

The Freethinker

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I RECENTLY HAD OCCASION to read a small volume entitled *Protestantism* by the late W. R. Inge, Dean of St. Paul's and known to the general non-ecclesiastical public as "The Gloomy Dean"; a cleric whose journalistic work, combined with his theological studies, caused him to be described as "a pillar of the Church and two columns of the *Evening Standard*." In his professional capacity, the Dean, an ex-Cambridge Professor, was a learned man, and possessed a keen, critical intellect, besides being a writer of undeniable literary talent with a flair for epigrams, often of a pungent character. In his theological outlook, Inge (along with his episcopal colleague, Dr. Barnes) was the *enfant terrible* of the Church of England. He was an advanced modernist, whose theological views would most assuredly have led him to the stake in the days when Christianity really was Christianity.

Protestantism

In this little book, published in 1927 and frequently revised, Dr. Inge gives a sketch of the evolution of Protestant Christianity as seen through Modernist eyes. Though Freethinkers will take exception to some of his views, it must be conceded that he gives an admirable and comprehensive sketch of his vast subject. He is lucid, learned and lively, and the ground he covers is really amazing. The major forms of Protestantism from Luther to the present day, are successively reviewed, and Inge concludes with an optimistic forecast of the future of the reformed religion in current circumstances which differ so widely from those which prevailed at the time of the Reformation.

What is Protestantism?

Dr. Inge commences quite appropriately for his theme by repudiating the common criticism that Protestantism is essentially something negative, or merely critical in character. Contrarily, when the word was first coined in the course of the fierce controversial battles which distinguished the stormy era of the Reformation, it had a positive character. The author quotes the 18th century definition of the word in that famous, but now seldom quoted, *Dictionary* of Dr. Johnson, viz: "a solemn declaration of resolution, fact or opinion." Shakespeare, more nearly contemporary with the Reformers, also used the word in a positive sense, viz: "I have a wife whom I protest I love." The early Reformers consequently, insists Dr. Inge, were not mere negative critics of the corrupted Catholicism of their day; they propounded a positive religious alternative. Inge denies finality to the special teaching associated with the names of Luther, Calvin *et al*, of course, and insists that Protestantism is, by its very nature, an evolving creed which is still far from having reached its final term. Not that Protestantism, as such, is coeval with its Christian expression. It represents essentially a religious attitude of mind rather than any sectarian pattern of doctrine. Thus the Jewish Prophets are here defined as "the Protestants of Judaism" and Protestant movements (in the wider sense

of the term) have also been found in other religions. Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc., have all had them. Inge defines the generic character of Protestantism (in this broad sense) as "the revolt of genuine religion against secularisation"; the attempt that is constantly renewed to free institutional religion from its recurring tendency to clericalism, intolerance, dogmatism and ritualism. When, argues this Protestant Modernist, these evils recur, as they have often done, within the Protestant Churches themselves, then it is time for new and more radically Protestant movements to reform their degenerate predecessors. No doubt the Dean would have argued that this is true of all religions, but in this sketch he limits him-

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

Protestantism and Modernism

—By F. A. RIDLEY—

self to Protestant Christianity.

The Evolution of the Reformation

Protestantism, then, in its Christian sense, originated as an organised movement at the time of the 16th century Reformation as a positive alternative to the degenerated Catholicism of the period. And the major Protestant Churches, Lutheran, Calvinistic and Anglican, still date from that period. Their historical origins and doctrinal character are briefly, but lucidly reviewed by Dr. Inge. As has often been demonstrated, while the Continental Reformation was mainly religious (or theological) in character, the English Reformation was primarily political in origin. The author does not deal in any detail with the formidable counter-Reformation which the Reformation provoked, or describe how the Reformers were wiped out in several areas (Belgium, Austria, even Spain) where at first the Reformation looked like taking root. (It is not often realised that Spain presented one of the most promising fields for the Reformation before the Inquisition so effectively extirpated it there.) But Protestantism in congruity with the author's initial definition, did not remain static where Calvin and Luther left it; many later sects appeared. Of these, Inge singles out the mid-17th century Quakers for special praise. They represent, he tells us (rather surprisingly for a cleric of the Church of England which the early Quakers so fiercely denounced) the purest embodiment of the Christian spirit. He even implies that, were Jesus Christ to return to earth, he would join the Quakers. In modern times, Protestant Modernism has criticised the verbal inspiration of the Bible and most of, at any rate the more important Protestant Churches, have abandoned the rigid dogmas of their Founders, and tend towards a liberal theology influenced by modern culture. It seems probable that Dr. Inge here rather underestimates the power of a still surviving fundamentalism, and we are sure that Billy Graham and Co. would not agree with him! But Inge is emphatic that the Reformation, however it has evolved since its inception, has come to stay; there will be no return to Rome, at least on any significant scale. Incidentally, he gives a brilliant critique of the origin and evolution of Roman Catholicism, which he declares explicitly to be the major foe of both Protestantism and

scientific culture in the contemporary world.

A Critique of Protestantism

Dr. Inge makes out probably as good a case for a liberal Protestantism as is possible, and he makes it in a witty and lively manner rarely met with in modern writers on religious themes. But there is one fatal defect, which vitiates his whole argument. For, while he admits and applies the evolutionary concept to the actual evolution of Protestant Christianity, he categorically refuses to apply it to the Founder and Foundation of Christianity itself. Here Dr. Inge is quite explicit: Protestantism, he tells us, "stands or falls by the historical revelation made nearly 2,000 years ago in the person and the work of the Re-

deemer," and he adds that "Protestantism is bound up with certain historical events" as closely as is any other type of Christianity, Romanism specifically included. However, since the historical character — the authenticity of those events narrated in the New Testament — is becoming increasingly unstable, we incline to the view that Protestantism has feet of clay and accordingly must eventually evolve out of existence! But it will always remain an important and, up to a point, progressive chapter in the annals of Comparative Religion. And as such, Dr. Inge has given us an admirable outline of its origins and historical evolution.

[cf. *Protestantism* — 1936 edition, by Dr. W. R. Inge; Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd.]

Humanism and Christianity

An Impression of a Debate between

MRS. MARGARET KNIGHT and DR. GOWENLOCK,
ON NOVEMBER 12TH, 1959, at BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY

By THOS. H. R. JAMES

MRS. KNIGHT OPENED THE DEBATE with a criticism of Bible mythology which, she said, is accepted by believers as the word of an omnipotent God. She pointed out that scholarship and scientific knowledge have shown many Bible statements to be erroneous and therefore quite untenable. Christian Apologists meet these criticisms with the claim that such statements are not meant to be taken literally, but symbolically. In the ages of faith, she objected, statements *now* said to be symbolic, were accepted and taught to the people as literal facts. "Will statements *still* accepted as literal facts, also become symbolic as knowledge increases?"

Mrs. Knight then took up the age-old problem of pain, which the omnipotent God must have created, since he is said to have created *all* things. "In Scotland, where I come from," she said "there are Carrion Crows who attack injured lambs, tear open their stomachs and devour the entrails and peck out the eyes from the still-living animals. Did the omnipotent God implant that instinct in the Carrion Crow?"

Mrs. Knight moved on to the working of miracles, and reminded the audience that many Roman Emperors also performed miracles, making the blind to see, the dead to live, the lame to walk, etc., so that the miracles of Jesus Christ were really just a variation on a theme. Today, miracles of the pagans and early Christians, are rejected by many leading Churchmen, Laymen and Divines.

Next she touched on euthanasia, suicide, homosexuality, free will and determinism.

She asked her opponent if he believed the Bible was inspired by God, if he believed in witches and devils, etc. She then explained that Humanism seeks to make this life a more beautiful and better thing for *all* creatures, and does not concern itself with the superhuman or the supernatural. She sat down to a tremendous ovation from the 300 or so University students of both sexes composed of Freshmen, Sophomores and Graduands.

Now came Dr. Gowenlock to defend Christianity. He maintained that many things the early Christians regarded as miracles were reasonable and possible events which, in a more enlightened age, would not be spoken of as miracles. Of pain, he said he did not claim to have the answer, but that doubtless it is bound up and involved with God and Eternity. He added, "I admit to have had many misgivings on this matter, but nevertheless, I have faith and I believe."

Dr. Gowenlock said of euthanasia that there is a great

danger here because we did not know God's will in this difficulty. Mrs. Knight here interjected to say, that it was because God's will is not known on many difficulties that believers have been murdering, torturing and persecuting each other for centuries.

After the two principal speakers had presented their case, they then proceeded to a personal discussion and Mrs. Knight put to her opponent the question of the infallibility and inspiration of the Scriptures. Dr. Gowenlock replied that he believed that the Bible writers were divinely inspired. Mistakes and apparent contradictions were due to fallible human beings, who lived in a less enlightened age than ours, when grammar was primitive, paper and printing were unknown. Hence the writings were without commas, stops, sentences, chapters or division. Translators, under these handicaps, were bound to mistranslate and make mistakes. Mistakes, he said, are made now, in spite of the techniques of modern improvements. Much discussion ensued on suicide, homosexuality, predestination, freedom of choice and other matters. Dr. Gowenlock had a very uncomfortable and difficult time, and was quite unable to deliver himself clearly or convincingly. This view may seem a Freethinker's bias, but I am supported by other members of the audience.

After the dual discussion, came the turn of the audience, who fired many and varied questions, some relevant, some informed, some not so informed. In answering, Mrs. Knight was concise, ready and authoritative. Dr. Gowenlock was sincere, courageous, courteous, but obviously unable to deal effectively with the questions put. From my own (the onlooker's) point of view, I would say that many waverers were won over, that many believers were disturbed, and that the unbelievers were wedded more firmly to their cause. Throughout, it was a happy and intensely interesting evening, spent in a stimulating, cordial and friendly atmosphere.

LEICESTER SECRETARY ON T.V.

ON NOVEMBER 18th last, Mr. C. H. Hammersley, the Leicester Secular Society's popular Secretary and an indefatigable letter-writer for the "Cause", was interviewed by Miss Elwes at the Secular Hall for BBC's T.V. "Tonight" programme. He was one of a number of members of the Leicester Letter Writers' Club, and though he was not allowed to be as forthright in criticising religion as he is in attacking it in the press, he was not afraid to state clearly that he dealt with religious subjects among others in his correspondence to the various editors. We hope that his T.V. appearance was noticed by many of our readers.

An Atheist's Attitude to Theists

By G. I. BENNETT

GOD-FEARING FOLK AND ATHEISTS have one thing in common: they both feel themselves to be in possession of a truth going deep as the roots of life itself. And they desire to impart it, if they can, to their sceptical or unbelieving fellows.

There is nothing wrong in this. There are strong reasons, historical and doctrinal, why the Christian should seek to proselytise. Hell may be less real to many than it was even half a century ago, and the hope of heaven less sure. But these beliefs have not died. When they do die, God will be dead, Christianity will be dead, and supernaturalism and sacerdotalism will be dead. The Christian expostulates with the atheist for the same reason that the atheist expostulates with the Christian: to bring him to what he is convinced is the great exclusive fact about existence. If the universe is presided over by a Supreme Power, then it is a thousand pities, thinks the Christian, that a mortal man should pass through this world without being aware of it. The atheist for his part considers it a shame that if, as he believes, there is no Divine Rulership, a person should go through life hugging the illusion that there is.

Yet I think there is this difference between theist and atheist. The call to proselytise tends, in the atheist, to become less clamant as the years pass; whereas usually, in the theist, it remains ever strong. The atheist sees that some people are quite happy in their beliefs,* which to him are intellectually and ethically untenable, and he realises that there are perhaps better things to do with one's life than spend it in a usually fruitless, almost always acrimonious, campaign to convert the unconverted.

At least, that has been my experience; and I make no apology for my limited zeal for propaganda purely anti-Christian. I say that although I have been an atheist all my adult life and am scarcely likely to alter my convictions now. I think that the simple facts of existence — considered alone and without the findings of modern scholarship and science — argue too powerfully against any change of opinion on that score. But I have a particular temperament that would, I believe, enable me to live happily in a land where everyone except myself felt the call of faith . . . granted only that I was not persecuted for my heterodoxy. Persecution is a terrible thing.

But apart from the question of temperament (about which, of course, we can do little or nothing), I have said before that I regard freethought militancy as wrong — tactically wrong — my view being that it antagonises more than it converts, and alienates even some of the converted. All thoughtful men seek the truth, but seek it in different ways, and put different constructions on it. This is perfectly natural. Being an atheist, I have an obviously different conception of the cosmos, and of various aspects of life, from the theist. But that is no reason why I should revile him, or he me. That faith has perpetrated evil cannot be denied. That there have been ugly episodes must be admitted. But to be fair, faith has not been devoid of goodness or of beauty; nor is it now. The man who refuses to recognise this closes his eyes to an important fact. Thus incompletely understanding the drawing-power of Christianity, how can he hope to attract people away from it to what some of us believe is a braver, nobler, finer conception and code by which to live?

* The writer has been very conscious of this on the occasions he has been in Catholic Ireland. The simple folk of the far west have few enough of this world's goods, God knows, and yet they radiate, many of them, an uncomplaining cheerfulness, an inner happiness, moving to behold.

I think fairness in controversy — as in all things — is hugely desirable. And fairness implies that among men of contending views there must be tolerance and mutual respect. That, in fact, seems to me to be one of the great lessons that humanity at large, and individual men and women in particular, have to learn. Upon its being learnt quickly enough, and by a large enough number of people, our hopes for the future largely rest.

A modern tendency that I personally regret is the use of the term Secularism as a synonym of Atheism. Secularism is a philosophy of this world and this life emerging from a condition of theistic unbelief. And a significant thing about secularism, I feel, is that in practice it actually represents the ethical best in religious as in non-religious thought. It is, to employ a paradox, the Great Affirmation of a Great Denial. Although the Great Denial has been a vital element — a kind of mainspring — in my intellectual and, I think, moral development, I have had to recognise that it is not necessarily such in the development of others. But I rejoice that the Great Affirmation — as I call it — by which I mean helping each other along life's way, moving in a spirit of good will towards all who are open to it, treating sincere, honest folk with the respect we would ask for ourselves, aiming to live by strewing life with the little acts of kindness and of love that mean so much to those for whom they are performed: I rejoice that this Affirmation is in the best tradition of secularism, a positive and socially valuable facet of atheism.

Does this mean that we should soft-pedal our unbelief, preferring to conceal it rather than express it? No. But I suggest it does mean that we should not be too pugnacious, too self-assertive, in pressing it. Let us remember that the comparatively modern house in which we live happily may not be even comfortable to others. We pulled down the old dwelling and built a new one. But for some the old dwelling, with all its dated and outmoded features, is still the only one in which they can breathe freely. So be it!

Perhaps in time a new generation will arise that does not desire the age-old consolations of faith — a self-reliant generation depending upon itself and its own exertions, clear-eyed in its acceptance of a world in which salvation comes not from without. But I personally hope that that generation will not be eaten by material gain and narrow self-seeking. As I have said, those who live by faith and those who live by their own light are each deeply moved by what they believe is life's supreme truth. Those who have faith in God and those who have faith only in human goodness are both, in my opinion, better off by far than those who have faith in neither and in nothing. The worst condition in the world — and one that is today unhappily so prevalent — is that of not knowing or caring whether there is a God or no God, whether there is a heaven or hell, whether there is great truth worth self-dedication or none that merits a moment's thought, whether man shall seek avenues of light and beauty or be content to stumble along murky and ugly alleys. Yet between not knowing and not caring there is the most significant difference. Not to know, or not to be able to decide, may be a none-too-happy state of mind; but not to care is an attitude to life lamentable beyond words.

NEXT WEEK

CELIBACY

By COLIN McCALL

This Believing World

The American Baptist minister who took photographs of his wife in bed with another Baptist was given a two-year sentence, though he is now out on bail pending an appeal. He was convicted of blackmail, conspiracy, and larceny; while his wife got 18 months for aiding and abetting — though actually, she was freed because of her children. We do not think this case provides an argument against Christianity — but what a wonderful argument it would have been in the hands of Christians against Atheism if the hero and heroine had been “infidels”!

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A one-time Harley Street specialist, Dr. Christopher Woodward, gained most of his fame as a “faith healer” here because he insisted that he “was called to help the Church recover the healing ministry”; in other words, he was almost, if not quite, certain that all his cures were not so much the result of his medical knowledge and medicines, as they were directly performed by Jesus Christ in Heaven for his patients on earth.

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Unfortunately, Dr. Woodward, who is now in New Zealand, has fallen foul of the leaders of the Anglican Church there, and they want their congregations to have nothing to do with him. Perhaps this is because they do not believe Jesus had anything to do with the cures, or perhaps it is because they don't like rivals. In any case, Dr. Woodward has the remedy in his own hands. All he has to do is to cure, through Jesus, all the blind and spastic and polio cases, say, in Auckland — and with Jesus to help, this could be done in a flash — and thus thoroughly confound, not only his fellow Christians, but also all unbelievers. Will he? Not on your life!

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Just after the war, we were told that the Church was training “commando” parsons to carry the Gospel right into the hearts of everybody, particularly blatant materialists and infidels. After one or two mild encounters, the commandos gave up and petered out completely baffled — so we are quite intrigued to find that there is to be a college near Birmingham planned for seven parsons to be specially trained as Commandos in industry. They will work all day in factories, and study theology at night.

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Their objective is to find out what men and women in factories think about the Church, encourage them to go to church regularly, and in particular find out why, in respect to religion, so many workers adopt the “I'm all right Jack” attitude. We can answer the last point without being trained for it. Workers in general are *bored stiff* with Christianity, not because they know much about it, but because they don't. They were taught it in school and dropped it when school days were over. And so of course they are now “all right.” Without being Freethinkers, they contemptuously reject it.

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Spiritualists who are also earnest Christians were shocked at a programme put on in TV's “Panorama” recently which did its utmost to “denigrate” their claims; and the Council of the Churches' Fellowship for Psychical Study has sent Sir Ian Jacob, the B.B.C.'s Director-General, a strongly worded protest. We are delighted. We hope now the B.B.C. will give these Christian Spiritualists every opportunity to produce on TV a number of beautiful materialisations of eminent people like, let us say, Shakespeare, Napoleon, Dickens, and even the most famous of all spiritualists — the great D. D. Home himself. In addition,

mediums who are also fervent Christians (like the founder of the Fellowship, Col. R. Lester) should solve for us a number of “mysteries” straight from the horse's mouth, so to speak.

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For example — why not let Charles Dickens himself tell us how he was going to finish his *Mystery of Edwin Drood*; who was really responsible for the murder of Darnley, Mary Queen of Scot's husband; who wrote the plays of Shakespeare; and many other historical and other mysteries. In fact, the Fellowship should be allowed to come on TV with *all* “crime” mysteries easily solved — like that of Jack the Ripper, for example — and the scores of unsolved modern ones. What a chance to confound hopeless unbelievers again! Alas, it will never be accepted. Why?

★

B.B.C.'s “Meeting Point” the other Sunday introduced the Rev. E. H. Robertson to deal with the place the Bible had in different nations, and to answer questions put by “a group of students.” In general, the students put up by TV are hopeless, but this lot were allowed to ask a few naïve and infantile questions which would have disgraced the most elementary Sunday School. As for Mr. Robertson, all one could gather from him was that the Bible was making tremendous headway in *Central America* whose “natives” carried it about with them everywhere and who *never* read anything else. Thus the Bible was at last coming into its own again. Needless to add, it was Mr. Robertson who did almost all the talking. We wonder whether he has ever read the *Age of Reason*?

The Hand that Rocks the Cradle

IN A TOUCHING ARTICLE on “Marriage in England,” the *Donegal Democrat* (30/10/59) tells its readers “If the Irish marry aright, they and their children will soon make England Catholic again . . . The conversion of England depends largely on the Irish. The future of the Irish depends on whom they marry . . . Hence, during the Irish mission season in Britain much of our praying should be for happy Catholic marriages, and for those who have married wrongly or are in danger of doing so and for their children . . . It requires a real miracle of grace to bring about the rectification of a *bad marriage*, and we expect plenty of these miracles thanks to the prayers of those at home.”

Just in what way this “miracle of grace” is to manifest itself is not very clear, for we read that “Cupid is the trouble. Sometimes he comes as a little angel from Heaven bringing joy to human lives. But sometimes he comes as a demon destroying happiness,” and a bad marriage is contracted because of the “attraction of the young person with little or no religion, who inveigles your Catholic [youth] into a bad marriage,” and is “indeed a deadly enemy to the faith of the children.”

Thus we read, “in the view of those who hope to see England Catholic again, if an Irishman is to keep faith in Britain and hand it on to his children he must marry a practising Catholic. With a good Catholic wife in the house, his home is a fortress of the Faith and all the powers of paganism or half-paganism will not capture it. In its shelter his children will grow up as safe as if they lived at Knock.”

Comment is hardly necessary, but perhaps one might say “Forward the Pagan lassies of England, the future of England lies in your hands, and in the interests of progress and civilisation may the arrows of Cupid put to flight the armies of the Pope.”

EVA EBURY.

THE FREETHINKER

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Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

- Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (The Mound).—Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. CRONAN and MURRAY.
- 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.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, CORSAIR, SMITH, etc. Sunday, 8 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, MILLS, SMITH, etc.
- 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.: Sunday, 6.30 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.
- West London Branch N.S.S. (Marble Arch).—Meetings every Sunday, from 4 p.m.: Messrs. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER, C. E. WOOD and D. TRIBE.

INDOOR

- Central London Branch N.S.S. ("The City of Hereford" Blandford Place, W.1.) Sunday, November 29th, 7.15 p.m.: LISA BRYAN, "The Humanity of Marx."
- Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1.) Tuesday, December 1st, 7.15 p.m.: Brigadier G. CHATTERTON, "How Many Million Refugees? Their Claim On Our Conscience."
- Glasgow Secular Society (Central Halls, Bath Street,) Sunday, November 29th, 3 p.m.: J. P. MORRISON, "Philosophy and Bunk."
- Kingston United Nations Association, Youth Section (Grammar School, London Road, Kingston-on-Thames) Friday, November 27th, 7.30 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, "The Social Origins of Christianity."
- Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate,) Sunday, November 29th, 6.30 p.m.: G. HEALY, "Trotskyism, Past and Present."
- Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Wheatsheaf Hotel, High Street.) Sunday, November 29th, 7 p.m.: J. CORSAIR, "God and Our Neighbours."
- Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Education Centre, Broad Street) Sunday, November 29th, 2.30 p.m.: J. H. PINDER, "World Economic Problems."
- South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1.) Sunday, November 29th, 11 a.m.: A. ROBERTSON, M.A., "What a Piece of Work is Man!"

Notes and News

Time MAGAZINE (23/11/59) gives details of the largest Roman Catholic Church in the United States, which has just been dedicated. It is the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, 459 feet at its longest point, and 240 feet at its widest, with a bell tower 329 feet high: certainly impressive if size is the criterion, as it often seems to be with the Church of Rome. "God was good to us", said Monsignor Thomas J. Grady, fifth director of the shrine project, "In the five years it took to build the upper church — with as many as 200 men working 200-300 feet up — no one was killed or seriously injured."

THE BBC PROGRAMME, "The Naturalist", most appropriately celebrated the centenary of *The Origin of Species*

on Sunday, November 22nd. The Chairman, Professor G. P. Wells, began with a very necessary clarification of the two themes of the book: first, that evolution is a fact; second, that natural selection is an explanation of how it takes place. (We say "very necessary" after years of experience of religious misunderstanding on the matter.) Then Sir Julian Huxley and Professor C. H. Waddington discussed Darwin's great achievement; his own awareness that it had a "weak point"; and our subsequent discovery of genetical processes to eliminate that weakness. Darwin's debt to Malthus was also acknowledged and his habit of reading the latter "for amusement" was noted by Sir Julian. Altogether, this was an admirable programme presented in a way that anybody could understand.

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THE FIRST CONFERENCE of the University Humanist Federation will be held in Birmingham on Saturday and Sunday, January 2nd and 3rd, 1960, in the Arden Hotel, New Street. The Conference fee will be 30s. covering bed and breakfast for the night, and morning coffee on the Sunday. All humanists under 35 years of age are eligible for the Conference, at which the principal speakers will be Professor P. H. Nowell-Smith, Lord Chorley and Mr. Hector Hawton. Further details are obtainable from the Rationalist Press Association, 40 Drury Lane, London, W.C.2.

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A "THINKERS CIRCLE" has been formed in Dublin, and readers in that city are invited to join it. Those wishing to do so should write to Dublin Thinkers' Circle, c/o THE FREETHINKER, 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

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HAMPSTEAD'S HUMANIST SOCIETY will meet on December 8th at Burgh House, Flask Walk, N.W.3. at 7.15 p.m., when our occasional contributor, Oswald Blakeston, will talk on "The Message of Humanism in Modern Art." Mr. Blakeston is also reading his poems at the meeting of The Contemporary Poetry and Music Circle, which co-operates with the Progressive League and the West London Ethical Society, on December 14th at Stanton Coit House, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, W.8, at 7 p.m.

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WE RECENTLY READ of a Methodist minister who was "an authority on fairy stories." Excellent qualifications, we should say.

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COMMENTING FAVOURABLY on the Bishop of Birmingham's "sandwich courses" in industry for young men training for the priesthood, *The Guardian* (12/11/59) said: "In recent years great efforts have been made, not only by Anglicans, to re-establish contact with industrial workers, through the place of work as well as the home." But how fruitless it all is. A "hale fellow well met" priest may establish "contact" on a social level; a Father Huddleston may impress with his humanitarianism; but how many industrial workers are interested in the Trinity, the Virgin Birth, and so forth? There's no contact on that level.

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AN AMERICAN SUBSCRIBER, Mr. Eugene A. Bergman of Aurora, Illinois, wonders if there are any amateur radio operators who read THE FREETHINKER. Mr. Bergman's amateur call letters are W90HE, and he is "in the process of getting back on the air after being off for several years." His address is in the Call Book.

★

WE ARE VERY PLEASED to receive a picture post card of Perth, Western Australia, signed by the various members of the Westralian Secularist Group, bearing good wishes from the Group to all the staff. In turn we wish every success to Mr. Collin Coates and his Group.

What is the Christian Case?—1

By H. CUTNER

LET ME BEGIN BY POINTING OUT to Mr. Geoffrey Ashe that even with the best will in the world, neither I nor any anti-Christian could possibly answer every point raised by him in his two replies to my criticisms of his *Sunday Express* articles, in a few columns of this journal.

THE FREETHINKER has been before the public for nearly 80 years, and it has published hundreds of articles dealing with Christianity from almost every conceivable angle. It has had articles replying to some of the ablest Christians of the day, and I think it would not be unfair to say that almost all, if not all, Mr. Ashe's arguments have been dealt with in detail over and over again.

In addition, hundreds of books have been written against the Gospels not only by complete unbelievers like Foote, Ingersoll, J. M. Robertson, Bradlaugh, and many others, but by many eminent writers who subscribed to Christianity — like Dr. Barnes, the late Bishop of Birmingham, for example. Mr. Ashe must not be angry with me if I say that the works of some apologists for the Gospels are *derisory*.

I have not read Mr. E. F. Bruce's little book which is so highly praised by Mr. Ashe; but I hope to obtain a copy and deal with it some day. I have read, however, some of our greatest and ablest apologists for Christianity, and I find it difficult to understand how so many presumably sane people can believe in "supernatural" events supposed to have taken place in Palestine nearly 2,000 years ago on what must be described as mere second-hand hearsay.

Mr. Ashe claims that we have three lines of attack — "on the Miraculous, the attack by way of Comparative Religion, and the more complex and detailed attack on the New Testament as history." I shall try my best briefly to deal with most of his arguments.

And first let us look at his defence of miracles. A miracle, he tells us, "in Christian terms, means a divinely-ordained exception; an event outside all rules, not humanly explicable, predictable, or repeatable; not affected by human will, but by God for his own purposes, through Christ or otherwise . . ."

Any discerning reader will note how Mr. Ashe first brings in miracles, and then proceeds to support them by appeals to something he says is "divinely-ordained," by something he calls "God" through "Christ," and an "otherwise," taking it for granted that there is a "divine," a "God," a "Christ," and an "otherwise." But in a discussion with a Freethinker (as opposed to writing articles for a Christian audience who have had years of superstitious nonsense forced down their throats) it was his business to define and explain all the necessary words he uses.

He should have begun with the word "God," for if the conception of "God" given us by Christian believers can be thoroughly sustained, all the rest of what he says is absolutely unnecessary.

If "God" is the "Almighty," the "Creator" of the Universe, the "Lord" of all things, then *of course* he could perform "miracles." Indeed, it is impossible to think of anything he could *not* perform. The wonderful Lamp of Aladdin, all the marvels of the *Arabian Nights* in fact, would be child's play to him. He would be able to make a clock strike less than one, suspend a full glass of water upside-down in the air, cause a regiment of Devils to march down Whitehall, to say nothing of a bevy of Angels walking through the Sun without getting burned.

Given a genuine Christian God, and there would be no necessity for Mr. Ashe to prove that the Gospels are really true. Of course God could have a Son and a Mother. Why not? Once he has shown us that there is a God, then there is not the slightest reason to doubt the existence of minor Gods — the Gods and Goddesses who throng what we may call "Comparative Religion." And as for New Testament history — if the Christian God, that is, the only true God, inspired the New Testament, then it must be true.

To put it another way. The Atheist, blatant or otherwise, simply has no case if God exists. Mr. Ashe would have won all along the line. And all his argument, whether in the *Sunday Express* or in THE FREETHINKER is a sheer waste of time.

The real difficulty is, however, that there is not a shred of evidence whatever for the existence of any God, whether thronging Comparative religions, or the one in "true" Christianity. No Christian has ever been able to produce any argument which could satisfy all thinkers as to the existence of a God, or "God"—if Mr. Ashe prefers "God" to be "one" God. Literally thousands of books have been written by believers on the Lord's actual existence, and millions of sermons have been delivered on the same elusive subject. But Mr. Ashe knows as well as I that *argument* can never convince anybody on the problem. Faith, faith alone, is what makes believers in God, and in his "divinely-ordained" purpose. And what is "faith"? The ability to declare that you believe something to be true which is literally incredible.

Notice how Mr. Ashe introduced to Freethinkers the words "divinely-ordained." I haven't the ghost of an idea what they mean. In actual fact, he hasn't either; but without dragging in the "divine," that is, "God," he could *never* make a miracle credible. I once wrote to him that I did not believe *any* scientist believed in "miracles," and he sent me a list of those who do — a list of men who obviously only believed in miracles because they were part of their religion. What I wanted was a scientist who could show *through science* that the New Testament miracles were absolutely authentic. As for example, when Luke tells us that when Jesus parted from his followers after the Resurrection, he was "carried up into heaven"; and I ask here, where does science *as science* prove this to have literally happened? Does science tell us also that Jesus reached "heaven"?

And there is the question of evidence, that is "evidence" that miracles have happened. There can be no such evidence. As has been pointed out by Baden Powell (in *Order of Nature*, p.285) "At the present time, it is not a *miracle* but the *narrative of a miracle*, to which any argument can refer, or to which faith is accorded." And what do we know of anything recorded about 1,800 years ago classed as a miracle?

I have not forgotten that Mr. Ashe has put one observation in a note which is deliciously disingenuous. Part of it is, "For a discussion in the present terms to have point on either side God's existence must be provisionally regarded as possible." This is just the kind of thing we must expect from anybody who believes that the Gospels are true and that miracles really happened. But why should I "provisionally" regard a word he introduces as having any meaning "for the sake of argument"? On the contrary indeed. And I maintain here that it is just impossible to

talk about miracles as having happened without proving that they are or were "divinely-ordained" by a God — a God whose existence can easily be proved. That Mr. Ashe *shirked* the most important part of his argument is not surprising — to Freethinkers.

[The above is the first of five articles]

Peter Asks a Question

IT WAS ONLY RECENTLY that we received a very old cutting from the Canadian paper, *The Ottawa Citizen*, but, as it happens, the date doesn't matter. It deals with a problem as old as religion — or at least as old as theism — the problem of evil. It deserves special attention because it was posed by Peter, though we confess we don't know who Peter is.

Let us explain. In the *Citizen* there is an advice column, "Dear Abby," since introduced into England. On May 28th, 1959, the following letter appeared: —

Dear Abby: My Sunday School teacher says that God is everywhere. Please put this letter in the paper and maybe he will see it.

Dear God: Why did you let my brother die? When he was hit by the car my mother prayed to you to let him live but you wouldn't. My little brother was only two years old and he couldn't have sinned so bad that you had to punish him that way. Everyone says you are good and can do anything you want to do. You could have saved my little brother but you let him die. You broke my mother's heart. How can I love you?

To give Abby her due, she was frank in her answer. "Your question," she wrote, "is one that has troubled religious men for thousands of years. One great thinker wrote a book about it. It is called 'Job' and is part of the Bible. It says that the suffering of innocent people is something we cannot understand." Later her humanity and her religion rather clashed. "But this much is sure," she said, "Death is not a punishment. It is one of life's mysteries."

Now in the Bible, death *is* a punishment; it is inflicted as such. And it is, rightly or wrongly, still regarded as the supreme penalty in our present legal system. But this is relatively unimportant. Peter's little brother is not suffering any longer, but Peter and his mother are. "You broke my mother's heart." Here Peter indicts the god he has been taught to believe in. Then he asks the inevitable question: "How can I love you?"

What could Abby say to that (for a Christian) unanswerable question? Certainly nothing that meant anything. She took refuge in: —

Speak to your minister, Peter. Communicate with God by praying, and He will help you in your search for wisdom and goodness and help make your Mommy happy again.

She is not to be blamed. Even if she had doubts herself (and there is no indication of this) her paper would hardly permit her to voice them. But how hollow her words are! Pray to God: to the god who ignored your mother's passionate prayers for her two-year-old son's life. Forget that Peter; pray for wisdom — and for goodness, of course. Yes, pray for goodness from the god who punished you and your mother, if not your brother.

As we said, we don't know Peter, and his address isn't given. We don't even know his age. But we do know his problem. We know that the theists never have answered it and never will answer it. Peter has seen the irrationality of theism — of Christianity. It is tragic that he had to see it this way, but the tragedy being unavoidable, he will be the better for having seen it. He will see things clearer and, although there will be further tragedies to face, he will face them unhindered by a monstrous religion. He will see that his mother needs *his* love, not God's if she is to be happy again.

C. McC.

The Bible Banned

WE EXPRESSED THE HOPE (October 2nd) that our American friends would send us details of a grand jury ruling, reported in *The Times* (18/9/59) that "Pennsylvania schools were violating the constitution by ordering compulsory prayers and Bible readings." The October issue of *The Liberal*, Freethought journal of Philadelphia, gives us the details we hoped for.

A special three-judge U.S. court in Philadelphia—it tells us—"ruled unanimously that the reading of verses from the Bible and the recitation of the Lord's Prayer every morning at the opening of classes in the public schools of Pennsylvania is unconstitutional and must be discontinued." The decision was given in the suit of Mr. and Mrs. Edward L. Schempp, of Roslyn, a Philadelphia suburb, against Abington Township school district, where their children attend. Mr. and Mrs. Schempp are Unitarians, and they objected to their children being compelled to take part in ceremonies of which they disapproved.

The suit was started in February, 1958, and a number of hearings have been held. The three judges at the last hearing were: Chief U.S. Circuit Court Judge John Biggs, Jr., and U.S. District Court Judges William H. Kirkpatrick and C. William Kraft, Jr. All three agreed that the practice violated the 1st and 14th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution. They said that "the Bible must be regarded as primarily a religious document, and not as a work of literary art, and that the school practice interfered with the right of a parent to teach his own faith to his child, or to teach him no religion at all."

This, they declared, was one of the foundations of the American way of life and it had full constitutional protection. They explained that: "The daily reading of the Bible, buttressed with the authority of the State and, more importantly to children, backed with the authority of their teachers, can hardly do less than inculcate or promote the inculcation of various religious doctrines in childish minds. Thus the practice required by the statute amounts to religious instruction or a promotion of religious education. It makes no difference that the religious 'truths' inculcated may vary from one child to another. It also makes no difference that a sense of religion may not be installed. The combination of reading of the ten verses of the Holy Bible, followed immediately by the recitation of the Lord's Prayer in our opinion gives to the morning exercises a devotional and religious aspect. We conclude also, that the reading of the Bible as required by the Pennsylvania statute prohibits the free exercise of religion. The sanction imposed upon the school teachers is discharge from their offices if they fail to observe the requirements of the statute."

The Liberal echoes our view of the importance of this Grand Jury decision. "The practice of reading the Bible in the Pennsylvania public schools is of long standing," it says, "and has never been challenged before." The present

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decision, therefore, is not "just the thwarting of something new"; it is "a death-blow to a long-standing abuse." Any appeal against the decision would have to be made to the Supreme Court, and it seems unlikely that the latter would reverse a decision so fully in line with its own previous rulings and so firmly based in the American Constitution.

CORRESPONDENCE

MR. ASHE

Apart from only "two or three doubtful passages," the gospels for Mr. Ashe are beyond suspicion. "Attempts to prove the writers historically wrong have also failed . . . the difficulty over Quirinius (Luke ii, 2) has long since been disposed of." How? if I may ask.

It was 4 B.C. when Herod — not a king but a mere Tetrarch — died; nevertheless he still tried to kill the holy babe. Similarly clever was his exploit to send 70 scribes to Ptolemy of Egypt to translate there the Bible into Greek (the Septuagint). This is related by Justin Martyr who lived when the gospels were assumedly composed; however, King Ptolemy had been dead some three centuries before the birth of Herod. According to Luke iii, Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene when Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea. Unfortunately, history does not know of any tetrarchy of Abilene, and Lysanias was, at that time, at least 36 years in his grave. Pilate himself — according to Luke a contemporary of both Lysanias and Herod — came only in 26 A.D. and was cashiered ten years later, for malpractices.

Mary was "great with child" when the first taxation took place, at a time "when Cyrenius was governor of Syria" (Luke ii). According to the *Res Gestae divi Augusti*, the First Taxation took place in 7 A.D. (and another one seven years later) and the governor's name was not Cyrenius but Sulpicius Quirinius (Cyrenius came afterwards). Be it mentioned, in passing, that no Judean sub- prefect was able to pass a capital sentence (and, at that, to be executed on a Sabbath!) without endorsement by the Syrian governor.

In short: Mary was with child in A.D.7 and this child was in mortal danger in B.C.4 (hence the Flight to Egypt — a little bit far to escape a local tetrarch!)

O. WOLFGANG.

MATERIALISM

Colin McCall quotes Professor T. H. Morgan to the effect that "the properties of living things are the outcome of their chemical and physical composition and configuration." So far so good! Then Mr. McCall goes on to claim that Professor Morgan's dictum "vindicates" Materialism. In what way? The problem has not been solved, but merely pushed a stage further back.

Living things derive their attributes from whatever goes into their formation. As nothing comes from nothing, so those same attributes must have been present to start with. Where did they come from in the first instance? The materialist dogma that mind, purpose, intelligence, etc., "emerged" out of blind chaos is as fanciful as the Catholic dogma that God made them out of nothing.

It is much more realistic to suppose that life is eternal and that only its manifestations and outward forms are subject to evolution, change and dissipation.

S. W. BROOKS.

[Mr. McCall writes: Mr. Brooks can't have read my article very carefully. I never said Professor Morgan's dictum vindicates Materialism; I said that Morgan's conviction "is more and more being demonstrated" and the Materialist view "is being vindicated" by subsequent discoveries. The rest of Mr. Brooks's letter is Idealistic nonsense. How does he know "life," apart from its manifestations? He doesn't: he knows only living things. What does he mean by "attributes" being present to start with? No Materialist would say such a silly thing. Nor do I suggest (dogmatically or otherwise) that "mind" emerged out of "blind chaos" (why the adjective, by the way? Is there a "seeing" chaos?) What I do say is that mental processes are dependent upon a physical organ, the brain.]

VIVISECTION

To reply to the specific points raised by Mr. N. MacIver (October 2nd) would demand a long article. For those wishing to read up the subject send to the National Anti-Vivisection Society, 27 Palace Gate, London, S.W.1, for a selection of free publications on animals.

An enormous amount of disease is preventable by hygienic living and right diet. Diet is really our medicine, in those cases

where a fast is not indicated. Most illnesses are due to abuse of natural laws and can usually be cured by nature cure methods. We should concentrate on positive health and not negative, pathological conditions. Many of us have proved this, over the years, to be true.

FLORENCE BARKER.

Hon. Secretary for Animal Welfare
International Cultural Forum, U.K. Branch.

OBITUARY

ETHEL CLAYTON had endured very much more than her fair share of suffering, and always with cheerfulness and stoicism. Yet her death in a Burnley hospital on November 9th was unexpectedly sudden; she was due for discharge the following week. Sixty-five years of age, Ethel was the devoted wife of National Secular Society propagandist Jack Clayton, to whom we send our deepest sympathy. A Secular service was conducted at Burnley by Mr. J. Burdon, NSS. member and close friend of Mr. and Mrs. Clayton. H.L.M.

BERTRAM GEORGE RALPH-BROWN, who has died at the age of 77, was a member of the National Secular Society and a Life-Member of the Rationalist Press Association. A dentist by profession, he lived a varied life: adventurous in youth, when he travelled to America and was for some time room-mate of Jack London in Panama; public-spirited in later life, when he served on Woking Council and became its Chairman. He was a great reader, being a particular admirer of John M. Robertson, and a fascinating conversationalist. Mr. J. W. Barker, Executive Committee member of the NSS conducted a secular service at St. John's Crematorium, Woking, on Wednesday, November 18th. We send our sincere condolences to Mrs. Ralph-Brown.

Christmas Cards

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