

# The Freethinker

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IN A RECENT ISSUE OF THE FREETHINKER, I considered briefly the situation in which the apologists of Theism find themselves when confronted with such an "Act of God" as was represented by the recent earthquake at Agadir. Following upon the facts and inferences then noted, I would like here to indulge in a more general critique of Theism. For it can hardly be disputed that, as far as Western religion is concerned, the belief in a personal God

who himself has created everything and was himself created by none, remains the fundamental tenet, the sheet anchor, of every present — and future — religion which claims acceptance by the human race. Doubtfully excepting Buddhism, which in any case did not originally appear as a distinct religion, but as a reforming movement in Hinduism, every religion that has ever appeared, has been ultimately based on one or another form of Theism, and a multitude of theologians, Jewish, Christian and Muslim, indeed ranging from the priests of ancient Egypt to the present-day Catholic Evidence Society (which, as already stated, declined our Editor's invitation to comment in these columns on "God and Agadir") always begin their demonstrations of the truth of their particular religious cult by affirming the prior existence of a personal God. One could say, in fact, that Theism represents the lowest (or highest?) common denominator of religion, of any religion, and of all religions.

## The Creator and His Creation

The most important fact to note with regard to Christian Evidence — "Natural Theology" as the Roman Catholic Church defines it more precisely — or for that matter, about any other form of Theistic apologetics, is that it is essentially based upon a pre-scientific view of the Universe. After all, the classic exponents of Theistic argumentation from Plato and Cicero to Al-Ghazali ("The Proof of Islam") and "The Angelic Doctor," St. Thomas Aquinas, all lived, both mentally and geographically, in a Lilliputian pre-Copernican, pre-Darwinian Universe about 6,000 years old and only a few hundreds or thousands of miles in extent; heaven and hell, its higher and lower extremities, being actually situated within visiting — and in the case of hell — burning distance of the earth. The classic and medieval arguments drawn from Design, were all based upon the supposed existence of this earth-centred diminutive Universe about which, in any case, virtually nothing was known, though a great deal was surmised. Space travel of a kind existed, but the distances traversed were so small that there was no need of sputniks! Any angel, endowed with wings, could cover the distances between the mutually farthest parts of this Universe without apparently ever feeling any need for even carrying a reserve pair of wings! It must never be forgotten that this Universe, which never had any existence except in the minds of the theologians, represented the presumed Creation upon which all the classic arguments for Theism were based, again from Plato to the Jesuit manuals — including, incidentally, our oldest

friend (which is found already in pre-Christian literature) "The Argument from Design" (cf. Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* — c.50BC).

## Theism and the Modern Universe

This pre-Copernican Universe has now disappeared without trace, except in Theology, and especially Natural Theology, viz, Apologetics, the "science" of proving the prior existence of God to the material Universe. But actually modern apologetics for Theism resemble nothing so much as the fabled coffin of Muhammed which traditionally hung between earth and heaven without visible means of support. For the traditional arguments of Apologetics relating to God and his Universe were all

elaborated in a pre-scientific era. Accordingly, let us do what no theologian has hitherto ventured to do; let us put the classic argumentation for Theism into the actual scientific perspective disclosed by modern research. In such a case we must consider the hypothesis of a God who actually created, not the petty pre-Copernican Universe, but the apparently illimitable Universe of today. Further, from the nature of the Creation, it would surely be possible to infer something about the character and interests of the Creator; (e.g., if, say, in a deserted house one were to find musical instruments, one could surely infer that its original occupant took an interest in music. This, incidentally, is the "argument from Design" legitimately stated). But what are the dominating characteristics of the Universe as now disclosed by astronomical research? Surely there can be no doubt at all about them; they are surely space, emptiness and silence. Solid bodies are merely parts in space scattered at enormous intervals throughout the huge void. Moreover, of these mutually remote and infinitesimal solid bodies, very few appear to be suitable for any form of conscious life — even an angel could not land on most of them with his wings intact! For example, in our solar system, only the earth appears to be suitable for any form of intelligent life, and even that is no earthly paradise, as the survivors of Agadir would no doubt confirm. Accordingly, since the basic characteristics of the Universe appear to be space, emptiness and silence, one must add that assuming the Theistic postulate of a Creator, his (or her) interests presumably centred around these self-same attributes. But what sort of a Creator would that be? The traditional God of Theology is at least a god endowed with what his worshippers regard as ethical and intellectual attributes. No traces of the existence and handiwork of such a Creator can be discovered either in the everlasting silences that dominate the inter-stellar spaces, or in such cataclysms as upon our own minute planet, destroyed Pompeii, Lisbon and Agadir; or in those, no doubt far vaster cataclysms which according to modern astronomy, fill the Universe with exploding suns and decomposing planets. The classic arguments for Theism, simply do not fit into this Universe. It was in no way an accident that Pascal, the most intellectual of modern Christian apologists, re-

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

## A Critique of Theism

By F. A. RIDLEY

marked after observing the sky for the first time with the recently discovered telescope, "The silence in those places terrifies me." Well it might!

So completely in fact, have traditional apologetics been undermined by modern knowledge, that it would not be at all surprising if surviving future theologians were to go back — or rather forward — to Dualisms preached by such ancient religions as Zoroastrianism and Manicheism and, within Christianity itself, by the 2nd century heretic Marcion. It is well known how the Inquisition effectively liquidated this heresy in the case of the Manichean Albigenses. Nonetheless, it has kept on recurring throughout European history (cf Stephen Runciman, *The Medieval*

*Manichee*). According to this, certainly more plausible theory, there are two gods, and the shortcomings of the Universe are not due to the good, but to the evil god. Such an hypothesis — as also that of a "limited" god which some recent theologians favour nowadays — would certainly be a relief to the hard-pressed apologists of present-day Theism. For the traditional unique Creator who made heaven and earth and the waters under the earth (including the subterranean volcano that blew up Agadir!) has now gone to join "the snows of yesteryear." There is no room, or reason, for his presence in the revealed Universe of 1960 — a Universe revealed by astronomic science and not by outmoded theological guesswork.

## St. Theresa of Lisieux

By MARGARET McILROY

THE CANONISATION, IN RECORD TIME, of Thérèse Martin, a French Carmelite nun who died in 1897 at the age of 25, caused some surprise. Her admirers can point to no positive achievements, practical or intellectual. In life she excited little notice in the small convent in which she was immured. Her fame rests entirely on her letters and on the short account of her life she wrote when dying, and had she not left in the convent three sisters determined that their little one should have the recognition they thought her due, nothing would have been heard of her. Her claim to sanctity rests on the consistency with which she lived out the terrible life to which she had dedicated herself, refusing the smallest relief from it but death — for which she longed. To the Catholic, she attained the peak of human perfection, completely pleasing to God; no life could be more useful, as witnessed by countless conversions, for which, we are told, she has been posthumously responsible. What should be the significance to the Free-thinker of the story of Thérèse Martin?

Thérèse's parents had both wished in vain to enter religious orders, and her mother hoped that all her five daughters would become nuns — as indeed they did. This comfortable middle-class family was obsessed with religion, and Thérèse was taught "contempt for the world" from the cradle. She was the youngest of the family, a most attractive child, was petted by everyone, and was very happy until, when she was five, her mother died. This was a bitter blow from which it took the poor child a long time to recover. Her sister Pauline became her "little mother," but the days of Thérèse's baby happiness were gone for ever, and there was little other happiness to follow.

Pauline had already decided to become a nun, and the quality of the upbringing she gave her little sister may be seen from the following incident. One hot day Thérèse came in from the garden for a drink of water. Pauline asked her to go without the water to help a poor sinner. Thérèse, though dreadfully thirsty, agreed to sacrifice her drink. Pauline soon decided the child had suffered enough, but Thérèse was reluctant to take the proffered water, inquiring about the possible harm to the poor sinner. Pauline reassured her: "First you gave him the merit of your sacrifice; now you can also help him by your obedience."

Thérèse's schooldays were dismally unhappy. The atmosphere of her home, in which the slightest misdemeanour was an offence against God, combined with the amount of petting she had received and the shock to an over-sensitive nature of her mother's death, had unfitted her to mix with normal children, even in a convent school. As any infringement of the school rules horrified her, she was naturally unpopular with the girls, and as she was liable to burst into tears at any moment, she was not, despite excellent marks, a favourite with the nuns. The pretty, confident toddler

had become an unattractive, dull child.

A further blow was still to come. When Thérèse was nine, Pauline entered the Carmelite convent at Lisieux, and Thérèse lost her "little mother." Henceforward she was to see Pauline only on rare occasions, and then through a grille, with the whole family present. Thérèse was shattered, and her mental suffering found physical expression in a nervous illness — chorea, commonly known as St. Vitus' Dance. Thérèse and her family naturally attributed this to an attack by devils! She was subject to such dreadful convulsions that she could hardly be kept in bed, but she never — an admiring sister tells us — deranged her clothing immodestly! She was suddenly cured by a miracle — a vision of the Virgin, she confided to Marie, her eldest sister. Thérèse was to regret her confidence, for Marie proudly publicised the event, while Thérèse was convinced that the Blessed Virgin wished her visit to remain secret, and the poor child was burdened with guilt.

Thérèse remained morbidly sensitive, constantly weeping; a problem child. The disappearance of Marie to join Pauline in the Convent did not help. Unlike Pauline, Marie had no wish to enter a convent, and had intended to devote herself to caring for her father in his old age but, since a priest told her to her surprise that she had a vocation, regretfully, she had to go. She was an obedient girl, and could not resist a vocation! The third sister, always the odd one out, went to another convent and Thérèse was left at home with Céline, three years older than herself, and their father.

But Thérèse was again to see herself as the beneficiary of a miracle. On Christmas Eve, when she was fourteen, she overheard her father make a slighting comment on her babyishness. To her surprise, she found herself calm and tearless, and from that moment she became happy and confident again. Then began her brief flowering. Her lively mind was released from some of its impediments, and she turned with interest to her studies. History and science interested her particularly, but the shadow of her religion hung over her still, and she sternly restricted the time she allowed herself for such reading — a worldly indulgence.

(To be concluded)

### ASSAULT ON TOM MOSLEY

We learn with some alarm, just before going to Press, that Tom Mosley was attacked at Nottingham Market Square on Sunday, April 24th, and was taken to hospital suffering from concussion. A Nottingham friend tells us that Tom spent a comfortable night according to the hospital report, and we know all readers will join with us in wishing him a speedy recovery. A man was taken to the police station.

# Materialism

By Dr. J. V. DUHIG

IT IS UNFORTUNATE that the word Materialism can be used in at least three senses — Scientific Materialism, Hedonism and Dialectical Materialism. Each is distinct from the others. Scientific Materialism rests on the fact that the world consists of matter which can be subjected to scientific investigation and the laws which govern its manifestations can thus be formulated. These laws are not absolute, and probably never will be, but are provisional approximations of sufficient cogency to be useful in everyday life and as points of departure for further scientific progress. Science is in this way fruitful; religion, being static, never is, except, of course, in theological strife. In this scientific way, we arrive at socially useful formulations of the general form that if P is true, Q is then likely to have a high probability of truth. So that Science becomes a useful source of prediction and a final mathematical statement may, through a physico-chemical investigation, end in a mathematical statement with a very wide general application. There is still much opposition to this system from metaphysical philosophers, Bertrand Russell amongst them, and from professional religionists who are particularly hostile when it is suggested that man is part of universal matter, mainly on the ground that, to the former, man has a "mind," and to the latter he has a "soul" impervious to physico-chemical investigation. I believe that man's body is matter, and as such obeys the laws of all matter and that the dichotomy mind-body is a semantic fallacy developed from primitive speculation about the mind-body relation.

The mind is a manifestation of brain function, as the voice is of lung and larynx, and as digestion is of hepatic, pancreatic, gastric and intestinal function. Research into localisation of mind phenomena in specific brain tracts is going on now along the lines laid down by Sherrington in his epoch-making work on the spinal cord. I believe that mind as an entity will eventually hold no secrets from the fully developed science of Psychology and Freudian psycho-analysis which will replace the always mutually exclusive speculations of the empirical philosophers who will slowly but surely wither away. I have tried, for example, to read Bergson, and I find his stuff tedious and pretentious rubbish, as meaningless as Kirkegaard and his like. This stuff will be fully replaced by Scientific Materialism as the major scientific conception on which to rest a *weltanschauung*.

While, of course, there was formerly room for confusion of thought about Mind, there has not been for many centuries any warrant for belief in the "Soul." This is an extremely primitive, pre-stone-age conception of something alive that resides in human bodies and has an existence independent of them after death. On this basis there are some questions I would like to ask. First, a soul, if it has an existence independent of the owner-body (or really temporary owner) must have physical characters. What are they? What is the shape, average size, lengths of major and minor axes, colour, odour in or out of a state of sanctity and physical state? Is it solid, liquid or gas? I have never seen these details given, though when I was young I read, compulsorily, many books of devotion. Second, what does God do with souls after they are finished with? The soul of a new-born baby dying soon after birth could, I should think, except for the nasty brownish stain of Original Sin, suit another baby, with the original Original Sin stain transferred to the new ownership. And third is the question of surplus souls. There is much to be said for the Theosophical idea of transmigration of souls as an

economy measure! To a person of tidy mind it must seem reckless waste to have billions of surplus souls flitting around Hades and the Elysian Fields, probably obstructing the traffic; while during the war the congestion and confusion on the trans-Styx ferry service must have been frightful. If there were any sense in the soul idea, I would be all for second-hand outfits. But the thing is obscene rubbish, and the only use for it is that it fills the priests' pockets. They keep telling bereaved people that their loved ones are in Purgatory and that it will cost them a fiver or a tenner a week in masses to get them out. I know one family whose recently deceased father will most certainly spend at least the next 20 years in Purgatory at the request of the three priests who charged the family £836 for the requiem mass. You can bet they won't let up on such a good thing. The word soul simply survives as a racket like this, and as a word which no longer means anything but an emotive epithet in art or music.

Now it is evident that if all matter can be reduced to simple physico-chemical laws, expressed as equations, the chances for the exercise of freewill will disappear, and the big money-spinner, Sin, will also disappear. People will not need the Confessional or the priests. By this time Religion will have ceased to exist.

The hedonist idea is just a masochist jealousy on the part of puritans and religious cranks, who hate to see other people enjoying themselves. I do not particularly want to be rich, but if I were I would enjoy myself by "crude," "sheer" and "gross" materialism. But it ill becomes the Churches, particularly the millionaire organisations of the Vatican and Church of England, to cavil at wealth forthcoming from Spellman's millionaire friends. This is curiously like double-talk, in which the Vatican specialises, since it survives on hoarded millions and pretends to be like Jesus who, being a lazy vagrant who never did any real work in his alleged life, was naturally so jealous of the wealth acquired by honest labour, and so cursed the wealthy. It is impossible to expect the realism of honesty from religionists.

Finally, Dialectical Materialism has produced a rigid authoritarian system indistinguishable from the medieval Catholic Church, and I am not interested in such things. I hate dictatorship of anybody or anything and, in this respect, I do not think the proletariat has been any different from any other dictatorship.

## READY FOR A REVIVAL?

ALTHOUGH THE Church of England lost ground during the 1914-18 war, and the rot continued almost to 1950, now, it appears, "the Church has gained as much active support as it lost" in the previous ten years. In fact, "the people are ready for a revival," says the *Daily Mail*.

There is not the slightest sign of a revival — that is, a revival in the belief that Jesus is the Son of God, that his Second Advent is bound to come, that there are a real Hell and Heaven, and that Devils and Angels actually exist. If the Churches gain any ground, it is only in the field of some social activities and not because of any belief in the "truths" of Christianity.

THE YEAR'S FREETHOUGHT  
THE FREETHINKER FOR 1959

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## This Believing World

A Christian slashed a girl of 16 across her face with a razor, and got seven years' hard for it. On appeal, he said he was bound by the oath he took on the Bible to do it, and his sentence was immediately reduced to four years. Of course, it is impossible to say whether this touching proof of his unimpeachable orthodoxy had anything to do with the reduction of his sentence, but we cannot help wondering what the appeal judges would have done if the razor slasher had claimed he had been reading "Tom" Paine's *Age of Reason*, or THE FREETHINKER. Would the sentence have been doubled?

★

Alas, that superb volume known as "Hymns Ancient and Modern" has had the violent hands of a vandal against it, and some of the finest examples of religious drivel look like being put on the scrap heap. Mr. D. Holbrook has found out that what were once considered "All Hymns Bright and Beautiful" — or at least some of them — are actually "dull and often downright ugly," and he objects to children being made to sing them.

★

So he wants to scrap two-thirds of those hymns which have done pious duty for a great many years — and which, incidentally, included many which to most children sounded in all probability like gibberish. However, here is one included in the new collection: —

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?  
Were you there when they nailed Him to the tree?  
Were you there when they pierced Him in the side?

and it is difficult to imagine anything more horrible than this, and more unsuitable for children. It will no doubt be in the new collection side by side with that other bright and cheery gem of our childhood — "Washed in the blood of Jesus . . .!"

★

That outspoken Bishop of Southwark, Dr. Stockwood — who is now, by the way, in the diocese of THE FREETHINKER — criticised his Church not a little in the *Daily Mail* "to prove his doctrine orthodox, by apostolic blows and knocks" — as dear old Samuel Butler nearly had it. He was obliged to admit that "the standard of sermons preached is often very poor," that the "services are much too complicated and difficult," that "the Church has on the whole failed with the working class," and so on. Still, there has been much progress, especially among the young undergraduates in our universities.

★

It appears that 30 years ago or so few undergraduates went to church — now 55 per cent. do so. This, contends Dr. Stockwood, is due "to a fundamental change in outlook on spiritual and social matters." What a pity that some of these more spiritual undergraduates don't come out a little more, and show us what they now know about Christianity. Do they really now believe in Miracles, Hell, Heaven, Angels and Devils — or what? Can they now show us that Christianity is really true?

★

Although, as the London "Evening News" tells us, Jesus "prayed in agony" on the night before his Crucifixion, yet "Christmas and Easter are joyful feasts." Of course, the reason for this is that "our Lord" is "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world"; his death was "a willing sacrifice," and a Roman officer cried out, "Truly this Man was the Son of God"; so we should all be thankful now and merry. Whether Christianity be true or not, the remarkable thing about it is the kind of silly slush which can pour out of whole-hearted believers. We wonder what the Bishop of Southwark thinks if he reads much of this.

But what can we really expect? Year in and year out at Christmas and Easter in particular, "pious" journalists find that by re-writing the Gospel story in good "journalistic" and especially enlarging on each incident, "The Crime before Calvary" (as it is always called) with all the lurid details illustrated like a "Western," a remunerative market lies at their feet. Nothing like the "agonising" story of Jesus on the Cross to rake in the shekels, and incidentally, disseminate hatred for the "criminals."

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In this connection — apart from the Jews — it is very interesting to find what *Today* (which has been publishing the story of Pontius Pilate) has to say. *Today* insists that it was Pilate who killed Jesus — so how was he punished? Actually, history does not record that he was punished at all, but facts are the last things which the Christian Church ever bothered about. So it began at once to invent the punishments which Pilate ought to have had but didn't.

★

According to Eusebius, Pilate committed suicide in Rome or in France; others say it was in Switzerland. If this does not satisfy us, then there is the story that he was imprisoned under sentence of death in a cave. As he peered out, an arrow struck him in the face and killed him. We can take our choice, of course, but the only thing we can say for certain is that Pontius Pilate died, and nobody knows how. There is no evidence that he ever knew Jesus at all — as Anatole France in a very famous short story slyly proved.

★

"News Chronicle's" writer Laurence Easterbrook (who is a Spiritualist) wrote on Easter Saturday an article to prove that we had a life "before we're born," and gave us two infallible proofs. St. Paul, we are informed, "is a useful guide in these things," while "the Risen Master" was the biggest authority of all on "Immortality." Did he not say to the thief on the Cross, "Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise"? This proves infallibly that there is a Paradise, no doubt stocked with Angels and Immortality for ever and ever. Mr. Easterbrook's article is about the last word on hopeless credulity.

### FROM DR. HOPE

Mr. McCall's sprightly and ingenuous attack on my Lucan sermon came at a very opportune moment. I had been trying to explain to Miss Kennedy why, more than half a century ago (when I was still frequenting the counters of the current vendors of "truth" and was therefore a constant reader of your sturdy little journal) I had reluctantly decided to give it up. Even at that age I was a little puritanical about Truth, Freedom and what is called Thought, and I felt that by suggesting to innocent, truth-loving anarchists like myself that its contributors' thought was free, THE FREETHINKER was being linguistically naughty and was trying to seduce us from our intellectual integrity. Under any other name such as "The Gay Joust" or "The Irresponsible Heretic" its attractive sentiments would have been welcome. But not as "The Freethinker," since all too obviously your contributors were just as dogmatic as the dogmatists they attacked, and their "thinking" mainly consisted in stirring up and trying to make new combinations out of the mud from which philosophers were trying to cleanse the River of Truth.

It is admirable that dogmas should be attacked — it keeps them on their toes. It is admirable that immature thinkers should play with mud — ultimately nothing is so cleansing as mud. But to call such escapades "free thinking" is rank blasphemy. I am therefore very grateful to Mr. McCall (could he by any chance be a recent convert from Rome to Moscow, like that gay old dog Joseph McCabe?) for providing Miss Kennedy with an even better illustration of why I stopped reading THE FREETHINKER than your other redoubtable contributor, Mr. Houghton, to whose writings she referred me in the first place.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient servant and brother in Christ,

RICHARD HOPE.

We are glad Dr. Hope found Mr. McCall's attack "sprightly" even if "ingenuous." We confess we find Dr. Hope's reply merely ingenuous.

# 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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Details of membership of the National Secular Society may be obtained from the General Secretary, 103 Borough High Street, S.E.1. Members and visitors are welcome during normal office hours. Inquiries regarding Secular Funeral Services should also be made to the General Secretary, N.S.S.

## ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

C. J. LITTLE. The reference in the *Bible Handbook* is quite correct. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are all referred to without the "St." If the Epistles of "St. John" are referred to, it would be as 1 John, 2 John, or 3 John. Moreover, none of the Epistles has fourteen chapters.

## 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.

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.

### INDOOR

London Anarchist Group (Union Hall, Clerkenwell Road, E.C.1). Sunday, May 1st, 7.30 p.m. Anarchist speakers on "How to end Tyranny and War."

North Staffordshire Humanist Group (Guildhall, High Street, Newcastle-under-Lyne), Friday, April 29th, 7.15 p.m.: A Discussion.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1), Sunday, May 1, 11 a.m.: F. H. A. MICKLEWRIGHT, M.A., "Ethics of Urban Development."

Sussex Branch N.S.S. (Meet at the Statue, Embassy Court, Brighton), Sunday, May 1st, 2.45 p.m. Speakers: D. TRIBE and J. W. BARKER.

## Notes and News

WE SEND OUR CONGRATULATIONS to Charles Bradlaugh Bonner, President of the World Union of Freethinkers, on the occasion of his seventieth birthday, April 28th. Mr. Bonner is, of course, the grandson of Charles Bradlaugh, founder of the National Secular Society, but is deservedly well known in his own right, especially as a Freethought organiser (he was for many years an official of the Rationalist Press Association Ltd.) and as a translator of Freethought literature. We wish him many happy returns of the day.

MENTION OF THE World Union of Freethinkers reminds us of the next meeting of the General Committee which will take place in Geneva from September 2nd to 5th, 1960. Once again the Committee meeting will be combined with a social occasion, and British Freethinkers who would like to meet their Swiss and other Continental colleagues are

## The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY ACKNOWLEDGED: £80 19s. 2d. S, Goldsmith, 12s. 6d.; W. Cronan, £1; R. V. Ross, £1 13s. 6d.; Mrs. H. A. Easlic (USA), £8 15s. 2d.; Miss D. G. Davies, £1 1s.; H. and K. Clark, 10s.; W. Perkins, 10s.; Mrs. B. Allbon, 2s. 6d.; W. Scarlett, £1; L. Davila, 10s.; K. Carroll, 10s. 2d. Total to date, April 22nd, 1960: £97 4s. 0d.

invited to be present. Further details may be obtained by writing to Mr. Bonner, 23 Streathbourne Road, London, S.W.17.

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OUR OCCASIONAL CORRESPONDENT, Robert W. Morrell, has produced a novel little pamphlet, *Does God Exist?* Here is the complete text: "Question: Does God exist? Answer: No."

★

MR. MORRELL RECENTLY HAD a good letter on "Catholic Claims" printed in the *Nottingham Evening News*. The Roman Catholic Church — he wrote in reply to the Rev. R. F. Thornhill — "has never had universal recognition as the 'One True Church' . . . It remains today as in the past but one of many sects." Simultaneously, the *Evening News* published a letter on "Moral Rearmament" by veteran Nottingham Freethinker, Tom Mosley, again in reply to a champion. "We remember Frank Buchman saying 'Thank God for Hitler,' and that Herr Himmler was a 'great lad,'" wrote Mr. Mosley. "History warns us that we should beware of the 'God-guided men,'" he went on. "What the world needs is tolerance for the other man's point of view, human understanding and problems regarded in the light of reason, not in terms of an absolutist, supernatural 'faith'."

★

A LETTER IN THE *New Statesman* (16/4/60) from Mr. Kenneth Wardle of London, bore out our view of the dominant role of Roman Catholicism in German politics today. Referring to an article by Mr. Paul Johnson, who is a Roman Catholic though not an uncritical one, Mr. Wardle said "In so lengthy an account of 'Home Truths about Germany,' I would have given pride of place to this omnipresent influence. It is fundamental to an understanding of German politics — home and international. In the context of the approach to the Summit it simply means that for many Germans — certainly the more vociferous ones — any negotiations with the Russians are tantamount to dealings with the 'Devil'."

★

CASSANDRA, IN THE *Daily Mirror* of April 19th, printed an ironic "Thought for the Day" in the form of Mrs. Verwoerd's comment on the recovery of her husband, the South African Premier. This read: "I see the hand of God in the absolute miracle that not only was Dr. Verwoerd's life spared, but also that he is expected to recover and continue the struggle. Is it not a sign to us that we are on the right path and God is with us?"

★

AN AMERICAN READER, Mr. John A. Wilson, sends us an interesting little letter from what he calls "a suburban Philadelphia newspaper," *The News of Delaware County*. Written by a Sixth Grader who asks the Editor not to use his name, it reads: "God gave animals for people to eat. God gave birds for cats to eat. God gave worms for birds to eat. God is good. God takes care of all of us."

### NEXT WEEK

## THE RISE OF CHRISTIANITY

By F. A. RIDLEY

# More Light on the New Testament—1

By H. CUTNER

READERS WILL NOT, I hope, expect me to reply to Mr. Geoffrey Ashe's last letter (15/1/60) which seemed to me to be utterly futile; but I trust he will not mind if I smiled at his querulous complaint that I did not deal with his "authorities." I distinctly wrote that I would deal with the work which so strongly influenced him — that by F. F. Bruce, *Are the New Testament Documents Reliable?*, and through the kindness of my old friend Tom Mosley, I have now a copy of the latest edition (1956).

I find therein that about ten years ago, I wrote four articles about it. Mr. Bruce writes in his Preface:—

I am grateful to reviewers of all shades of theological thought for the generous way in which they have recommended it [the book], and also to the remorseless critic who exposed its weaknesses at length in four successive numbers of THE FREETHINKER.

I shall, however, not look back upon what I wrote then, but treat Mr. Bruce's volume as new for me — though I suspect I shall repeat myself in many ways.

And first, on looking through its pages again I came across a reference to the "Tubingen School" which Mr. Bruce tells us "restated the origins of Christianity in terms of Hegelian metaphysics." When I read this kind of thing, I am reminded of the way in which defenders of Dialectical Materialism invariably drag in Hegel in much the same way; though they always maintain that in the course of interminable discussion about it, either Hegel or Marx was standing on his head — I was never quite clear which.

The truth is that there were two (or even three) Tubingen Schools all differing in some way. The most famous of the writers included in the term was F. C. Baur, and I cannot help wondering whether Mr. Bruce ever read a line of his writings — or even whether his disciple, Mr. Ashe, took the trouble to check Mr. Bruce. Of course, Baur, like so many of his contemporaries — even Karl Marx — was influenced by the methods of Hegel, but he made mincemeat of the "supernatural" in Christianity, and proved quite clearly the two dissenting factors in early Christianity — the so-called Petrine and Pauline schools constantly quarrelling with each other, and it was only the finally edited Book of Acts which brought the two factions together, probably long after the deaths of the leading exponents of the two Christianities. But it would take too long here to discuss the Tubingen School and I would not perhaps have referred to it but for the notice Mr. Bruce gives of W. R. Cassels and his devastating work, *Supernatural Religion*, which popularised the Tubingen School. It was, says Mr. Bruce, "conclusively answered by Bishop Lightfoot" a statement which almost took my breath away. It is completely untrue. Lightfoot "replied" to it but never "answered" it.

Anyone who can make such a statement could not possibly have read either Cassels or Lightfoot. And if I were a betting man, I would bet 100 to 1 that Mr. Bruce has read neither.

In the 1891 edition of the Schaff-Herzog Religious Encyclopedia, there is a lengthy article on Lightfoot, and a eulogy of his "remarkable scholarship"; but there is no mention whatever of his "conclusive" reply to Cassels. Probably the writer knew of this utterly incompetent attempt at an "answer." It is one of the most ghastly failures I have read from the Christian "apologetics" school, and I have read many.

First of all, it should be noted that, at least in his Index,

Cassels never refers to the Tubingen School; but of course, like so many theologians all over the world, he was much influenced by the deep and detailed studies of German scholars. In any case, what he essayed to do was to examine the claim that Christianity was a "divine," that is, a "supernatural" religion. How do Christians support this belief?

He took up as far as possible the "evidences" which all Christian apologists have been in the habit of putting forward as supporting their claims — in particular, the problems of Miracles, the authorship of the Gospels, the witness of Paul, who wrote Acts? and above all, the evidence for the Resurrection and the Ascension.

Now it cannot be too strongly asserted that the real question at issue is the "miraculous" in Christianity. If you eliminate the Virgin Birth, the Angels, the Devils, Hell and Heaven as distinct places where one can go to, and all references to Miracles and the Resurrection — what is there left? Renan did his utmost to save Jesus and had no difficulty in proving, by excluding everything he did not believe in, that Jesus was not a God but a Man — and in this he has many followers even in the Humanist Movement. But what they all believe in is *not* Christianity.

Cassels shirked nothing. He began with a long disquisition on Miracles — in my opinion, the finest ever written against them. No one with any pretention to scholarship in relation to Christianity could possibly afford to ignore the closely reasoned chapters which Cassels devoted to Miracles. And it must be stressed that without its Miracles, Christianity is of no more value than Islam or any similar religion. It certainly is not the religion of Mr. Bruce — or Lightfoot—who believes that the Gospels are "reliable"; that is, they present us with adequate *evidence* for the truth of all Christian miracles. Yet, will it be believed, Lightfoot's "conclusive answer" to Cassels on Miracles does not make any attempt to answer the criticisms made so powerfully against them. The cowardly way Lightfoot evades the issue is typical of so many Christian apologists.

Cassels divided his work into six parts, the first part dealing with miracles in general; and those in a "Divine revelation," namely Christianity, are examined in the subsequent parts in very great detail. Lightfoot *refused* to examine the case against miracles in the first part, saying that if "the author has established his conclusions in the first part," the other parts are "altogether superfluous"! In other words, Lightfoot was literally unable to touch any of Cassels's arguments against Miracles.

What he preferred to do was to examine what Cassels said about the Gospels, etc., that is, the *literary evidence* for Christianity; for it was in this field that Lightfoot obtained his reputation as a great scholar and theologian.

And how did he proceed to do this? He was, as anybody can see if he reads the *Essays on Supernatural Religion*, not only furious that a mere layman should be at least his equal in actual knowledge of the enormous amount of the critical literature necessary to maintain his position, but also that a mere layman could possibly read Greek and Latin as easily as he read English. Here then was Lightfoot's opportunity. He proceeded to test Cassels's "scholarship" — did he know the difference between, for example, the definite and the indefinite cases in Greek and Latin? and finding a few slips, he chortled with joy. "I venture to say," he pompously declared, "that any fairly trained schoolboy will feel constrained by the rules of

Greek grammar to deny what our author considers it 'impossible' even 'to doubt'." This was "conclusive" because Lightfoot did not agree with a translation made from a passage in Irenaeus by Cassels. Where Cassels agreed with the criticism on grammar, he promptly changed his translation, for it had literally nothing to do with his thesis. What was this thesis? Simply that there is *not a scrap of evidence* in any of the early literature of Christianity that anything "supernatural" had happened. And in the whole volume produced by Lightfoot, he never touched this devastating criticism in the least degree.

In the one-volume edition of *Supernatural Religion*, over 100 pages are devoted to the Resurrection and Ascension stories. Lightfoot completely ignores every word. He has neither the words "Ascension" nor "Resurrection" in his own Index. A more ignominious retreat from the most important part of Cassels's work could not be imagined.

Now I invite both Mr. Bruce and his all-believing disciple, Mr. Geoffrey Ashe, to explain this. And I say that, coming from a theologian of Lightfoot's reputation, his refusal to deal with miracles and particularly the "Miracle" of the Resurrection, proves how hopeless even eminent Christians find it to meet the Freethought case.

If I had the space I would like to devote a dozen articles to Lightfoot, and show how he evaded every issue of any consequence he found in *Supernatural Religion*. No wonder that both Prof. S. Davidson and Prof. Pfeleiderer pronounced "Lightfoot's polemic wholly inadequate" (as J. M. Robertson noted in his monumental *History of Freethought*); and in Pfeleiderer's *Development of Theology* (he added), "there will be found a forcible vindication of the critical value of *Supernatural Religion* and a severe criticism of Lightfoot."

Mr. Bruce, if he had read Lightfoot and Cassels, would have known all this, and left the worthy but wholly incompetent Canon severely alone. But he knew perfectly well that few, if any at all, of his readers would take the trouble to find out the truth for themselves; and it would be a million to one that any of them had even seen copies of the two books—or for that matter, Cassels's final volume in reply to Lightfoot and the "grammatical errors." But I am fairly certain that both Mr. Bruce and Mr. Ashe will ignore all I have written so far, and hope for the best. Thank God Mr. Bruce's readers will never read THE FREETHINKER.

[This is the first of four articles]

## What is a Christian?

By REGINALD UNDERWOOD

THAT CAUSTIC DISTURBER of ecclesiastical complacency, Dean Inge, once remarked that Christianity might have been a good thing if it had not been for the Christians. It is clear enough what the Dean had in mind. It is clear enough that what he meant has been amply justified. But it would be just as clear and quite as just to say that most, if not all, Christians would have been better human beings if it had not been for Christianity.

For what are Christians and Christianity but two aspects, the theoretical and the practical, of the same thing? They originated together and they beget each other. They cannot exist apart. To explain one is to explain the other. The puzzle is how to explain either without explaining them both away.

The Dean, himself an eminent Christian apologist, obviously had a poor opinion of Christians in general. And insofar as his indictment holds good, it is as a large and loose generalisation of a large and loosely generalised situation. Such generalisations will work after a fashion in similar situations, but they are of little use when we come down to the multitudinous and concrete details of the daily round and common task.

For instance, it can make sense of a sort to say that Christianity is superior (if it is) to Buddhism. It can make sense of an even better sort to say that Christianity is inferior to Freethought. But it makes no sort of sense to say that Christianity is superior to Mrs. Smith's spiteful backbiting of her neighbour Mrs. Jones on the grounds that Mrs. Jones prefers pub-crawling to chapel-going, because Mrs. Smith will virtuously regard her censoriousness as a dutiful manifestation of her Christianity.

It is very common to assume that whatever the words Christian and Christianity stand for is plainly written on the surface for every Tom, Dick and Harry to read with complete ease and understanding. But is it?

If, from the various denominations we select a number of professing, or better still, professional Christians, and ask them bluntly and individually what they mean by Christianity, what they demand as the qualifications of a Christian, we soon find ourselves beset with such a rabble

of pious sophistries, contrary opinions and flat contradictions as would defeat the liveliest intelligence and daunt the most open mind.

What this denomination rules, that denomination rules out. The essential here is anathema there. A binding creed to this man is a blinding heresy to his neighbour. There is nothing that one can lay hold of that is convincing, that is not immediately and easily disreputable. So that where we might reasonably expect at least some sort of unity we find nothing but dissension. Only one certainty can be said to emerge: it no more follows that because a man calls himself a Christian he is a good man than it follows that a professed atheist is therefore a blackguard, as many earnest partisans would like to maintain.

But surely, if all the zealous yet much divided exponents of what is called the Christian religion knew where they were or what they were talking about, their efforts could never result in such perpetual confusion worse confounded. We should be bound to get something at least approaching a single, apprehensible ideology, either to be seen with starrv eyes or seen through by sceptical ones. While as to the Christians, we might hope to know who was and who wasn't. Whereas, as things are, any high-principled agnostic (no rare species) goes in constant and embarrassing danger of being mistaken for a Christian, while any Christian, however sincere, with honest perceptions and an outspoken tongue, is liable to be put down as a heretic by his co-religionists. Dean Inge himself was, to his credit, more than once accused of agnosticism.

"Forty religions and only one sauce," Voltaire exclaimed in astonishment. Forty religions and only one source, we echo in bewilderment. But if we take a closer look at this source, embodied in what may be called its book of words, we soon get an inkling of how it could give rise to forty, if not four hundred, religions. For was there ever such an inextricable tangle of history and myth, wisdom and moonshine, poetry and penny dreadful; of conflicting instructions, cryptic injunctions and impossible commands? Was there ever such a Tom Tiddler's ground where every interpreter and adapter could pick up all the evidences and

authorities he requires to support whichever particular venture his fancy runs to? Yet (though no credentials are forthcoming) we are confidently assured that all this muddle of miracles, riddles and fables is both unique and divine in origin. As if all other religions did not make a similar claim.

But what is even more disconcerting than the muddle is the lack of grace with which it is so often presented. We know that all religions have their factions, but in a religion supposed to be based on brotherly love, we should hardly expect the factions to outrun the fictions. Yet although there may be precious little unity among the many doctrinal inventions, there is no want of it in the satisfied self-righteousness with which the various sects serve up their own particular brand; nor in their contemptuous rejection of any other brand; nor in their disdainful refusal to acknowledge, let alone associate with, each other. Their definition of tolerance seems to be: two sides of course to every question — their own and the wrong one.

What is an outsider to make of it? And when we are solemnly exhorted to see how these Christians love one another, what can we do but smile and think, they do indeed, they love one another like poison? Atheists, however, having no pretensions to being other than human and therefore having (let's hope) more sense of humour and consequently more charity, may good-naturedly concede that perhaps after all it's all love, only it's a funny way of showing it.

What is a Christian? It looks such an easy question, but there appears to be no easy answer worth calling an answer. Nietzsche probably got nearest when he declared that there has been but one Christian and he died on the cross. How many Christians today would die on the cross?

There is strictly no such thing as a Christian, but only a lot of people who choose to call themselves Christians for all manner of reasons that have as little to do with reason as they have to do with each other. The claim is as insubstantial as the mythology in which it is founded. That is why in actual life the professing Christian as such is little more than a myth himself.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### CIRCUMCISION

Your contributor, Alastair C. F. Chambre, asserts in his "Random Reflections," that freethinkers of Jewish extraction perpetuate circumcision for the sake of partaking in a superstitious and moronic ritual of social conformity, analogous to that of baptism indulged by non-believers of Christian background.

I should like to suggest emphatically, that my own attitude and the position taken by other humanist parents of Jewish descent, would show his allegation to be quite spurious.

My (non-Jewish) wife and I had our two sons circumcised (in hospital, by surgeons) after considering varied medical advice by a number of doctors and one or two sisters in the maternity ward of St. Bartholomew's Hospital. We also came across the following statement by Lord Amulree, M.D., F.R.C.D. (University College Hospital, London) when discussing incidence of malignant growths: "Among men who are circumcised at birth, cancer of the penis is unknown."

I wonder what evidence can be produced to verify "the psychological trauma and frequency of harmful physical sequelae which may result from those operations." WALTER STEINHARDT.

### ISLAM AND DR. KRINKILL

I was glad to find that Dr. Krinkill found my letter amusing. However, his amusement did not allow him to ignore it. Dr. Krinkill may not think it wise to "burden" his readers by giving the sources of his facts — this reads to me like a reflection on the intellectual abilities of FREETHINKER readers, be that as it may — references should be given, not as a mark of scholarship but as an aid for those who may wish to check whether or not the questions are accurate and the conclusions drawn valid.

I did not take issue on the question of Arab Nationalism as

I hold no brief for nationalism of any type; my remarks relate to the completely one-sided view expressed by Dr. Krinkill regarding the Muslim attitude towards Christians in conquered countries. Despite insinuations about my supposed immaturity, it was significant that no attempt was made to refute the facts I advanced.

Whether Dr. Krinkill was a Christian did not bother me, nor do I seek to absolve Islam from blame for the many foul deeds committed in its name. My intention was to indicate that there was another side to the story and if we wish to be accurate we must present it. R. W. MORRELL.

### BENEDICTINES AND CULTURE

It has ever been a commonplace in dispute with Christians either to misrepresent their opponent's arguments, or to evade the issue by introducing the irrelevant. Yet we do not expect such tactics from Freethinkers. In a previous issue a quotation was made from my *Historical Facts for the Arabian Musical Influence* (1930) adducing evidence that the Benedictines were not a learned order. As a rejoinder Mr. Ridley asserts that my facts — and I quoted my authorities so that they could be consulted verbatim — "are not very convincing." Strangely enough — or is it exceptional — Mr. Ridley does not produce any evidence that is "convincing" *per contra*. Was that a mere oversight? I think not. My reason for that assumption is that he very conveniently introduces the present tense *are* in relation to those phantoms "learned" Benedictines, whereas both he and I were dealing with the past tense *were*. His "backer," the Romanist-schooled Mr. Bond, actually introduces the "day before yesterday" in testimony of his argument. Of course, things never *are* what they *were*: otherwise Mr. Ridley would have been well toasted by now — back and front — for his heresies under the mild persuasion of the flame in Smithfield Market. Now with all disciplinary humility, may I suggest that, instead of positing a mere *ipse dixit*, it would have been preferable to have produced cogent evidence in support of his contention of "learned Benedictines" during the Middle Ages. Therefore, all he has to do is to name them. He avers that St. Benedict's command to avoid secular literature "has been consistently ignored." Mr. Ridley will supply details presumably? Likewise he will give sworn evidence that "most of what classical literature survived *seems* to have been preserved in their monasteries." (What a blessed word is "seem"! ) Now, Mr. Editor, so as to save time and trouble, will Mr. Ridley please show his cards face upwards, and not beat about the bush with talk concerning the "agrarian activities" of the Benedictines, or any such irrelevant references to their innocence of "crimes against humanity"? It may be interesting to him to indulge in topics which are beside the point at issue. Finally, the issue *was* and *is* that the Benedictines were a learned order.

H. GEORGE FARMER.

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