

The Freethinker

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IT WOULD NOT BE UNFAIR to say that the one thing which has helped Christianity more than anything else to become easily the dominant religion in Europe — and in some respects elsewhere — is its world-famed symbol, the Cross. The Cross, and of course with it the Crucifix, marks out Christianity everywhere, and believers look upon it not only as peculiar to their religion, but as being literally Divine. It is the Holy Cross, the Symbol of the only begotten Son of God, upon which he perished to save Mankind.

The Symbol Par Excellence

Christians have not been slow to realise its value, and they have made the most of it. The Cross is the great influence in their lives, and forms part of every church and chapel, as well as so often the dominant portion of our great religious pictures. In fact it has, no doubt, had far more influence in shaping Christianity than the Bible. Priests and nuns and bishops almost invariably carry a Cross or a Crucifix everywhere and, though they may all declaim against war, they never ceased to be glad of a cross-handled sword as part of a true Christian's equipment, until they were obliged to admit that a pistol was a far more potent weapon.

But the Cross Symbol haunts us. On TV recently, a Cross was superimposed on a (so-called) portrait of Jesus, the long part from the top of his head to the bottom of his beard, and the short part across his eyes. Most religious programmes on TV open with a Cross, and nothing else appears for a moment so as to let it sink in. Almost every Christian is convinced that the Cross was specially designed by God for their benefit and was never used before Jesus Christ was crucified upon one. The truth is something quite different.

Anybody can find out by looking at nearly any encyclopedia that the Cross, in some shape or other, was known for centuries before the birth of Christianity. Its *actual* origin is unknown for certain, but quite a good many historians have no doubt at all that it is in all probability phallic origin. If a stick is placed in a ring with the ring horizontal, a cross is easily seen. But of course there are now many shapes of crosses as can be seen in an illustrated encyclopedia.

The Universal Symbol

Most ancient peoples, both in the Old and the New Worlds used the Cross. It was used by the Hindus who adored Agni as "the Light of the World" — incidentally, that is exactly what Jesus was made to call himself. The cross has always been adored by the Buddhists of Tibet, and by the ancient Egyptians. And most people know one form of the Egyptian cross — the *Crux Ansata*. The Babylonians used the Cross as a religious symbol — it was the symbol of both the God Anu and the God Bal. It was also the religious symbol of the ancient Persians, and in the New World, of the ancient Mexicans, as well as of the people of Peru and Paraguay. I have not seen the latest edition of Chambers' Encyclopedia which, like the

Encyclopedia Britannica, may well have come under Roman Catholic censorship; but one of the earlier editions in its article on the "Cross" has: —

It appears that the sign of the cross was in use as an emblem having certain religious and mystic meanings attached to it, long before the Christian era; and the Spanish conquerors were astonished to find it an object of religious veneration among the nations of Central and South America.

But the really interesting thing about the Cross is that it was not *at first* used as a symbol of Christianity. The word translated in all our versions as "cross" is in Greek "stauros," and this word was never meant to describe a cross but a *stake*. It would be safe to say that almost every case of execution in ancient times which

we call "crucifixion" was not what we now mean by crucifixion — nailing on a typical modern Christian cross. The horrible death used by Romans on some of their criminals and prisoners of war was not a "crucifixion" as we know it at all, but fastening to an ordinary stake with revolting cruelty.

The word "cross" is by some supposed to be the translation of the Latin word "crux," but Denham Parsons in his scholarly work *The Non-Christian Cross*, quotes Livy to show that "crux" should never have been translated "cross" as it meant "a single piece of timber." Cruden, in his valuable *Concordance*, sensing something of the sort in a long note on the word "cross," says that the verb "cruciare" was "used for all sorts of chastisements and pains of body and mind." In any case, a glance at this work will show that the word "crucifixion" is *not* to be found in the Bible. Yet the picture of Jesus on the Cross, the Crucifixion, has done more to foster hatred than probably any other picture ever painted. Jesus, suffering agony on the Cross, as on a Crucifix, is the world's most popular symbol, and has in my opinion done more to perpetuate the myth of Christianity, and particularly the myth of the Crucifixion, than all the Christian books about it ever printed, and all the Christian sermons ever uttered. Yet there is not a particle of evidence that there ever was a Crucifixion.

Before the Christian Era

In his work on the Cross, the French writer, M. de Montillet, concludes: —

One sees that there can be no doubt whatever concerning the use of the cross as a religious sign for a very long time before Christianity. The cult of the cross was well spread over Gaul before its conquest and already existed in Emilia in the Bronze Age, more than a thousand years before Jesus Christ.

When and how and why did the new religion of Christianity adopt the Cross as its symbol? This is actually a long story, and would take us far beyond the bounds of an article such as this. But one or two candid admissions by Christians are worth recording again.

For example, that very Fundamentalist Christian, Dean Burgon, always ready to defend every dot and comma in the Authorised Version of the Bible, during the latter part of the nineteenth century, once wrote a most interesting

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

The Cross

By H. CUTNER

travel book entitled, *Letters From Rome*, and in it he says: "I question whether a cross occurs on any Christian monument of the first four centuries." Mrs. Jameson's standard *History of Our Lord as Exemplified in Works of Art*, says: "It must be owned that ancient objects of Art, as hitherto known, afford no corroboration of the use of the cross in the simple transverse form familiar to us at any period preceeding or even closely succeeding the works of St. Chrysostom (347-407)." This is particularly interesting because it is commonly agreed that by the time of Constantine (c. 340) the Cross was the universally accepted symbol of Christianity. As a matter of fact, as Dean Farrar points out in what used to be the most popular *Life of Christ* ever written, "Of all early Christian symbols, the *Fish* was the most frequent and the favourite . . . (It) continued to be a common symbol down to the days of Constantine." And Farrar insisted that the Cross and the Monogram of Christ (an X with a P through it) "were not generally adopted, even if they appeared at all, until after the peace of the Church at the beginning of the fourth century."

Revolt from Religion—2

By F. S. HOUGHTON

IN A PREVIOUS ARTICLE I tried to show the cause of my revolt from religion; how it was mainly brought about by home evangelism and enforced church attendance. My childish mind rebelled against Church dogma, and particularly against the doctrine of Hell fire and the eternal damnation of sinners and unbelievers, about which our parson never tired of preaching.

This doctrine brought me face to face with the puzzle of time, for it struck me as most unjust that millions of people in pre-Christian ages—and those of non-Christian religions—should be condemned to never ending punishment, which was what this preacher believed. It aroused my doubts. Formerly, I had been satisfied with my own knowledge, and had made no attempt to increase it. Being convinced of the accuracy of my opinion, I didn't take the trouble to examine its basis. But doubt, which disturbs lazy and complacent minds, upset all that. I was moved to ask if things were as they are commonly supposed, and if all that I had been taught to believe was really true.

I used to be terrified by the fear of future punishment, but unbelief destroyed that fear. As I developed, I began to insist upon the right of private judgment in religion, and my judgment contradicted Church dogma and freed me from prejudice. There are many who believe themselves righteous, when in fact they are bigoted and superstitious; who think themselves good because they attend church regularly.

A typical household on Sundays in Victorian times was an inexpressibly dull affair. One could play no games, indoor or outdoor. One could read no newspapers; only books of a sacred character were allowed, profane or secular literature of any kind being strictly forbidden. Each book had to be vetted, and I have known quite innocuous books be prohibited. As with literature, so with music; only sacred music, both vocal and instrumental, was permitted. And conversation had to be suitably decorous for the occasion. Levity, jokes and laughter were strictly taboo.

Came the First World War, and my service in Palestine. One of the first things I did on arrival in the East was to provide myself with an Arabic grammar and phrase book, and during my two years' service there, I managed to acquire a smattering of the language. Which reminds me of a story. There had been mysterious thefts in the night from the Quartermaster's Stores. So a watch was posted.

The Cross in fact came in with Constantine. He was the great champion of Mithras, of the Unconquered Sun,—the great God of the Romans, though of course the Sun-God had many other representations. These are found on numbers of Roman coins which have survived.

That the Cross was once a phallic object is almost a certainty. That it was used in Sun worship is a certainty. That the two religions gradually became one is perhaps a speculation, but a very strong one on the evidence. The "Light of the World," Jesus, representing the Sun, "nailed" on the Cross representing the fertility of Nature, shows how the two religions at last became one.

But unfortunately what was once meant to be symbolism has been at our "Easter" taken literally. There was a real Cross, there was a real Saviour, and there was a real Crucifixion. Hence Good Friday with its rejoicing that the Saviour died for us, and hence the belief in the Resurrection—a belief in these modern times astounding in its credulity and superstition. It may take centuries before people come to see it as Myth born in a credulous and superstitious age.

Eventually a Bedouin was caught red-handed running off with a side of bacon, the bacon ration of a battalion for a week. The culprit was brought before a Court Martial of three officers. But no one could speak Arabic and the prisoner knew no English, so the Court had a dilemma on its hands. Someone remembered that I had been swotting Arabic and I was called upon to act as interpreter. Being duly sworn in, I was instructed to put the charge to the prisoner and to render his answers and no more. He was charged with the offence. The defence of the wily rascal was that he was a Copt (an Arab Christian) and that our Father above (he pointed heavenwards) was his Father too. Christians didn't steal, he said, and he being a Christian couldn't steal either! I knew the rascal was lying, but his reference to Christianity and his alleged mutual belief so intrigued the Court that they let him off.

Owing to a spell of malaria I was sent to convalescence at a base camp and there I was employed in the orderly room. A colleague held similar views to mine on religion. We slept in a marquee divided in half by a canvas partition, the other half being occupied by Irish personnel all bigoted Roman Catholics. My colleague and I used to discuss religious and philosophical topics, and it appears that we were being overheard on the other side of the partition. We heard the tumult on the other side but thought the men were just drunk as usual; we didn't realise that the disturbance concerned us. At night a friend crept in and gave us a hint to change our quarters, which we did. And it was fortunate for us that we made that move in the dark. During the night the marquee was burned to the ground.

During my service in Palestine I took what opportunity I could to visit Biblical places, and was surprised at the lack of regard or interest displayed about them by the native population. I had a drink on the site of the garden of Joseph of Arimathea, which was then a pleasure garden for drinks, cards and gambling. Another surprising fact was the lack of precise knowledge of the alleged site of the holy places. Dragomen were guides for tourists, and the various dragomen would show visitors differing sites, each insisting that his place was the authentic one.

I returned home from the war an avowed unbeliever, determined on my revolt from religion.

—NEXT WEEK—

THE ENORMOUS GROWTH OF
SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE

By Professor HENRI LAUGIER

The Reformation

By F.A. RIDLEY

[The Reformation by Archibald Robertson, Watts & Co. (1960) 21s.]
 INDISPUTABLY, one of the most important epochs in the evolution of both Christianity and of European history, was represented by the Reformation of the Sixteenth century, an international movement, the influence of which was by no means confined to its ostensible aim of "reforming" the Christian religion, but almost equally extended to the allied, and often overlapping, fields of culture, politics and economics. Along with the little-known first century, that witnessed the origins of the Christian religion, and the strangely neglected fourth century that witnessed the definitive triumph of the new Oriental cult, the era of the Reformation ranks decisive in Christian annals. And this is so, whichever of the numerous theories that have been evoked to interpret it, may be accepted. The most recent of the many historians is Mr. Archibald Robertson, well-known in rationalistic circles as a lecturer, chiefly in connection with the Rationalist Press Association and the South Place Ethical Society, and to a wider circle as the author of numerous books; and in particular as a specialist on the highly controversial subject of Christian origins. Mr. Robertson is not only a Rationalist; his approach to both general history and to that of the Reformation is strongly influenced by the Marxist school of Historical Materialism and, as such, is in "apostolic succession" from the pioneer studies of Karl Kautsky and Belfort Bax.

What Mr. Robertson gives us here, is a critique of the Reformation which is primarily socialistic in character; and some of his conclusions may appear to be partisan and/or dubious to non-socialistic freethinkers. Everyone, though, must admire our author's remarkable lucidity of style, not to mention the enormous amount of ground which he covers in an essentially readable manner in a short book of some 200 pages. For the history of the Reformation is really coeval with the history of Western Europe throughout the 16th century. Following the Marxist traditions set by Kautsky, Belfort Bax, etc., our author traces the origins of the Christian movement to an historical Jewish revolutionary of the 1st century, whose authentic message of revolt against the Roman Empire was soon enmeshed in a web of Gnostic theosophy and was eventually by a stupendous paradox, in and after the 4th century, taken over by the Roman ruling class itself. The Catholic Church which effectively dominated the Dark and Middle Ages (c. 500-1500 AD), had nothing in common with the historic Jesus and his revolutionary gospel except the name; and particularly after the Crusades (1100-1300) had become a purely feudal institution bound up essentially with the secular interests of its feudal allies.

Personally, I consider that most Marxists, including both Engels and Mr. Robertson, overestimate the feudal character and connections of the Catholic Church; if Rome had been a Simon-pure feudal institution, it would surely have perished along with Feudalism. Actually Rome is very adaptable. Nowadays, it is as capitalistic as it was formerly feudalistic, and if the pre-Reformation Papacy may be accurately described as a feudal institution its present representatives have suffered a sea-change into the "blue-eyed boy" of Wall Street. The colossal imposture of Catholicism owed its long duration to the almost universal ignorance which prevailed in the medieval era when such learning as there was represented a clerical near-monopoly. The "gospel" of all these pre-Reformation heretical sects, Hussites and Anabaptists included, was the Apocalypse.

aply defined as "a hymn of hate" against the Roman Empire. Incidentally, these sects largely retained what Mr. Robertson regards as the originally revolutionary teachings of the earliest Christians, but they were unable to cope with the organised fanaticism of the Roman Church.

But knowledge was greatly expanded during the 15th and early 16th centuries, thanks to the invention of printing and the voyages of discovery to East and West, and the glaring discrepancies between New Testament Christianity and Catholicism became manifest to the rapidly increasing educated classes. The first half of the 16th century was marked by simultaneous religious (and often political) revolts throughout Western Europe which, in their totality, constitute the Reformation properly so-called. Some, though by no means all, of these anti-Roman movements met with permanent success, thanks to the emergence not only of new cultural forces released by the invention of printing, but also, according to our author, the concurrent emergence of a new middle, or merchant-capitalist class. This had an urgent class-interest in the abolition of absolute monarchy and feudalism and, accordingly, of their cosmopolitan ally, the Papacy. The support of these new social forces which had not been available to the earlier heretical, mostly peasant sects (like the Waldenses and Hussites) ensured eventual victory, at least in those areas where these new forces were strong (like England and Germany and the Netherlands). Where they were lacking as, say, in Spain and Italy, the Reformation eventually proved unable to stand up to the fierce resistance of the Catholic counter-Reformation led by the Jesuits.

Such is, in brief, the Marxist thesis sustained by Mr. Robertson. I think that it contains much truth; the Reformation certainly was much more than a mere dispute about religion; it was truly social, as well as religious. It is, however, difficult to see how Rome could have survived at all on Mr. Robertson's hypothesis. For, after four centuries of the Reformation, not only does the Vatican still stand, but Luther's "anti-Christ," the Papacy, still rules by far the most powerful of the Christian Churches; and yet, the Robertsonian middle-class revolution is now triumphant virtually everywhere — except where it has been succeeded and superseded by its still more radical socialist successor.

In the course of his comprehensive survey, our author gives vivid portraits of the major reformers, notably of Luther, the great demagogue of the Reformation, and of Calvin, its master-theorist. However, he is no advocate of what is sometimes called the Great Man theory of history. Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Henry Tudor, etc., did not *make* the Reformation. It would, in fact, probably be much more accurate to say that they were *made* by it. This is virtually proved by the fact that this ostensibly religious revolution actually took different forms in different lands. Whereas in Germany and England it took an Erastian form and ended by immensely strengthening the power of the secular monarchies in both countries, in the Netherlands, Switzerland and Scotland, it created democratic and republican movements. Where, as in the case of the Anabaptists and of some English peasant risings in Norfolk in 1549, it remained like the medieval sects a purely peasant movement, it was bloodily suppressed as it was in Southern and Central Europe, where the new social and cultural forces were weak, and the Catholic reaction was backed by the

(Concluded on next page)

This Believing World

Writing in the "Daily Record," a Miss Macaulay tells us that she has a "real respect for the Free Kirk," but is evidently staggered that the Free Presbyterian Church in Scotland has at last managed to stop all Sunday radio and TV programmes in hospitals without the unlucky patients having any say whatever. Sunday is the Sabbath Day, it was ordained by God, and nobody must listen to any programme on the air or see one on TV so long as he or she is ill in hospital. There is power for you! And the tragic thing about it is that Sunday is *not* the Sabbath Day of the Bible, and it was *not* ordained therefore by God. But even if it were, what or who is this silly Church to be able to order anything? Who are the idiots who allow themselves to be dictated to?

★

"News Chronicle's" outspoken and lively Miss Jenkins watched BBC's "Out of This World" programme the other week, and her comments are worth repeating. It illustrated a visit to an enclosed Carmelite convent depicting what a nun's life therein was really like; it left Miss Jenkins "weeping silently and sadly." Of course, the nuns were all happy, particularly the "ecstasy" of a 19-year-old novice who talked of girls of the same age getting married. "Yet," said the novice, "they cannot love their bridegrooms half as much as I love my heavenly bridegroom." No doubt whatever this is quite true—and priests, we are sure, use exactly the same language about "our Blessed Lady" as nuns do about "our Blessed Lord."

★

But in spite of this sacred love Miss Jenkins appears to be quite unconvinced. She admits that she "doesn't want to shiver in a lonely cell with only a hot brick to keep warm with." She prefers an electric blanket. A little more of this kind of criticism and we shall get very near to blasphemy.

★

In the meantime we are pleased to put on record the appearance of a New Messiah. He is splashed on the front page of our very religious *Daily Express* with a portrait of Jesus Christ himself either blessing or admonishing him, we are not clear which. The New Messiah is Premier Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, and Mr. Lejeune, who records the Blessed Event, tells us that "everywhere I found evidence of an organised attempt to present him in Messianic terms." The faithful can buy postcards showing the two Messiahs together, and in one, Christ is handing Nkrumah the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven.

★

We heartily welcome this glorious news. It is time that we had a new Messiah — a coloured one at that — and we are sure that Nkrumahism which is (we are told) "a great new philosophy," will in time replace the out-of-date religion of Christianity with its out-of-date Messiah. Of course, nobody can yet explain what Nkrumahism *really* is, but then the old, well-tried Christianity has always been in the same boat. Suffice it to know that the world now has a New Messiah, and may he long reign!

★

However, in spite of such a world-shattering event, our contemporary, *Today*, has been telling us "What Pontius Pilate was really like" — billing him as "The Man Who Killed Christ." This is a refreshing change from the usual culprit or culprits who are usually named with special adjectives. Although we are clearly told "little is known about him," Mr. J. Leasor now presents a "detailed and authentic reconstruction of Pilate's life." These authentic details of a man we know next to nothing about give us

"the dramatic story of Easter" which, like nearly all Christians, Mr. Leasor takes from the Gospels. Even the way (described as "Pilate's hour of crisis") in which Jesus stands trial and the "mob screams for blood." The old, old story never changeth.

★

On the other hand, the "Daily Mail" is all out to prove that there is now a "Great Church Come-back." One would never think so judging from the empty churches and the hopeless ignorance nearly everybody shows both about the Church and the Bible. One thing the *Daily Mail* would never allow: It is a Freethinker to reply to the great come-back articles.

★

We trust there will be a smashing response to the heart-rending appeal of the Rev. A. Buckley who badly needs the money for a new organ in his church at Mottingham. He wants his flock to sell all their TV sets *at once*, for Christ's sake, and the organ will thus be handsomely paid for. Here then is a God-given chance for all believers to show their supreme faith — and not just to talk about it. We are hoping for a record-breaking sale now of TV sets from modest homes in Mottingham.

★

On "the Life of Christ," BBC's TV gave us the other Sunday Canon Patey answering questions put by Robert Robinson—and a fine old quandary Mr. Robinson put the worthy Canon in. He was asked to deal with the "miracles" of Jesus, and was hopelessly incompetent to do so, pathetically admitting that it was *not* the "miracles" which made him a Christian. It was not at all clear what did make him one. Christians must have had the shock of their lives hearing the Canon quite unable to defend the charges Mr. Robinson brought against the sacred person of "our Lord."

THE REFORMATION (Concluded from page 123)

military power of Spain and led by the semi-military, semi-psychological organisation of the newly-founded Jesuits. The 16th century Reformation represented in both its victories and defeats, a tremendous historical drama played out upon a cosmopolitan scale. It appears indisputable that, despite the frequent cruelty and bigotry which attended it, its net effect was, as its most recent historian contends, progressive. Historically, modern freethought and modern democracy both emerged from the left wing of the Reformation. Messrs. Watts & Co. are to be congratulated on their publication of this readable and vigorous, if at times controversial, account of one of the most stirring, as well as permanently important periods in both the secular and the religious history of mankind.

God's Place

All the life in all the seas
And all the leaves on all the trees
Seem to sigh
Asking why
God must die;

For God is the good in the living heart
And does not and can not dwell apart
In high blue skies,
Distant from eyes
Inwardly wise.

Temples of God, how mute you are
While thoughtless men prepare a war
To end the race,
God's only place.

ANNELLE EASLIC.

THE FREETHINKER

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All articles and correspondence should be addressed to THE EDITOR at the above address and not to individuals.

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

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 week-day, 1 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, CORSAIR, SMITH, etc. Sunday, 8 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, MILLS, SMITH, etc.

Marble Arch 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.

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).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

Notes and News

WE HAD OCCASION the other week (1/4/60) to quote *The Trinity Light*, bulletin of The Assumption of Our Lady, Deptford. Having received another issue of this (3/4/60) we honour it again with mention in these columns. A few weeks ago, it informs us, 1,200 small envelopes were sent out "inviting you to make a little offering towards a Memorial Mass for the Sisters in gratitude to them for their half-century of devoted service to the Parish." Recipients were asked to return the envelopes with their offerings but, thus far, only 225 have done so, "so it seems somebody's memory is not as good as it might be." It seems also that there is some lack of gratitude to the Sisters, for £100 has to be sent to Bishop's House for the Bishop to permit the Mass.

The Trinity Light also sees a loss of revenue with the end of the football season, now "rapidly approaching." A special meeting was therefore due to be held on April 8th "to make arrangements to cover the 'off-season' in some way." It is intended to base the Pools on "a very simple system using the horse racing results" and would-be promoters were informed that, at the end of the meeting "you will be given a detailed explanation of the scheme and how it will work, though in point of fact it is dead simple and we will shortly publish an explanation of it in *Trinity Light*." We can't wait.

A VERY DIFFERENT BULLETIN, which we have also mentioned before, is *Ram's Horn* of the First Unitarian Society, Salt Lake City, Utah. It is always interesting, and the latest copy to reach us (No. 26) includes a brief but salutary "Lesson in Theology." Here is is: "The ability of thousands of clergymen to utter preposterous propositions contrary to history, science and experience and not be laughed out of the pulpit is plain evidence of the cultural

lag of religion. The Neos curiously enough claim that the more preposterous the statement the more profound is the esoteric truth embedded in its absurdity."

"IT'S A SAD STATE OF AFFAIRS" commented Mr. Harry Legerton, Secretary of the Lord's Day Observance Society, and this time he wasn't referring to the Society's heavy financial losses (*THE FREETHINKER*, 8/4/60), but something much worse. Mr. Les Wise, joint manager of the TV "All Stars" football team, had been given an absolute discharge at Norwich on summonses arising from a Sunday charity match (*Daily Express*, 1/4/60). "Norwich apparently permits law breakers to get away with it," Mr. Legerton added. "God bless Norwich" said Mr. Wise, no doubt adding insult to injury in Mr. Legerton's eyes.

The Sunday Dispatch (3/4/60) was in frivolous mood about religion, albeit the Buddhist and not the Christian variety. Before they started shooting the film of *The World of Suzie Wong*, it said, it was (1) blessed by a Buddhist priest; (2) a gong was beaten to ward off evil spirits; (3) silver was thrown in front of the cameras; (4) firecrackers were let off for luck; (5) a floral emblem of peace, 30 feet by 12 feet was presented. "How has Suzie Wong fared?" the *Dispatch* asked; and answered: "The star fell ill. The director was fired. And, to date, at Elstree, they are three expensive weeks behind schedule."

IN HIS COLUMN, "One Man's World," in *The Sunday Times* (27/3/60), Mr. John West quite rightly castigated Father Trevor Huddleston for "an arrogant overtone" in the latter's remark, "We are all involved in the tragedy of Sharpeville, if we are Christians." "If we are Christians? We are all, dear Father Huddleston, involved in the tragedy of Sharpeville whether we are Christians or not," said Mr. West, and he hoped that "a great Christian of our time" wasn't going "to imply that only his co-religionists enjoy the privilege of constructive passion." "How very easy it is," he went on, "when conviction burns in us with passionate force to assume that those who think differently are not merely wrong but dwellers in darkness . . . even Jesus was driven at times into using the rough edge of his tongue."

WE HOPE MR. JOHN CORDLE, M.P. for Bournemouth East and Christchurch, read Mr. West's column. He was reported in the Bournemouth *Evening Echo* (15/3/60) as saying that "the Christian approach did make a difference in the way one treated one's fellow men," because "The example came from the Master Himself who was always ready and willing to give of His best." If Mr. Cordle really believes his concluding words — "trust in Jesus and never in time or eternity will you be confounded" — we only hope he will never be granted a ministry. Things may be pretty chaotic at some of them now, but that is nothing to what they would be like if they were left to Jesus.

MRS. E. A. GUELKE, of Cheltenham, makes the admirable suggestion that Secularists in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament Easter March from Aldermaston to London, should advertise themselves as such by carrying banners, even if home-made.

WE ARE VERY PLEASED to announce that Mr. Thomas H. R. James, genial and much respected member of Birmingham Branch of the National Secular Society and occasional contributor to *THE FREETHINKER*, is to be married on April 21st to Miss Bessie Casper. We wish Mr. James and Miss Casper every happiness in their life together.

Exodus: The Jewish Easter Tale

By P. G. ROY

ABRAHAM IBN EZRA, the 12th century Bible exegete, was the first Jew to cast doubt on the authorship of Moses. Five centuries later, Spinoza challenged the rabbinical assertion that the Pentateuch had been written by Moses. He established the science of "Higher Criticism" by his suggestion that the Five Books and the pseudo-historical parts of the Old Testament were compiled in the Persian Period by Ezra and the "men of the Great Assembly." When Cyrus (538 BC) allowed Jewish Exiles to return to Judea and made Nehemiah Governor, the scribe Ezra collected the old tribal lore and tribal laws of the land, cemented together with genealogical tradition and ritual regulations. The Talmud testifies (Baba Batra 14b) that the collection, arrangement and final redaction of the Old Testament was done in the time of Ezra, the founder of Jewish theocracy.

Following the Frenchman, Jean Astruc (fl.1766), scholars are able to separate the various intertwining strands denoted by the symbols, "J" for those parts characterised by the use of YHWH for the god name; "E" for the "Elohist"; "JE" for combination of texts with Jahveh and Elohim quotations by an editor of the 7th century; "D" for the Deuteronomist; and "P" for the Priestly Code (5th century BC). The oldest extant manuscripts of the Old Testament, kept in the Vatican and the British Museum respectively, date from the 9th century AD.

It was the task of the priestly editors to cast the beginning of Hebrew civilisation back into a time when, in fact, their ancestors were nomadic bedouins, periodically compelled to take employment with the tillers of the soil, whom they yet despised. In Genesis 4.2, it will be remembered that, "Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground" and when both made their offerings, God refused to accept Cain's fruit, preferring Abel's firstlings of the flock. These barbaric nomads and shepherds felt that it was a degradation having to labour for others in order to survive and, as soon as conditions improved, they returned to their free life in the desert. This shifting took place in the borderlands of the desert, and in 1910 Grimme discovered that the Old Semitic root M*Z*R — taken to mean Egypt (Mizrayim) was an appellative for "Border March," i.e., a district far better known to the tribal bards. Every Spring they escaped from the "House of Bondage" to freedom and the celebration of their *Ver Sacrum* with the initiation ceremony of the young men. The basis of the Initiation Secret was a presumed liberation by Moses of the Israelites suffering oppression in Egypt.

Michelangelo's famous statue of Moses is rightly depicted with bull horns, symbol of the crescent, for he was a moon god like Abraham; the latter was the epithet under which the moon god Sin or Nannar was worshipped in Harran (from where Abraham starts). Like Joseph — whose story was modelled after the Osiris-Anepu legend — Moses was given a pseudo-Egyptian varnish in imitation of Akhenaton's imperial reform on monotheistic lines. In Genesis 12.17 the "Lord plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abraham's wife." With Moses, the story is repeated on a grand scale and the highlight is the march of the Israelites through the divided waters of what the text describes as *Yam-Sûf*. This, however, is not the Red Sea, but a "Reedy Sea" or a Sedgy Moor. In commemoration of this legendary happening, every Spring the Jews celebrate the Passover (*Pesach*), which originally was a paschal offering of the firstlings of lamb and barley. The people daubed crosses on their doors with the victim's

blood so that the furious deity would "pass" them. Before Abraham made his covenant with God, he offered a sacrifice of cut-up flesh, in the midst of which the deity passed through "as a smoking furnace or a burning lamp" (Genesis 15.9-17). Being Saturn, the dangerous god, Jahveh, has to be propitiated, and the Hebrew *pâssach* (Passover) has the proper meaning of "to spare" (Exodus 12.13, to pass sparingly).

Having returned from centres of greater learning and genuine culture, the repatriates set to creating their national literature in the image of the cuneiform models they had come to know. The best-known examples of this re-writing are the law codex and the stories of the Creation and the Flood. The story of the deliverance from Egypt during the Spring Equinox is but another creation. So is that of Jesus, the paschal lamb, slaughtered on the eve of Passover to placate the Lord, and resurrected on Easter Sunday. They follow the same pattern.

All great epic poems of the cuneiform literatures were modelled after the astral pattern, where the zodiac encircled the earth. The northern part of the sky was considered the region of airy spirits, the southern half was the realm of aquatic beings and evil spirits. In Winter — which in certain regions is the rainy season — the Southern constellations culminate. The waters of the Great Flood are above the earth; it is a time of ordeal and suffering. The light deities and heroes must travel southwards (hence to Egypt) or they are cast into an abyss (Joseph in the pit, Jonah stays the three days of the Winter Solstice in the belly of the Great Fish, etc.). At the Spring Equinox they are raised from the dead or across the Milky Way, enter the Promised Land after the equinoctial storms, which were believed to emanate from the Pleiades. Next to this cluster of seven stars is that of the Hyades, conceived as the wet-nurses of both the Greek Dionysus and the biblical Rebekah (Genesis 24.59). People saw in them a beehive, and its brightest star was called Al-Debaran by the Arabs, i.e., the Bee, holy to the Goddess of Spring. Her representative in the Old Testament is Deborah, one of the legendary "Judges."

Under this constellation the Chosen People cross the southern waters into the "Land of Milk and Honey" after having wandered in the desert for 40 years, 40 being a round number, not to be taken literally. In Syria the Pleiades are called *'araba'in* to denote that for "40 days" a storm will blow. In Egypt they are *Hamsûn*, literally "fifty days." Brugsch Pasha remarked that in Persia even at present, "forty" is an elliptical expression for "many," and the animal we call the centipede is in Persian *chihil-pai*, forty-foot, and in Turkish *Kyrk-ajakly* — forty-footed. Yet incredible as it may sound, even a serious work such as the Cambridge History tries to fix dates in accordance with Biblical enumerations.

In Enuma Elish, the Babylonian Creation story, the world came into being in the course of a terrible storm as the result of a fierce struggle between Marduk and Tiāmat, the Sea Snake of the underworld. They met in close conflict, and the Lord Marduk cast his net to enclose her. Then Tiāmat opened her mouth wide in anger, the god let out in her face the "Evil Wind" (from the Peiades): —

Marduk made the evil wind to enter her so that her lips could not enclose . . . Marduk shot the arrow, he split up her belly . . . etc.

(Quoted in the British Museum translation, *The Babylonian Legends of the Creation*.)

After the Chaos dragon had been slain, the remaining

monsters took to flight. And the Bible still contains scattered indications of the story. So, in Psalm 89, where Tiāmat is called Rahab (Fracas):—

Thou hast broken Rahab in pieces, as one that is slain; thou hast scattered thine enemies with thy strong arm (v.10).

In particular, Rahab is the representative of Egypt, the eternal adversary of Jahveh's Chosen People (or "property"), and on their mythical exodus from Egypt, the motif of division is repeated in another water monster Yam-sûf is asked in Psalms 114.5: "What ailed thee, O thou sea, that thou fleddest?" And Isaiah (51.9-10) asks Jahveh: "Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon? Art thou not it which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep . . . ?" In passing it should be mentioned that this translation is misleading, as the text has "the floods of the great Tehôm" (i.e., Tiāmat).

Order was created out of Chaos when he "divided the sea" (Job 26.11) or, after Psalms 74.13-15: "Thou didst divide the sea by thy strength: thou brakest the heads of the dragons in the waters . . . Thou didst cleave the fountain and the flood . . ." Every Spring Equinox is a repetition of that "creation" by the splitting of the sea. Therefore, at the Feast of Passach, the legendary exodus, with the cleft sea monster is recited in the month of Nisan, when Enuma Elish was recited in Babylon. The Lord, like Marduk, "caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind . . . and the waters were divided" (Exodus 14.11 and 15.10).

Little wonder, therefore, that nobody has been able to find out the Pharaoh of "oppression"! A current assumption is that he was Mer-en-Ptah, or Menepthah (c. 1234-1225 BC. In the fifth year of his realm, Egypt was attacked by a confederation of tribes from Libya. He vanquished them and pursued their remnants into Palestine. Later he caused a Hymn of Triumph to be cut upon the back of a stele of Amenhotep III, at Thebes, and among the enumeration of the peoples he subjected in Palestine are mentioned, for the first time in history, the Israelites. As, however, a tribe settled on Palestinian soil and subject to Egypt. The Guide to the Egyptian Collection of the British Museum states:—

. . . the identification of him [Menepthah] with the Pharaoh of the Oppression is a pure theory, which is now known to be highly improbable . . . In any case, neither A'ahmes [who in 1580 BC drove out the Hyksos—P.G.R.] . . . nor Menepthah were drowned in the Red Sea. The mummies of both are in the Cairo Museum. That of Menepthah shows that he was an old man, who died of calcification of the arteries, and no doubt in his bed.

Nevertheless, Hollywood goes on lavishing huge sums on the boosting of glamourised Biblical fairy tales, and the producers play on the ignorance and gullibility of their fans. On a poster advertising their latest Bible-boosting "epic," *Solomon and the Queen of Sheba*, Judean warriors, clad in Roman armour, carry a standard showing the Star of David.

In fact, the Jews had, apart from tribal and dynastic emblems, no such symbol. Their coins (before the Hellenistic era they had no coinage) show differing designs — fruit, chalice, cornucopia, etc. The hexagram, or Star of David, was only adopted in 1897 by the First Zionist Congress, at Prague.

NO BLESSED GOOD

ONE OF OUR SCHOOLBOY READERS recently repeated the American experiments with blessed and cursed seeds, which naturally engaged the attention of our popular Press some months ago — and which, equally naturally, caught the fancy of the professor of ESP himself, Dr. J. B. Rhine. We are afraid, though, that neither the Press nor Dr. Rhine will be interested in our reader's experiments. He kept a careful record of his observations, but alas, "nothing spectacular happened."

CORRESPONDENCE

THE BENEDICTINES AND CULTURE

The examples cited by E.N. (1/4/60) in disproof of my contention that the Benedictines are, and especially were in the Dark Ages, a learned Order, are not very convincing. None of the authorities was a Benedictine except, of course, St. Benedict himself. If Benedict, like St. Francis later on, forbade his monks to pursue secular studies, his advice has been consistently ignored. Not all Benedictines were scholars — for that matter are all atheists? — but I think it is legitimate to contend that the Order did discharge a progressive role during the Dark Ages; always remembering that "progress" is a relative term. Most of what classical literature survived seems to have been preserved in their monasteries, whilst their agrarian activities were useful in a primitive society. In the evolution of Catholicism, the Benedictines have initiated reforming movements, particularly in the 11th century. On the whole, I would infer that they are the best of the Catholic religious Orders, and their name is not associated with any of the major crimes committed by later Orders, as by the Church in general, against Humanity.

F. A. RIDLEY.

Mr. Ridley seems to have drawn a secular hornets' nest round his ears for daring to suggest that the Benedictine monks played a (comparatively) progressive role during the Middle Ages. St. Benedict's dictum to eschew profane learning was seldom strictly adhered to. Incidentally, most of E.N.'s authorities are not from Benedictine sources. The Benedictine monasteries did in fact preserve a great many MSS of a general character. They certainly were noted for their abilities in the field of agriculture, vinery, etc. And, as with Hildebrand and the Cluny movement, they endeavoured to obtain reforms *within* the Church on many occasions. Nor do I believe that they acquired any great notoriety, if any, in connection with the persecution of heretics. As I attended a school at two Benedictine establishments in this country, I can state that members of that order tend towards being, if anything, "worldly." Most of them would admit that their Church badly needed reforming at the time of the Reformation — only with the proviso *within* the Church. I recall an occasion when a senior boy informed the "fathers" that he had "lost his faith," as a result of browsing among certain books in the school library. He was not expelled but left to his own devices: although it is true that he eventually "recovered" (recanted?). Can we have a sense of proportion in judging these matters?

G. F. BOND.

RADIO TIMES AND RELIGION

After studying *Radio Times* the other week, I wrote to the Editor of that journal, commenting on the six-to-one programme-time ratio between religion and science in the sound transmissions for that (a typical) week. I later received a printed card telling me how pleased was the Corporation by the interest I had shown in its programmes and that my letter had been passed to the appropriate department.

In a fit of childish and quite unreasonable pique at being refused print, I promptly dispatched a second letter accusing the Corporation of religious bias backed up by the suppression of criticism.

I hope, Sir, you will allow me space in THE FREETHINKER to say how wrong I was. The Editor of *Radio Times* has personally assured me that such letters are chosen completely without bias, thus, the fact that letters criticising the BBC's religious policy do not appear, can only mean that they do not get written in significant numbers.

I hope, therefore, that anyone who reads this and feels at all strongly about the question of religious broadcasting, will immediately take up his pen and avail himself of the opportunity to propagate his views via the pages of that widely-read journal.

G. M. JONES.

A GOOD DEVIL?

It has occurred to me that we know of God only through supposed revelations, and as we have only His word that he is the one true God and that the Devil is evil, then how can we be sure He is telling the truth?

Perhaps God is lying and the Devil is the truly good God, although weaker in power, and suppressed and misrepresented by his hypocritical rival. How can we be sure? We may be really worshipping the Evil One in disguise and promises of Heaven may be just a lure into Hell. And no matter how the Devil tries to make himself heard, he is ignored, because of his appearance, and the smears and threats of his opponent (that even to listen to the Devil is sin).

If the clergymen deny this idea of mine and say that *they* know what is the Truth — again how can we be sure? They themselves may be unwitting agents of the Evil One, which is something that they often attribute to others. All religious strife and evils generally may be due to God, while all goodwill and welfare be due to the Devil. Let us therefore proceed with circumspection.

D. L. HUMPHRIES.

RELIGION AND OVERPOPULATION

I hope you will be freethinking enough to allow me to answer the question posed in THIS BELIEVING WORLD (March 25) as to what solution religion has to the over-population problem.

Originally, the founders of all the great religions provided a most radical solution which was, however, always promptly concealed by the priests supposed to be perpetuating their teachings. Christianity with its celibate founder, who was intended to be the "example" for all men; Buddhism, which taught that the aim of life was to kill all craving so that the cycles of rebirth in this jungle world should cease; the Mystery Religions with their castrated priests symbolising the Goddess of Wisdom's demand for continence and chastity; Paul, who considered celibacy a higher condition than matrimony; all taught the same thing, i.e., that the physical sense of life was not to be perpetuated but transcended in order that a higher sense of life lived in the mental-spiritual realms might be achieved. Both Buddhism and the Mystery Religions taught that man had fallen into a material sense of life from a higher existence and that his destiny was to return to his native, spiritual realms by means of self-purification and abstinence from animalism in all its phases.

Clement of Alexandria quoted from *The Gospel to the Egyptians* passages that were firmly repressed by the Church, in which Salome asked Jesus: "How long shall death prevail?" and he replied, "As long as ye women bear children," going on to say, "I came to destroy the works of the female," i.e., human propagation. Gandhi, one of the most religious men of this century, entreated his fellow-countrymen to cease propagating for a generation by means of self-control. Now Nehru, less idealistic, is driven to advocate birth control and possibly sterilisation, neither of which can add anything to the dignity and purification of mankind.

The fact is that true religion has always provided the "remedy" for population of any sort, on the assumption that man is a pilgrim and stranger in this jungle of a world; but the power-addicted priest-hoods, with an eye on unlimited congregations have always chosen to reverse the teachings of their more realistic and far-seeing masters — hence the present plight of mankind.

ESME WYNNE-TYSON.

DR. DUHIG

Although I agree with the main points in Dr. Duhig's article on Birth Control, I feel that he has given the Catholic Church rather more of a hammering than she really deserves.

If "God wrapping up pleasure in the sexual act" is news to Dr. Duhig, he should consult one of the many pamphlets on Sex and Marriage issued by the Catholic Truth Society, when he would learn that the pleasures of sex are intended to compensate married couples for the difficulties and hardships involved in raising a family. Sex is to be enjoyed, but only within the bounds of marriage and parenthood (or at least the risk of parenthood!). Of course, this is the Church's opinion, not mine.

The Jesuit priest's advice to the young bride, to be as modest in marriage as before, was sound as far as it went. Immodesty in marriage, and especially in the newly married girl, is not likely to produce either admiration or respect. Sexual adjustment takes much time, patience and skill, and as the young bridegroom rarely has any of these qualities, a little modesty on the part of his wife would hardly be out of place.

As regards Dr. Duhig's comments on the "safe period," it is widely known that most women exhibit fluctuation in sexual desire, but it is far from true to state that "maximum libido . . . occurs about the middle of the cycle at the time of the maximum charge of conception." In fact, most women's maximum libido is just after menstruation, or even during the last days of menstruation, i.e., during the safe period. Some show a maximum during ovulation (mid-cycle) and others show no periodic fluctuation at all.

SIDNEY H. HODDES.

N.S.S. EXECUTIVE

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 6TH. Present: F. A. Ridley (Chair); Messrs. Barker, Cleaver, Corstorphine, Ebury, Hornibrook, Johnson, Mrs. Ebury, Mrs. Trask, Mrs. Venton, the Treasurer (Mr. Griffiths) and the Secretary. Apologies from Messrs. Corina and Gordon. The Committee stood in silence as a tribute to Peter Moore. New members were credited to Birmingham, Dagenham and Glasgow Branches which, with individual members, made 9 in all. Secretary's letter to High Commissioner for South Africa was approved. Request for Mr. Ridley to speak at Hull University and Leeds was agreed. Reports and correspondence from F. J. Corina and Dagenham, Edinburgh and Leicester Branches were dealt with. Two Sunday meetings at Hove (for Sussex Branch) would be arranged. The Conference Agenda was prepared. The next meeting was fixed for Wednesday, May 11th, 1960.

PETER MOORE

"IF THERE IS A GOD, he dealt Peter a double dose," Mr. Moore senior said to me when he told me of his son's death from cancer in his 26th year.

True indeed! Peter Francis Moore was born with a terrible physical handicap that made walking hazardous. He overcame it stoically, and he became a popular personality in the Freethought movement. A few months ago, he was in the office when I returned from conducting a secular funeral, and he asked me to conduct his. I laughed and said I should most likely die first, but he referred to the traffic of London and the possibility of his being knocked off the tricycle he used to get about all over the metropolis. Now I wonder if he knew he was ill. Later when I visited him in hospital he was obviously very weak, but he was cheerful as ever.

And Peter was cheerful, in spite of his infirmity. Of course, he had his moods, like all of us — and he was jealously independent — but no one loved a joke more; few were better company. He could talk, and talk well, on many subjects, but music, cricket and history were among his favourites. It was clear he had a fine brain, and he had read enormously. I am glad I persuaded him to write a few articles for THE FREETHINKER, as I am glad the National Secular Society elected him to its Executive Committee and gave him the chance to address a series of Study Classes a year or two ago. I know he appreciated the friendship and the mental stimulation he got from being with his fellow Freethinkers.

I remember the first time I met him, at the now defunct Malatesta Club. I had only been in London a short time and was gathering material for a debate on Billy Graham. Peter, who then lived near Arsenal Stadium, gave me his impressions of the Graham rally there. Then we played chess, and he beat me. His memory served him well at the game, as it did in his favourite field of history.

When I think what he had done, with little or no formal schooling; when I think what he could have done had he lived even a second twenty-five years, I feel a bitterness against life. But Peter would have been the first to tell me to pull myself together, to be reasonable. At a time like this it is hard, but I can recall the many cheerful hours we spent together. He was, as we Northerners say, a grand lad.

COLIN MCCALL.

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