied them about the year 100 A.D. setting the scene midway between, it surely proves that John is historically inaccurate!

★

Moreover — are we to infer now that the other Gospels are "historically" inaccurate? Were they also copied from the Dead Sea scrolls, but inaccurately copied? The truth is that, as most Christian theologians have had sadly to acknowledge, if the picture of Jesus given by John is true, then the picture given by the Synoptics must be false. There is no escaping that damaging fact. So far, no Christian writer has been able to reconcile John with the other Gospels — except by saying so. This fact cannot be gainsaid.

★

In a United Church of Canada publication, Hell, the Soul, eternal damnation, and prayers for the dead, have been all solemnly rejected. It took a committee five years to come to this rejection. What the Church of Rome, with that great champion of a literal Hell, Father Furniss, at its side will now say of this summary dismissal of one of its greatest weapons — the weapon of fear — we shudder to think.

★

Then there is the question of prayers for the dead from which the Roman Church has always made a handsome profit, especially by foisting something called "Purgatory" on to its credulous sheep — the "place" where sinners have to wait (as in a condemned cell) before knowing the awful, or otherwise, sentence judged by the Almighty to be their eternal lot for "disbelieving" something or other. No respectable Church can possibly give up Purgatory.

★

The Chairman of the United Church Committee which is responsible for these "heretical" changes in Christian belief thinks the "intellectuals" in the Church will have no difficulty in accepting them, but is not so sure about laymen. They are, he insists, "30 or even 50 years behind in their thinking." But are not the intellectuals in the Roman Church 1900 years behind in their thinking?

★

A 14-year-old boy who came before the magistrates at Wimbledon for theft recently was told "to listen to the preacher in church a little more," and so behave himself better when he came out. But all boys and girls are taught religion at school and this does not appear to prevent some from stealing or even committing more violent crimes. What evidence has ever been produced that religion is any deterrent whatever to crime? Who says so?

★

So at last a member of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals has had the courage to say that the Christian "bless-the-pets" services are actually *cruel* to animals. It scares them! Isn't that just too bad? Don't the dear little pets know that Jesus, the greatest pet-lover the world has ever seen, is always thinking about them, his heart full of love, especially for the hundreds of thousands of animals kicked and tortured by his Christian followers every year? Animal pets scared of Jesus? — perish the thought!

The South African Minister for External Affairs, Mr. Louw, has been accusing the Archbishop of Cape Town, who is on a lecturing tour in the United States, of a "blasphemous" attack on South Africa. The Archbishop opposes the segregation policy of Mr. Louw in Education, who has retorted "in kind." He says that "non-whites have always been denied admittance in (some) Anglican Church schools, long before the legislation was passed a few years ago," the legislation being that only African natives be excluded from white schools. But after all, both the Archbishop and Mr. Louw are Christians — so why all this bother?

WHAT IS THE ANTI-CHRISTIAN CASE?

(Continued from page 347)

Gospels were written long after Paul's death.

The belief that extraordinary events took place in Palestine about A.D. 29 has been challenged on the ground that the world seems to have taken too long waking up to them. We are told that "outside the New Testament there is virtually no early evidence that Christ existed." I would say the slowness of perception is understandable. Educated pagans had no reason to pay serious attention to the wild claims being made by a few lower-class fanatics about an insignificant Jewish agitator, whether or not these claims were in fact true. In Nero's persecution we begin to see a dim realisation that something odd is going on; in Pliny's correspondence with Trajan the realisation has grown much stronger. But it was bound to take time. (As for Josephus, I have my answers ready.)

Tacitus and the others, given their full weight, imply much more than they say. But the "outside evidence" argument in any case is another piece of question-begging. What the critic says is very nearly "Throw out all the evidence and there is no evidence." An historian may be justified in throwing out evidence, but he has to prove this justification. The unacceptability of the New Testament itself must be established separately, piecemeal.

As to the attack on the New Testament, a good deal of what I would wish to put forward is in F. F. Bruce, *Are the New Testament Documents Reliable?* (1953 edition).

Manifestly the question of date is crucial. The earlier these writings are, the higher their value. Also, an even moderately early dating reverses the argument from the silence of non-Christians. If the Christians of, say, Nero's time or Domitian's were making any of the chief Christian assertions, then their enemies' failure to confute them — to prove, by producing witnesses or records, that their Christ never existed or never did what they said — requires explanation. Josephus is proof enough that ample information was available.

First we have the Pauline Epistles, presumably written before A.D. 65. These check against Acts, a book which has survived objections to its historical claims, and (apart perhaps from Hebrews) the assault on their authenticity has carried little conviction. Much of the Gospel narrative is already here. Allusion is made to Christ's Davidic lineage; his circumcision; his brother; his poverty; his actions at the Last Supper; his nocturnal betrayal; his prayers in Gethsemane; his death by crucifixion, at Paschaltide, at the hands of the political authorities; his resurrection on the third day; his prophecies of the Second Coming and the Last Judgment; and his commission to the Apostles to preach the Gospel and various moral precepts, of which at least one, "It is more blessed to give than receive," is quoted verbatim. (References if required.)

(To be Concluded)

THE FREETHINKER

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Lecture Notices, Etc.

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INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics Institute) Lectures every Sunday, 7 p.m.

Central London Branch N.S.S. ("The City of Hereford" Blandford Place, Blandford Street, W.1.) Sunday, November 1st, 7.15 p.m.: J. M. ALEXANDER, "The Gods Who Died by the Nile".

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1.) Tuesday, November 3rd, 7.15 p.m.: Dr. L. E. C. HUGHES, "The Case for Calendar Reform".

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate.) Sunday, November 1st, 6.30 p.m.: HECTOR HAWTON, "Morality Without Religion".

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Education Centre, Broad Street) Sunday, November 1st, 2.30 p.m.: F. J. BAYLISS, M.A. "Trade Unions and Politics".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1.) Sunday November 1st, 11 a.m.: W. E. SWINTON, Ph.D., "The Gap Between Scientists and Artists".

Notes and News

THE *Sunday Pictorial* was disgusted (on October 14th) by what it called "The Crudest Toy of All" — a do-it-yourself crucifixion kit in plastic. Step by step instructions are given for assembling the various parts (the head is in two parts, the crown of thorns in three, and there are six nails) and there is "a drawing of a dismembered body," as well as "a detailed diagram for sticking together the thumbs, fingers and hands." Why this makes it an "offensive and inexcusable commercial enterprise" escapes us. Vulgar, yes; and unaesthetic; but no more so than millions of other crucifixes in Catholic repositories. Jesus in section or Jesus entire are equally "offensive and inexcusable commercial enterprise."

★

THE SAME ISSUE of the *Pictorial* showed concern about the future happiness of Peter Townsend and his bride-to-be. So much, in fact, that it devoted the front page to a discussion of the religious controversy likely to develop around the affair. The couple cannot marry in any Catholic church in Belgium, the paper informed us, but "they can

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £284 10s. 2d.; A. L. Jones, £1 5s.; W. J. Edmunds, 5s.; A. Ineson, 5s.; T. Benton, 2s. 6d.; O.A.P., 10s.; Anon, 1s.; J. Wilson, £2.; T. Yelland, £1.—Total to date, October 23rd, 1959. £289 18s. 8d.

marry in a civil ceremony." Perhaps that will help to remove some of the "deep lines" that the *Pictorial* reporter noticed were "etched" on Peter Townsend's "handsome face."

★

I AM CONTROLLED BY THE LORD ABOVE and not responsible for my actions," a 47-year-old man told Hinckley (Leicestershire) magistrates (*Leicester Evening Mail*, 15/10/59) when he pleaded not guilty to being drunk and disorderly. Unable to punish the real offender however, the magistrates had to deal with the agent. The man was therefore fined £5, with the alternative of one month in gaol.

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WE NOTE FROM THE *Radio Times* that the famous discussion between Bertrand Russell and F. C. Copleston, S.J., on "The Existence of God" is to be broadcast again in the week beginning November 15th. It originally took place in January, 1949 and is, of course, reprinted in Russell's *Why I am not a Christian* (George Allen and Unwin).

★

TWO GERMAN-BORN FREETHINKERS have written in their different styles about the Holy Coat of Trier (or Treves) in THE FREETHINKER during this exhibition year. They are Walter Steinhardt (August 7th) and Mr. P. G. Roy (last week). By a curious coincidence, Mr. Steinhardt's article was reprinted in the American Freethought paper, *The Liberal* for October, and reached us on the day Mr. Roy's article went to Press.

★

"MAY GOD LOOK with kindness upon the chief of the Spanish State." The prayer comes strangely from Jewish lips, but the presence of a police inspector no doubt explains it. The occasion was the dedication of the first regular synagogue in Madrid since Ferdinand and Isabella expelled the Jews in 1492 and, after due tribute to Jehovah, Franco was remembered, too (*Time*, 19/10/59).

★

THE SAME ISSUE OF *Time* reported an increasing tendency to hermaphroditism in the case of a pit viper (*Bothrops insularis*). Confined to the small island of Queimada Grande, off the coast of Brazil, this highly venomous snake lives mainly on the abundance of sea birds, and it has no enemies. Now, according to Dr. A. R. Hage of Sao Paulo Buntantan Institute, it seems to be breeding itself "into increasing abnormality, decreasing fertility and eventual extinction." Part of Nature's plan?

★

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR CIVIL LIBERTIES is organising two Conferences in Friends' House, Euston Road, London, N.W.1 on Saturdays November 21st and December 12th. "This unusual step of arranging two important meetings within one month is motivated by the urgency of both problems," says the Council, and we think readers will agree. On November 21st, the subject is "The Colour Bar — Legislation and Education," and speakers will include Mrs. Paul Robeson and Mr. Ted Braithwaite (author of *To Sir, With Love*). The subject on December 12th is "Rights of Youth." Affiliated organisations (of which the National Secular Society is one) can send one or two delegates, but other interested persons will be welcomed as visitors or observers. Each Conference will begin at 2.45 p.m. and continue until early evening, with a break for refreshments.

Darwin's Year

By H. CUTNER

(Concluded from page 343)

THE REAL DIFFICULTY Darwinism had to face was to account for "variations" by Natural Selection. Even scientists who accepted fully the general theory of Evolution were not convinced that Darwin had made out the case that it could be accounted for by his theory. In other words, we were still at a loss to explain how differences arose which, for example, made our "ape-like" ancestor change into primeval man, and then into man as we know him. Lamarck—roughly speaking—claimed that "direct action of the environment and inheritance of acquired modifications" was how Evolution worked. Darwin claimed that in the struggle for life, "a selection of the better fitted by the elimination of the less fitted" brought about the variations. It was a Jesuit priest, Gregor Mendel, whose experiments with flowers as far back as 1865 were almost completely ignored, who insisted that it was "changes in the germinal cell which cause variations." Mendelism, as it is now called, is a much bigger subject than can be explained in the course of a simple article, and readers should study it for themselves to learn what it has done to help to prove the theory of Evolution. It is bound up with the question of the inheritance of acquired characteristics which Darwin thought possible, but which few scientists now accept.

Writing 100 years ago, when any theory of genetics was in its infancy if not unknown, we cannot blame Darwin for knowing so little about it. At the same time, Darwin admitted that the *cause* of the variations which were eventually "selected" are very obscure, and even in the light of Mendelian discoveries, are still obscure. Are changes due to "mutations," to big jumps so to speak, or to very small changes influenced by long periods of time? Joseph McCabe, who stoutly defended Darwinism said:—

It is generally admitted that any man who now set out to prove that all new structures arose by the natural selection and accentuation of chance small variations would have formidable difficulties to face. Darwin himself attributed many (the plumage and weapons of male birds, etc.) to sexual selection, which in turn is disputed or greatly curtailed. Darwinians now admit that structures have arisen in which we can see no utility. They are rather "permitted" (not being injurious) than "selected."

(*The New Science and Story of Evolution*, page 105.)

But, however we may modify some of Darwin's claims for Natural Selection, it is still by far the most important factor in Evolution. As McCabe says, "In the facts themselves there is nothing whatever to decide whether (some forms of Evolution) took place on the lines suggested by Mendelists or by Darwinists . . . the facts we have already seen seem to justify the attitude of compromise I adopted in regard to the Mendelist theory." He himself found it difficult to see "how a gradual development, by a slow accentuation of small variations, is possible."

It must not be forgotten that Darwin did not discuss "Man" as such in his *Origin*—he left this to a later work, *The Descent of Man*. And in that famous work, he showed, or tried to show, that Man and ape came from some common ancestor. Man, he insisted, "at the present day is liable, like every other animal, to multiform individual differences or slight variations, so no doubt were the early progenitors of man the variations being formerly inducted by the same general causes, and governed by the same general and complex laws as at present." And of course in the ultimate, it was the "mind" of man which had eventually to be studied in the light of both Natural Selection and Evolution in general. There is on this a valuable chapter by Dr. Eiseley in his book, *Darwin's Century*,

which we would all do well to study. The Evolution of Mind is not easily explained though the subject appears not to be too difficult for some Evolutionists. Dr. Eiseley thinks:—

Darwin and his followers actually obscured the whole problem by not differentiating between the signal cries of animals and the symbolism of true speech. They tended to slur over a very difficult and complex question at the same time that they were successful in drawing attention to the fact that if man is a part of the rest of nature, language, too, must have evolved in the same way. The obscurity and vagueness of the Darwinian approach lies in the fact that in spite of a certain use of signal cries of a largely instinctive nature, animals show no tendency to increase their vocabularies or to transform vague emotional cries into specific symbols capable of manipulating the past and the future.

It is here where Alfred Russel Wallace tried to come in. As is well known, he discovered independently and about the same time the theory of Natural Selection; but having a strong inclination to mysticism, it is not surprising that he parted from Darwin's forthright disbelief in the supernatural, and became a fully believing Spiritualist—even believing in "spirits" when all the evidence showed nothing but some clever conjuring.

The differences between Darwin and Wallace centred on *human* evolution, and are too long to be detailed here. The question as to what was "primitive" man, or if there ever was one, was hotly debated by scientists—for example, Grant Allen asked whether the "missing link" was anything more than an average savage or, in other words, "the Darwinists seemed confronted either with no traces of man at all, or with man essentially like that of the present day." Wallace himself, who had widely travelled, claimed that "the more I see of uncivilised people . . . the essential differences between civilised and savage man seem to disappear." He did not believe in "the low state of morality and of intellect in all prehistoric man." To put it another way—Wallace and many other Evolutionists wanted to believe that primitive and savage man were really "degenerates" from a kind of perfect man, something of course very difficult to prove. In any case, Wallace insisted that with the rise of the human brain "the whole nature of the natural selection process has altered." The published paper in which Wallace argued his case was highly praised by Darwin—though he did not agree with at least a part of it. Wallace wrote to Darwin that his argument was that "the great cranial difference has been slowly developing while the rest of the skeleton has remained nearly stationary; and while the Miocene *Dryopithecus* has been modified into the existing gorilla, speechless and ape-brained, man (but yet *man*) has been developed into great-brained, speech-forming man." In Dr. Eiseley's book will be found most of the arguments Wallace put forward, and which I think he retained all his long life.

It is interesting to note that Dr. Eiseley barely refers to Herbert Spencer, no doubt because that great philosopher did not make the *biological* aspect of Evolution his theme; but it is as well to remember that Spencer was an Evolutionist before Darwin. As Prof. W. H. Hudson points out in his *Introduction to the Philosophy of Herbert Spencer*,

The law of evolution as a universal process—a matter which the aims and objects of Darwin's work did not lead him to touch—were worked out by Spencer irrespectively of the special process of natural selection . . . Thus it appears that if any one man is to be looked upon as the immediate progenitor of a doctrine which, in common phraseology, may be said to have been to some extent in the air . . . that man is

not he who first elucidated one factor of its progress in one domain of phenomena — the biological; but rather he who first seized upon it as a comprehensive law, underlying all the phenomena of the universe. In a word it is not Charles Darwin, but Herbert Spencer.

It is as well to remember this; but all the same, let us not forget that it was not Spencer's universal law which made the world talk of Evolution, but the *Origin of Species*, first published 100 years ago. To most people, friend and foe alike, Evolution and Darwin are equated even now. And the year 1859 marks a world history division — pre-Darwin and post-Darwin. The *Origin of Species* began an epoch in the history of the world.

But though at the time of its publication Darwin had still some vague Theistic beliefs, it began the doubts Darwin had of Theism in general and of Christianity in particular. Darwin was always "cautious," and so was not a little afraid of Atheism with connotations (always urged by Christians) of immorality, vice, and other undesirable qualities. So, like Spencer, he finally admitted "Agnosticism" as best representing his unbelief. Like Paine, Bradlaugh, Ingersoll, and many other great Freethinkers, he was never left alone on the question of his religious beliefs; and like them, he was credited with "recanting" — as if "recanting" could in any way prove the truth of such a hotch-potch of superstition and credulity, to say nothing of actual nonsense, like Christianity.

True believers have sensed for 100 years that any acceptance of Evolution meant the death of religion, no matter how much the evidence can be juggled to admit a "Creator" somewhere. They are, therefore, quite right in opposing it — but they can no more sweep back the theory of Evolution than they can sweep back the sea with a broom.

And Charles Darwin is — though perhaps he never knew it — their greatest enemy.

"Make Me an Offer"

MANY READERS OF THE FREETHINKING must, like the writer, have supported Theatre Workshop in its struggling days before the war. It had its struggles after the war, too, and was acclaimed abroad before most of the British Press and theatregoers really recognised its existence. Now things are very different: it has two plays (Brendan Behan's *The Hostage* and Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey*) running in the West End, and each new production is eagerly awaited. Fortunately, it is in the right hands. It remains faithful to its claim to be "A British People's Theatre," and its home remains the Theatre Royal, Stratford, London, E.15.

Its new season opens, in a newly-decorated Theatre Royal, with the musical play, *Make Me an Offer*, based on the book by Wolf Mankowitz. It is set in the Portobello Road street market, a world of dealers in antiques and pottery, where the motto seems to be, "You look after me and I'll look after me"; where "Business is Business," "friendship counts for nil," and you "just go in and make the kill."

Mr. Mankowitz, an expert on Wedgwood, knows this world well, and into it he puts a young idealist: a lover of Wedgwood for its beauty, not its cash value, who, ironically, is called "too materialistic" because he bothers to distinguish between the genuine and the imitation. "That's all right when you're buying," he is told, "but when you're selling, be a poet, be a dreamer." "People buy dreams, not originals."

The book is witty, the songs are catchy, production and setting imaginative. And, as always, the cast seems to enjoy itself as much as you will.

C. McC.

Letter to a Young Catholic

AT A LONDON OPEN-AIR MEETING the other week, a young Catholic said that he had been reading THE FREETHINKER for a year and had not read anything in it that made any attack on the Catholic Church, and indeed, that no Catholic would be upset by reading it.

I would like to answer him through your columns; to explain that the purpose of THE FREETHINKER is not just to attack the Catholic Church or, indeed, the god idea, but to encourage criticism of ideas and institutions that have long been accepted as established; and thus to view all problems from a Rationalist and Secular standpoint.

It is the influence of religion on thought, morality, conduct, etc., that is of importance to mankind. That the Catholic Church, of all the Christian Churches, has probably had the most baneful effect on these is generally accepted by Freethinkers. Other religions today are taking their stand equally against the advance of human progress, and blocking the path to successful solutions of pressing problems. For example, the world population question which, if peace should become established on earth will be a major problem of the future; any rational examination is prevented in the lands where it is most needed by the religions of those lands. More than that, in all countries today, where Christianity has become part and parcel of the mental make-up of the people, any real discussion on birth control as a social matter is impossible.

In England, every worker has accepted the responsibility of the children born here, by family grants, maternity benefits, education rates, etc., and yet the parents disclaim any social responsibility for the number of children born. If I were to say that, in the event of over-population, a government, say in India, should forbid the birth of any children for a generation, or forbid any girl to have more than two children, practically everyone everywhere would be shocked and appalled, and yet future generations will have to face this problem.

It would be claimed that that was invading the very rights of the marriage bed, forgetting that Christianity has always invaded those rights by proclaiming that sexual intercourse with contraception immoral and sinful.

THE FREETHINKER is out to rationalise thought, which unfortunately almost means to revolutionise it. Practically every aspect of human life and endeavour has been pinioned by religion of one sort or another; and the human race, to survive, let alone improve its lot, must first throw off the shackles that bind it.

However, we are congratulating ourselves that at that open-air meeting at Tower Hill on Thursday lunchtime, October 15th, we were able to sell 52 copies of this revolutionary paper.

EVA EBURY,

(Hon. Secretary, North London Branch,
National Secular Society.)

Wanted *Philosophy of Physical Realism* by Prof. R. W. Sellars, (Macmillan, New York.) : K. Wootton, c/o FREETHINKER.

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CORRESPONDENCE

THE GENERAL ELECTION

The silence of THE FREETHINKER on the General Election I find somewhat puzzling. Surely political myths are as dangerous to the human mind as are religious myths. Certainly that has been my experience in life. In fact, in many ways in political affairs political myths excite more prejudice than religious myths, and affect human progress more.

C. H. NORMAN.

[We have, we think, enough to occupy us in the religious field, without entering political controversy. But we did encourage Freethinkers to ask questions on secular education at Election meetings.—Ed.]

EXCESS POPULATION

You have published several articles regarding the dangers of excess population. Perhaps, before the number of people on this earth becomes really critical, the civil authorities, with popular approval, will adopt a plan under which each female will be allowed to have, say, three live deliveries (if that is the figure needed to maintain a stationary population level) — and after three such deliveries each female would be sterilised or neutralised. (In all probability universal knowledge and voluntary use of birth control techniques would eliminate the need to sterilise many women.)

Such a plan would limit the production of those women who are chronic producers of illegitimate children, such as many negroes of the U.S. "Deep South," where generation after generation of illegitimates find their way to the relief rolls only to produce more illegitimates. And it would prevent the half-wits and chronic criminals and diseased from filling the earth with more nit-wits and diseased children.

Under such a plan a larger proportion of the future citizens would come from the higher grades in our society. We would have a larger percentage of children from good homes instead of a multitude of children from the slums and poorer homes. This might stop the erosion of the better qualities in our citizenship.

The infallible Popes will oppose such population controls, of course, for the Popes say such controls would thwart the will of God. We must remember that the Popes only (that is they, and God only) know the will of God!

Yes, the Popes will try to thwart human progress as they did when the Pope (Innocent III) annulled the Magna Carta. [Encyclopedia Britannica, 14th Ed., Vol. XIV, page 633.]

S. S. A. "WINTER GALE" (U.S.A.).

FACT AND FICTION

Mr. P. Turner is "curious to know how it is possible for highly cultured people to be easily deceived." The same applies to the frequent remark that with all our progress, we do not improve in morality. Why anyone should think that cleverness is necessarily virtuous, I do not know. The fact is that our whole environment encourages credulity. At our earliest we are taught to say "I believe," etc., etc. It is never "How can I know if anything is true?" A credulous public is a happy hunting ground for "sharks." Should we not put truth instead of falsehood, facts instead of fiction, reality instead of imagination, knowledge instead of wishful thinking? The vast majority prefer fiction instead of facts, they spend all the time they can spare in imagination and wishful thinking in novels and plays. It seems their principal enjoyment is to get as far away from reality as possible. To enjoy fiction, it needs to appear as reality for the time being, although we know it is all imaginary. Is this not practising credulity?

JACQUES LEROI.

FREETHOUGHT AND SCIENCE

Your contributor, Jack Gordon, thus defines the relationship between Freethought and Science: "Our basic criterion in assessing any scientific theory is, that no theory can be acceptable if it contains any supernaturalistic survivals, expressed or implied."

Now I hold that *Free*-thought, properly speaking, is uncommitted, undogmatic thought; thought that, in the words of our R.P.A. friends, is unencumbered by "arbitrary assumptions." To reject, without consideration, any theory that is not uncompromisingly materialistic is to take one's stand on the dogma that the supernatural (or supersensual, as it may more accurately be called) does not exist.

While it may be objectively true, such a statement is not a product of *free* thinking, since free thought must always be free to investigate any and every possibility which is not demonstrably and incontrovertibly absurd. I therefore submit that Freethought, popularly so-called, is mis-named and should be re-named.

S. W. BROOKS.

REPLY TO THE ABOVE

Mr. S. W. Brooks is only *partly* right; Freethought should, I agree, be unencumbered by "arbitrary assumptions"; but what is

supernaturalism today if not an arbitrary assumption? Mr. Brooks seems to prefer the term "supersensual," but I am unable to attach any precise meaning to this term in the context in which he uses it.

Freethought should be open-minded, yes. But there is a vast difference between an open mind and an empty one. In the latter, all sorts of ideas, good, bad and fantastic, jostle for consideration on an equal footing. As our knowledge increases and our intellectual horizons expand, the more closely are we able to define what is possible and what is impossible or highly improbable.

An oceanographer engaged in a search for an explanation of the apparent drift of the continents will not seriously consider the views of The Flat Earth Society; not because he is dogmatic, but because the whole of his experience commits him to a position which rejects the fundamental views of that Society as unworthy of further consideration. In like manner, the modern Freethinking atheist and materialist is committed to a position which regards any supernaturalistic or vitalistic ideas as quite unacceptable. The whole weight of modern science is such that the chances of any supernatural theory being proved true are so small as to be practically negligible.

JACK GORDON.

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