

The Freethinker

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LOOKING BACK, AT A COMFORTABLE DISTANCE, on the annual gastronomic orgy known as Christmas, serves to remind us that this is still a Christian land, though if one were to consider objectively the relative parts played by commerce and religion, by God and Mammon, in the conduct of the festival, one might be in some doubt as to the real name of its patronal Deity. However, in its religious aspect, Christmas reminds us that the religion of Christ, that celestial cuckoo who borrowed the birthday of his old rival, Mithras, December 25th, has now endured some 2000 years. Living in a land of professing Christians, we tend to forget what a really surprising thing it is that an Oriental cult, traditionally founded by a Jew — one of

a people as unpopular then as they are now, should yet have succeeded in becoming the accepted religion of an alien race and culture. And that it should have retained this position. Of how many organisations, religious or secular, could such a lengthy and wide diffusion be predicted.

Christianity and Sociology

It has often occurred to me, that even rationalistic critics of Christianity tend at times to consider religious phenomena too much from the purely ecclesiastical, or theological, angle. For religions, however much they may aspire to the next world, live, have their being, and eventually die in *this* one. Historically they are "of the earth, earthy," however much their devotees may deplore and denigrate this fact. Consequently, the origin and rise of any religion, as equally its eventual success or failure, must in the last resort, be ascribed at least as much to causes that lie within the allied provinces of history and sociology as to those of theology or comparative religion. This principle applies to all religions, including Christianity.

Let us begin with the known facts (amongst which the divine affiliation of the son of God does not figure). Christianity, however and by whomsoever founded, made its initial entry into human affairs just at the time when the classical civilisation was entering upon its final constructive phase, the era of the Roman Empire (whose founder, Augustus Caesar was, if we are to believe the Gospels, the ruler who had the unique honour of having a *bona fide* God born under his jurisdiction). What is perhaps ultimately more important is that the ancient world under the aegis of the Roman Empire was on the verge of an industrial revolution at the moment when the new Oriental religion first made its entry on the historic stage. The beginnings of a factory system can be traced in the Rome of Augustus; in the 1st century BC the new revolutionary invention of the water-mill gave a tremendous impetus to ancient industry (as was pointed out by no less a person than Karl Marx himself who once wrote a treatise on wind-mills). Classical technique had reached the verge of machine-power, for the productive character and social utility of machines was systematically considered by Aristotle, who indicated what was in effect an industrial revolution as a possible alternative to the human slavery upon

which classical civilisation reposed throughout its whole existence. The Roman technocrat, Vitruvius, first defined a machine, and the Greek savant Hero (of Alexandria) actually experimented with an embryo steam engine. At the period when Jesus reputedly rode into Jerusalem on an ass, Greek and Roman scientists were thinking up far more modern forms of transport on land, sea and in the air — not at all the sort of aerial ascents mentioned in the

New Testament! It would perhaps hardly be any exaggeration to state that the classical world stood at the crossroads of history. In which connection, as I once noted, "When classical society stopped before the steam engine, the ancient civilisation stopped with it." For

though the industrial world existed in embryo, the classical Industrial Revolution never came to a living birth. Instead, the Roman Empire and the classical civilisation got — Christianity!

The "Ifs" of History

Why did this happen? Why, having got so far, did the classical technical revolution predicted by Aristotle and pioneered by Hero, Archimedes, Vitruvius and many other scientific geniuses, eventually fail to put in an appearance, whereas our own Industrial Revolution which began in the 18th century under rather similar conditions, has actually succeeded in transforming the modern world? To inquire overmuch into the "ifs" of history is no doubt a barren, if intriguing, pastime. We recall the old Swiss proverb: "For what has been, a Jew gives nothing." However, some possible explanations do plausibly suggest themselves, amongst which may be mentioned the stultifying effects of the prevailing system of chattel-slavery in the economic sphere, and of the Roman Autocracy of the Caesars in the political domain. But I do not myself think that any final solution to the problem of why the classical industrial revolution failed, has so far ever been put forward; perhaps because traditional classical scholarship has always been more interested in literary texts and trivialities of grammar, than in the social realities which underlay the literary superstructure of classical society.

The Christian Counter-Revolution

One fact, at least, is certain; the Industrial Revolution of antiquity failed, and classical science, after its promising start, eventually declined and became bogged down in scholastic trifles quite foreign to the genius of its great Greek founders. In its place there arose a new religion, Christianity, with a new "science," theology, which from about 300 AD (the era of the conversion of the Roman Empire to Christianity) became and remained for over a millenium, the undisputed "queen of the sciences." It is a far cry from Hero's steam-engine to the pronouncements of the Athanasian Creed, though both the Greek scientist and the Greek theologian were actually natives of the same city, Alexandria. Had the Graeco-Roman scientific revolution succeeded, its social results would probably have resembled those which, in our own times have resulted from

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

The Rise of Christianity

By F. A. RIDLEY

the rise and subsequent success of the Industrial Revolution of the 18th century. The Romans might have discovered gunpowder and the Roman Empire might have kept the German Barbarians north of the Alps and thus survived indefinitely. The already existing and active rationalistic schools of philosophy in classical Greece and Rome (Stoics, Epicureans, Cynics, etc.) might have developed into mass-movements of a humanist and rationalist character.

However, we have been recounting pipe-dreams, for history took another course. In lieu of the still-born In-

dustrial Revolution, there arose the Christian Counter-Revolution; in place of science there arrived theology; in lieu of Democracy, the medieval Church and Popes, the successors of the Caesars. It appears to be a recurring law of social development that a society frustrated in its fundamental evolution recoils in exhaustion into the arms of a victorious counter-revolution; the rise and ultimate victory of Christianity during the 4th century, over the scientifically frustrated society of classical antiquity, furnishes perhaps the best historical example of this.

Secular Marriages

By LESLIE HANGER

IT IS EASY FOR SECULARISTS to prove in black and white that all religion is false; mere superstition. The trouble is people are not attracted by black and white; they want colour. There is nothing basically irrational in that; every sane person likes something attractive about him; a piece of pottery in the house, flowers in the garden; and to live in a community that has something of grace or distinction about it. Very often this last is provided by the Church, which for centuries provided, through its ceremonies, the only colour in the lives of the people, and today, despite competition from secular entertainment, still fulfils that purpose. The wedding ceremony, for instance, is particularly sought after.

This is emphasised by a report from Russia that the authorities are aware that State marriages, in which names are registered and identity cards changed from "bachelor" to "married" do not satisfy young Soviet citizens. A letter published in the government newspaper *Izvestia*, from a foreman in a Moscow car factory, told of many Russians who held a second marriage in church, after the State ceremony, not because they were believers but because the pomp and solemnity of the ritual seemed appropriate and necessary. Suggestions at once poured in and the editor, Mr. Alexei Adzhudei, a son-in-law of Mr. Khrushchev, launched an inquiry into public opinion by offering prizes in a contest among its readers for proposals as to the best kind of Soviet marriage and baptismal rites.

Thousands of replies were received, almost all agreeing with the idea of making weddings more solemn and memorable whilst avoiding religion. The suggestions included the exchange of rings, longer ceremonies in beautifully decorated rooms, and plenty of serious music. One proposed that special wedding palaces should be built in every city, designed by the country's foremost architects and decorated by the best artists. Another, that the bridal couple should wear broad crimson sashes inscribed with marriage vows of faith and honour, the bride to wear a tiara. All those present should sing specially composed marriage songs, and doves should be released as the wedded couple leave the palace to start a new life.

Among the critics of the present-day conditions was Mr. Kozlov, President of the Praesidium of the Supreme Soviet of Byelorussia. He wanted the wedding to have its own solemn rites with songs, music and dances stemming from the best national traditions. He thought it quite fitting, too, to have announcements of marriages through the local Press and radio and by means of specially printed invitations.

The outcome has been the conversion of a former nobleman's palace on the banks of the Neva at Leningrad into Russia's first "Wedding Palace." The first ceremony took place there last November in a magnificent marble ballroom. Soft lights shone on the polished alabaster walls

and music by Tchaikovsky and Chopin throbbed through the chamber as the certificates of marriage were handed over and rings exchanged.

There is a lesson here for Freethinkers. We must avoid giving the impression that Secularism will make life drab, dreary and uninteresting. We stand for beauty, colour, and satisfaction of the emotions, and we should make it clear that we do.

Reply to a Maltese Catholic

In your letter of April 11th, you say that I should know your Church better. The remark is rather amusing to an Atheist. For what can a true Catholic know of the Catholic Church? Do not the very teachings of your Church forbid you to learn its true history, its true impact on the world today, the evolution of its dogma, the lack of historical basis for its inception, and the true source of the Christian tradition? The Catholic must look upon his Church, as it were, from a cell, hung around with the emblems of his superstition and the window heavily barred from the sight of the outside world.

While your letter was in the post, from Malta, an item appeared in the *Daily Chronicle*, stating that, in Malta itself, the Church had issued an interdiction against Laurence Sant, editor of the Labour youth monthly newspaper, *The Struggle*. It also referred to a circular sent by Archbishop Michael Gonzi to be read during mass, making it a mortal sin for Catholics to read *The Struggle*. One more bar to the cell window!

You refer me to *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*, encyclicals which fulminated against the unity of the working class of Europe, in its struggle against the oppressions of Capitalism. The Church, in its fear of the solidarity of the workers for economic emancipation in this life, turned its hypocritical voice to preach disunity of action and patience in suffering and the blessings of the world to come. That it also advocated more kindness on the part of the employers was only part and parcel of its age-long casuistry. What tepid plea by any Pope has ever produced the least effect upon the master class when that class's economic interests were at stake?

I cannot condemn the present Pope for his attitude to the South African Government and its racial doctrine, but I fear the apparent increase of influence of the Catholic church in Africa. What is its history in racial emancipation? Leopold and the Congo; the Portuguese and St. Thome; Spain and the Indies; what Catholic country has not accepted the slave trade as divinely inspired? How can we believe in the Church's sincerity now? Is it not that it seeks this opportunity to creep into the hearts of the African, who must loathe, as the Catholic Church loathes, the heretical Dutch Reformed Church? Would your Church not replace that accursed creed with its own equally accursed creed, and preach again the infamous doctrine of patient endurance in this life, for gain in the life to come?

Do not tell me to learn more of your Church; pull the bars from your cell window and look out upon the world. Learn the true impact of your Church upon that world. EVA EBURY.

WITHOUT COMMENT

Sean Carey was a proud father that night and so was Mrs. Mary Smith who was the Godmother.

—The Trinity Light
Bulletin of the Assumption of Our Lady, Deptford, 24/4/60.

NEXT WEEK

JAMES LEASOR AND PONTIUS PILATE

By C. STANLEY

St. Theresa of Lisieux

By MARGARET McILROY

(Concluded from page 138)

Therèse's determination to dedicate herself to her Church remained firm, for she never questioned the hideous doctrines, according to which eternal fires were waiting for the unwary, and she longed in love and pity to assist souls to heaven. As a child she had wished to go with her beloved Pauline to the Carmel, and had never contemplated any other future; but now she considered more exciting projects. There were missionary orders, offering the excitement of travel, the joy of welcoming souls to the Church, even the dazzling possibility of martyrdom! In such a life she might have found much happiness but, perhaps for that very reason, she rejected it. She wanted to suffer for her god, to give everything and keep nothing for herself and, according to Catholic doctrine, the cloistered Carmelites were doing as much, or more, for the Church as any missionary. By their privations they partook mystically of the sufferings of Christ, and assisted the work of atonement for the sins of mankind; by their prayers they strengthened the Church. Clearly the more one suffered the better, and the Carmel offered plenty of scope for suffering. Besides, there were Pauline and Marie, and family feeling was very strong in Thérèse, as in all the Martins.

Her decision taken, she wished to act on it at once. As she was barely fifteen she required a special dispensation to enter the Carmel and, though her father supported her, permission was not forthcoming for some time. She and her father decided to go on a pilgrimage to Rome, in the hope of getting the required permission there. They went with a party of fashionable people, and the trip gave Thérèse her one taste of a wider life — and convinced her of the need of praying for priests. The Swiss scenery was a delight that she was to remember always within her prison walls, and possibly she received attentions from a young man in the party, which made the idea of a normal life attractive to her for the first time. She appealed to the Pope to be allowed to enter the Carmel early, but he merely replied that she would enter if it was the will of God, and Thérèse returned home much deflated.

However, the Bishop's consent was at last obtained, and at Easter, 1888, the convent gate, to which her father and Céline had escorted her, closed behind the 15-year-old girl, and she was immured for life. It was a joyful moment when she was able to embrace Pauline and Marie, but she had come to suffer — and suffer she would.

The rules of the Carmelite Order are austere in the extreme. No meat is permitted, and in Lent dairy produce and eggs are also prohibited and there is only one meal a day. There are six hours of services daily. In Thérèse's time the convent was unheated in the bitterest weather. Silence is obligatory, except in the recreation hour. Straw pallets are used for beds. Self-flagellation is required. This narrow, painful life was not cheered for Thérèse by any "spiritual experiences." The privations of the place she expected, but it was a bitter blow to find that her companions were for the most part disagreeable old women, among whom petty spites and jealousies abounded.

People are not canonised for nothing, and to attain her posthumous eminence Thérèse had to do more than keep the rules of her order. She, with heroic single-mindedness, entered into the spirit of this horrible regime. The recreation hour, to the chagrin of her sisters, she would spend in apparently delighted conversation with the most disagreeable old nun present; in the cold of winter, in the

unheated building, she would not protect her hands in her habit, as the others did; in the laundry she would not dodge splashes of filthy water; in the refectory she never added condiments to the monotonous food; repulsive medicines she swallowed slowly, savouring them drop by drop; misjudged, she never explained herself, rejoicing in a blow to her pride; fatally ill, she obeyed the letter of the rules by reporting her symptoms, but she contrived to report them in such a way as to conceal the gravity of her condition. Thus she cut herself off from any little satisfactions that could have made the hard life tolerable to her; in particular from the companionship of her sisters. She felt a deadness of soul and was tormented — diabolically, of course — by doubts. Every day of this existence was a misery to her, and she constantly longed for death to release her; for Christ to claim his neglected bride! And through it all, this iron-willed girl appeared gay and cheerful; was excellent company at recreation; and was envied for her happy disposition.

One of the few moments of real joy she experienced in the convent was that in which she realised she had tuberculosis. Christ would not keep her waiting too long! Nevertheless, during her illness she suffered from an inner feeling that there was no life after death, but she was able to explain this as an assault of the devil, or else a further trial by God. She had dedicated herself to suffering, and she did not complain when it came. Her disease took a particularly painful course, which she had to bear without the assistance of any pain-relieving drugs, of which the Reverend Mother did not approve. The stomach was attacked, and she was unable to keep down any food — not even the sacramental wafer — and the dreams of food natural to a starving person, she imagined to be attacks of the devil, tempting her to gluttony. (Dreams of open fields and playing with children, however, were heavenly consolations.) After weeks of torment, she died on September 30th, 1897, aged twenty-five.

Her three sisters — Céline had entered the Carmel on the death of their father — had from the first no doubts about her sanctity, and were determined that it should be recognised. Their efforts were successful in a remarkably short time, and in 1925 Thérèse was canonised. Thus to the Catholic, who is officially permitted to address his prayers to her, this depressing tale is a success story.

To the Freethinker, nothing could show more vividly the essential morbidity and repulsiveness of Roman Catholicism, and the monstrous nature of its God and doctrines, than the story of Thérèse. She had great qualities. She was naturally generous, affectionate, courageous and intelligent. What might she not have become in a wholesome environment? Perhaps in her, the world lost another Florence Nightingale or a Madame Curie. Her religion prevented her from developing her intelligence, deprived her of her "little mother's" care in childhood, and made her a useless, unhappy neurotic — a saint! What kind of god is it who is alleged to delight in such a sacrifice?

THE YEAR'S FREETHOUGHT
THE FREETHINKER FOR 1959

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This Believing World

That superlatively happy Christian, Mr. H. Legerton who, as the cheery secretary of the Lord's Day Observance Society, does his utmost to stop anything in the entertainment line on Sundays, is delighted that he has the Law on his side, and he violently disagrees with Mr. Bumble that on Sundays at least, "the Law is a ass." Anyway, he is did his utmost to prevent a charity concert in aid of the late Sir A. McIndoe's plastic surgery hospital for which some famous people gave their services free. Mr. Legerton was not able to prevent the concert, but, thank the Lord, Sunday Laws, all God-given, will make the promoters pay a heavy fine—or that is what our pious Christian Mr. Legerton fondly hopes!

★

As every Christian knows, "our Lord" was specially sent by his Father — that is, by himself — to die for our "sins," though ever since all Jews, past and present, have been blamed for the "cowardly crime." In addition, when the Jews are momentarily forgotten, the "crime" is always shifted on to Judas Iscariot. Judas really should have been given a glorious medal for having so faithfully carried out the Lord's wishes, but we grieve to say no Christian would ever have turned the other cheek to him — that is, up to now.

★

For now, there is a vigorous movement to champion the "traitor." According to *Psychic News*, a new church is about to be founded called the Church of Judas, the members of which all believe in "survival"; and this means that Judas has survived, and is having a rough time in Summerland by being boycotted just like a trade unionist "scab." Poor old Judas is feeling this very badly, and so the new Church wants to show him that until Christians learn to love Judas as well as Jesus they can't be true Christians, and really love Christ.

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We are delighted that Judas at last is having the recognition he deserves, and our earnest wish is that the Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury will help the good work, and provide him with a halo — just like Jesus. And please, no carping criticism that Judas, like Jesus, may after all be a myth. Why blatantly destroy a beautiful story!

★

For trying to introduce some "high pressure" business methods to rake in a few shekels for his church, a vicar has run into loads of trouble. He is the Rev. F. Spurway of Holmwood, Surrey, and it appears he engaged a representative of Fund Directors Ltd., one of whose jobs will be to make house-to-house calls, "with an hour's sales talk" at each house, and other similar "fund-raising novelties." One of these ideas is for all parishioners to tip up as hefty a sum as possible, every week for years; for in the ordinary way, "jumble sales and collections" are not enough. We wonder what would happen if the F.D.L.'s agent tried an hour's sales talk with a "shallow-brained infidel"?

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However, Mr. Spurway is unrepentant. He hopes to get raised a steady income of £30 every week by his new and pious business methods, and claims that all criticism is dwindling. After all, why shouldn't God be sold from door to door? Especially if it brings in the dough?

★

That stormy petrel of free discussion, Mr. Malcolm Muggerridge, has found out that "the only point in common between the Christian Easter and Easter as it exists today is that both involve a blood sacrifice." But there

is a slight difference — our Easter involves the death and mutilation of hundreds of innocent people on the roads. Mr. Muggerridge "doubts very much whether most people have the faintest idea of what Easter is about." And this, after at least 1,500 years of compulsory religious teaching!

The Roman Catholic Church and the Contraceptive Pill

THE OTHER WEEK (22/4/60) we quoted seven precocious Roman Catholic teenagers who, in a letter to the *Leicester Mercury*, were instructing humanity on the subject of the oral contraceptive. You will remember that the young ladies had no hesitation whatever in condemning the pill as dragging "our precious God-given gift down to an animal instinct"; the "final sapping of the moral code on which our civilisation is founded"; and as "murder legalised."

The letter was assuredly dogmatic enough and, were it Catholic teenagers who were infallible, and not the Pope, we should know where the Church of Rome stood regarding the latest and potentially most revolutionary of contraceptives. This not being the case, and John XXIII not having — to our knowledge at any rate — pronounced on the matter, we beg leave to reiterate our opinion that the pill may prove valuable to the Church as well as to woman: that it may in fact, provide that "changeless" institution with an escape from its now anachronistic denunciation of birth control.

This is a possibility that the seven young ladies could not, of course, be expected to see. Precocious in some respects, they were naive in this. It happens, though, that another and rather more shrewd Catholic voice has recently been heard on the same subject.

It was at the three-day Cincinnati meeting of the American Society for the Study of Sterility that Dr. John Rock, Professor Emeritus of Harvard University, spoke about the pill, and as his tests in Puerto Rico have been the most extensive to date, his findings are obviously important. These were that, far from permanently reducing a woman's fertility (as was feared they might) they may actually increase it. "The pregnancy rate of women who have stopped taking the pills is phenomenal," said Dr. Rock (*Time* 11/4/60). Nor do they cause cancer. "Many fewer cases of cancer of the cervix than would be expected have developed. Several women with very early cancer of the cervix had their disease temporarily arrested." "Enovid does not cure cancer," said Dr. Rock, "but it holds it in abeyance, and it emphatically has not caused cancer."

Such were Dr. Rock's findings about the pills, but he made known his religious attitude towards them, too. And we trust this came to the notice of the seven Leicester teenagers. For the benefit of FREETHINKER readers, we quote *Time* again. "Like his Los Angeles colleagues," it said, "Dr. Rock viewed the pills as merely a means of modifying a woman's monthly cycle. As an active Roman Catholic layman, Dr. Rock went farther and provocatively insisted that it must be acceptable to the Church as a morally permissible variant of the rhythm method."

TOM MOSLEY

We are pleased to report that Tom Mosley is home from hospital after suffering concussion when knocked off his platform (for the first time in nearly forty years) in Nottingham Market Square last Sunday week. Mr. Mosley had four stitches in his head and he reports that he still feels "a bit dizzy." We wish him a quick recovery. As the matter is sub judice we can make no further comment at this stage.

THE FREETHINKER

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Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (The Mound).—Sunday afternoon and evening; Messrs. CRONAN and MURRAY.

London (Tower Hill).—Every Thursday, 12—2 p.m.; Messrs. J. W. BARKER and L. EBURY.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitz 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.

INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Midland Institute Cinema, Paradise Street) Sunday, May 8th, 6.45 p.m.: A. D. BURDETT, "Spiritualism."

Leeds and District Humanist Group (Trades Hall, Fountain Street.) Sunday, May 8th, 7 p.m.: C. WYE, "Moral Values and Moral Man."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1.) Sunday, May 8th, 11 a.m.: W. E. SWINTON, PH.D., "Fiction in a Scientific Age."

Notes and News

WE LEARN WITH REGRET, from the April issue of the Belgian Freethought paper, *La Pensée*, of the death of its able and enthusiastic Managing Editor, Robert Vens. We send our sympathy to M. Vens's parents and to his colleagues on *La Pensée*.

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THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY ANNUAL CONFERENCE will be held in the Imperial Hotel, Temple Street, Birmingham, on Whit Sunday, June 5th, and members intending to be present are asked to notify the General Secretary of their accommodation requirements. The Conference will be preceded by a reception for members and friends in the Imperial Hotel on Saturday evening, June 4th, and will be followed on Sunday evening by an outdoor demonstration.

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THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE of the Rationalist Press Association will be held at St. Hilda's College, Oxford, from Friday, July 22, until Tuesday, July 26. This year's theme will be "Humanist and Christian Morality" and among the speakers are Prof. P. H. Nowell-Smith, Mr. Victor Purcell, Mr. Olaf Drewitt, and Mr. Ritchie Calder. Members of the National Secular Society are cordially invited to attend at the reduced fee of £7 available to R.P.A. members. Further particulars may be obtained on application to the Secretary of the R.P.A., 40 Drury Lane, London, W.C.2.

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LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY has protested to the local Parks Committee for allowing Salvation Army community

hymn-singing in Abbey Park during the summer. The city's parks and open spaces, says the Society's Secretary, Mr. C. H. Hammersley, should be used for recreational purposes only, and he hopes that the Committee will reconsider its decision. Mr. Hammersley has also written to the local *Illustrated Chronicle* (15/4/60) criticising the Moral Rearmament pamphlet. Like Mr. Tom Mosley (29/4/60), Mr. Hammersley recalls Frank Buchman's championing of Hitler and Mussolini and notes the current absence of any condemnation of Fascism in Spain or Portugal. In a nutshell, he concludes, "M.R.A. is just another of the hundreds of sects of Christianity, no more Christian than the others, but certainly far more political."

★

WE WERE TOUCHED TO LEARN, from the always reliable *News of the World* (17/4/60), that "under the influence of Princess Margaret," Mr. Antony Armstrong-Jones had "turned to religious instruction and inner reflection," and "acquired priestly friends and a lively interest in theology." Perhaps he lacked these in his Chelsea days, but the newspaper reminded us that he nevertheless "enjoys a vigorous spiritual inheritance." His father "is a deeply religious character" and his grandfather, Sir Robert Armstrong-Jones, the physician, "was a pillar of the Welsh Church with a long line of dissenting forebears." Dissent, however, is a thing of the past. For Tony, at any rate, the keynote of the future would seem to be conformity.

★

IAN FLEMING'S tough-guy, James Bond, now appearing as a cartoon strip in the *Daily Express*, carries in his suitcase a copy of *The Bible Designed to be Read as Literature*. Not for literary or religious purposes, however. It is hollowed out and holds an automatic when that is not being carried in the "Berns Martin Triple-draw holster worn under the arm."

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THE *Western Evening Herald* (26/4/60) reported the new version of the Ten Commandments which, according to the Rev. Ronald W. Frost, superintendent minister of Plymouth Methodist Central Hall, governed the lives of this generation. The Second Commandment read: "Thou shalt make unto thyself mascots and lucky charms of every kind. Thou shalt put thy trust in them, for a woolly dog in the back car window and a silver penant around the neck shall preserve thee from all accident." We share Mr. Frost's scorn for the widespread belief in mascots and charms, but we suggest he should put his own — or at least a neighbouring — Methodist house in order first. Less than a week before (20/4/60) the *Western Evening Herald* had reported the death of Mr. John Pearce, a "life-long member of the Callington West End Methodist Church" at the age of 92. The Rev. R. J. Gard, officiating at the funeral service, said: "We have all been proud to have John Pearce as a member of this church," and then "referred to Mr. Pearce's long-established reputation of being able to charm away warts and ringworms, and of how people who went to him were cured." "I asked him what was his answer for this," said the minister, "and he replied that the whole basis of the cure was faith."

★

THROUGHOUT HIS EVANGELICAL MISSION in Africa, *The Ghanian* (April, 1960) tells us, "Billy Graham and his assistants had good food to eat and luxurious accommodations." "We stay where we can get good food and water to keep us fit and well during the campaign," said the evangelist. And he added: "If I rode down the street in rags on a donkey, like Christ, people would say I was doing it for publicity." Possibly, but we can imagine a happy medium.

More Light on the New Testament—2

By H. CUTNER

CHAPTER 2 OF MR. F. F. BRUCE'S WORK, *Are the New Testament Documents Reliable?* could, apart from the fact that he uses more modern "authorities," have easily been written by the renowned Archdeacon Paley. His *Evidences of Christianity*, published as far back as 1794, has almost the same disregard for evidence, and the same repetition of statements every one of which has produced volumes of controversy; though Paley was lucky, of course, that in his day, the greater part of Christian England could hardly read, and those people who could, would certainly not know much about the "authorities" Paley so confidently referred to.

But even in these days, very few of Mr. Bruce's readers would actually test his many glib statements. We learn from him, for example, that "the New Testament was complete, or substantially complete, about AD 100, the majority of the writings being in existence 20 to 40 years before this." There is *no evidence whatever* for this ridiculous statement, and Mr. Bruce knows perfectly well that there is not. He obviously accepts some or all of the dates given by the Roman Church for the Gospels and the Epistles; but he must be fairly certain that only Freethinkers like myself, and some of the more learned Jesuits and "intellectuals" in the Churches, are aware that the problem of the dates of the Gospels and Epistles have formed some of the biggest and, for that matter, the most acrimonious discussions in the history of the Christian Churches. Far from the New Testament being then complete or "substantially complete" (whatever that means) we have no certain traces of *any* of the books being even *known* in the first century.

Naturally, we are referred to many "authorities," but after wasting much valuable time in consulting them long before I read Mr. Bruce, I found that all we ever got from them were "opinions." Prof. C. C. Torrey or Prof. E. C. Raven or Mr. E. K. Simpson says something without any proof, and it is immediately accepted as "Gospel" truth by Mr. Bruce and his disciples (like Mr. Geoffrey Ashe, for instance). (Incidentally, I found it quite exciting to find in Mr. Bruce's book so many "dead certainties" on the Gospels used — with acknowledgment, of course — by Mr. Ashe in his *Sunday Express* articles, and in his reply to my own criticisms.)

After telling us, however, that Matthew's Gospel is now dated about 85-90; Mark, 65; Luke, 80-85; John, 90-100, Mr. Bruce goes on to point out that Torrey says "there is nothing in any of the four Gospels which demands a date later than AD 50, or a place of writing outside Palestine"; while Raven declares, "The general habit of placing the Synoptic Gospels in the period AD 70-100 is inexplicable." And why? Simply because, if the Gospels were written *later* than AD 70 when the Fall of Jerusalem took place, they would have had at least some reference to it. I consider this argument sheer nonsense. If the Gospel writers were palming off Gospels on some disciples or apostles of Jesus, they would do their utmost to keep them in tune with his period.

And first, it must be made clear that we are not discussing *a* Gospel or any kind of Gospels. We are discussing the probable dates of the four "canonical" ones as we have them now. Sayings of Jesus and Gospels of some kind may have been floating about during the second half of the first century — but as we know nothing whatever about them, and have never even seen them, it is a sheer waste of

time discussing them.

Our business is with the famous Four — and where can we discover any allusion whatever to them before about the year 180 AD? Mr. Bruce knows perfectly well that neither he, nor Streeter, nor Torrey, nor Raven, nor Simpson, can produce any allusion to them anywhere in our early existing Christian literature. In spite of this, following no doubt Paley and other completely out-of-date authorities, Mr. Bruce drags in — as they all do or want to do — "attestations" from the "Apostolic Fathers" who wrote "chiefly between AD 90 and 160." For "in their works we find evidence for their acquaintance with most of the books of the New Testament." There are the Epistles of Barnabas, of Clement bishop of Rome, of Polycarp, and of Ignatius bishop of Antioch; there are early lists of New Testament books by the "heretic" Marcion, and, of course, the "Muratorian Fragment" — and so on. And if any reader cares to look at dear old Paley, he will find much the same argument, and the same lists, and the same confident belief that after all few people will look up these ancient writers and witnesses and therefore everything in the garden of Heaven is lovely.

To make the "witnesses" very impressive, Mr. Bruce loves to give us their titles. For instance, when Papias is introduced, we are told that he was the Bishop of Hieropolis, so that what a truly live bishop says must be authoritative. It appears he "wrote a work in five books (now lost except for a few fragments quoted by other writers) entitled *An Exposition of the Oracles of the Lord*" in AD 130-140, in which he says that he got his information from "Elders" — though whoever *they* were we are not clearly told. And I cannot help wondering how many readers of Mr. Bruce will try and find out what we know about Papias.

The truth is we know almost *nothing at all*. The Schaff-Herzog Religious Encyclopedia says: "No fact save his episcopacy is definitely known about him"; and the writer of the article tries his best to save him as of importance because "of his relation to apostolic times." That is all very well, but *who* made him a "bishop"? And why do we never find such another important "bishop" in Hieropolis ever mentioned? In other words, what is the evidence for Papias as knowing the "Elders," or that he wrote any book before "fragments" are found in Irenaeus and Eusebius?

Mr. Bruce quotes Eusebius, but does not say that that famous name in Christian history is almost as shadowy as Papias. Nor does he point out that Eusebius was writing about the year 340 AD, while Papias's supposed work (or whatever it was he was quoting) was written or spoken of about the year 130 AD — and one is curious as to how Eusebius got hold of the manuscript. Moreover, though Papias is always described as a bishop, Eusebius was irreverent enough to call him (after relating some particularly silly stories from him) "very limited in his comprehension as is evident from his discourses." And this fool is one of Mr. Bruce's pet witnesses!

Or take Ignatius the Bishop of Antioch. Here is another wonderful "bishop" who is always named as a witness for the Gospels. And what do we know of this gentleman? Nothing at all — except what we find in his own Epistles, that is, in the Epistles which go under his name. And the ordinary reader would be astonished at the number of books written about these masterpieces of drivel. The "great" Dr. Lightfoot is supposed to be an authority on

them, and on nothing was he so furious with W. R. Cassels as he was on what that writer said in *Supernatural Religion* about them. In the Ignatian Epistles, Christian forgery can be shown at its peak. Even the Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia tells us, "What tradition else has preserved concerning Ignatius" (that is, apart from his name) "is completely worthless." Ignatius is one of the early Christian martyrs, and the Encyclopedia says "Nor are the various *Acta Martyrii* of any historical value"; but Ignatius is of far too great a value ever to be repudiated by people like Mr. Bruce. If we throw over the Epistles of Ignatius as priestly forgeries, and Papias as a fool, what have we left? Why, there is Polycarp, and I defy even Mr. Bruce to find in these early "witnesses" for the genuineness of the Gospels a bigger idiot than Polycarp—that is, if it can be proved that he ever lived.

How do these three witnesses prove that the Gospels were in existence in the first century or early second century? The answer is that they do *not*. Not one of them quotes *by name* any of our Gospels — as Mr. Bruce knows very well. *No* writer, in fact, quotes them by name until about the time of Irenaeus, that is about the year 180 AD, and this date makes his claim that, before 100 AD most or all of the New Testament documents were known, just sheer nonsense.

Historical Basis of Exodus?

By ROBERT W. MORRELL

P. G. ROY in a lengthy argument (THE FREETHINKER, 15/4/60) advances the theory that the Exodus is just mythology. While agreeing that many aspects of the story can be treated as mythical, I suggest that the basic theme, the escape of a group of Jewish slaves from Egyptian bondage, could be based on fact.

Ezra played a large part in collecting and editing what we now know as the Old Testament, but whether or not he wrote large parts of it, as Mr. Roy seems to suggest, is a matter that has yet to be thrashed out. It seems more likely that his main concern was to enhance the position of the Jewish priesthood. I am not sure whether Mr. Roy is suggesting that Ezra gave Moses what he describes as a "pseudo-Egyptian varnish in imitation of Akhenaton." If he is, it raises a number of points. I cannot see how Ezra could be acquainted with the religious theories of Amenophis IV. The date given by Mr. Roy to Ezra is open to question. Some scholars place him in the reign of the Persian Artaxerxes, putting his arrival at Jerusalem in 458 BC. Thus, there are almost a thousand years between him and Amenophis IV (Akhenaton). Abundant evidence can be produced to show that, shortly after the death of Akhenaton, the priesthood of Amun regained the power they had lost in his reign; the boy king, Tutankaton, changed his name to Tutankamun, and the priests set out to obliterate the memory of the late Pharaoh and his god. There is not a scrap of evidence available to indicate that Ezra had access to documents relative to the period of Akhenaton. The State archives of that Pharaoh had long been buried in the ruins of his city at Tell-el-Amarna (modern name). Thus, I suggest that the story of the Exodus pre-dates Ezra by quite some time.

In the latter part of his article, Mr. Roy discusses the question of who could have been the Pharaoh of the "oppression." Now Bible fundamentalists may hold that there is only one Pharaoh; I feel that it should be plural. A number of kings have been suggested as being the Pharaoh concerned, yet none fits the picture given in Biblical accounts. This tends to support my argument.

The quotation given from the British Museum guide book mentions the Hyskos. These people conquered Egypt and imposed their rule on the country, and the native Egyptians had little if any love for them. The Hyskos are known as the "shepherd kings," and their affinity with the early Hebrews is here demonstrated. Evidence available indicates that these kings employed the Jews in their "civil service" as tax collectors, etc., and as allies and friends of the Hyskos they received short shrift at the hands of the Egyptians when the latter at long last threw off the Hyskos yoke and brought into being the brilliant 18th dynasty. The early kings of this period were great soldiers, who established a vast empire; they had plenty of use for slaves, as the monuments of the period show. But it is not so much the first part of the dynasty that interests me here; it is the last part, for here enters the Pharaoh Amenophis IV. This man was a religious fanatic who allowed the hard-won empire to crash about him. Such were the conditions that a group of slaves, aided perhaps by the Pharaoh's subjects who for the most part had very little regard for him, could make good their escape. From the Old Testament we learn that the Jews were employed making bricks and constructing a city for the Pharaoh. This would fit well the time of Akhenaton, who deserted the old capital Thebes, for a new city — built mainly of mud brick as its remains show—which he called Arhetaton. The workers employed on the site could not fail to pick up some of his ideas.

The slaves' chance of getting away would be greater if they had an able leader. Hence Moses comes into the picture. Whether or not that was his real name does not concern me here. The Bible has it that he was of the Egyptian royal house — by adoption. This is very suggestive, and looking at it, one cannot help but wonder if he could be a member of Akhetaton's family or court who had the idea that things might not be very healthy after the death of the Pharaoh. As things turned out, such a deduction would have been all too true. Adopting the idea that safety lay in numbers he could gather a band of slaves and lead them out of the country. We can rule out the story of the Red Sea opening up, for as Mr. Roy points out this is a mistranslation. Such ideas are the work of later generations who sought to embellish the account in order to impress others of the power of their god. For, after all, he was in competition with other deities.

There are many questions which I must leave alone for lack of space, but one important part of the story has as yet to be touched on — the wandering in the wilderness. The very fact that the group kept away from civilisation indicates its true nature — that it was a party of runaway slaves. From the Biblical account we learn that they took up certain practices. These were identical with those of the local nomadic inhabitants of Sinai and were credited to the local moon god Sin. I doubt whether Ezra, so many years later, would have much knowledge of such practices. Some critics of the Exodus have maintained that the lack of evidence from official Egyptian or Hittite sources is evidence against it. I would suggest the reverse be true. The Egyptians, more so if they were anti-Atonists, would see no reason to place on record the fact that a party of slaves ran away. Nor would their rivals see anything to be gained by putting it on record, assuming that they heard anything about it.

CORRESPONDENCE

SOCIAL PURPOSE

Is Mr. R. Smith (8/4/60) suggesting that action always follows directly from passion or that passions are uncontrollable or that an idea cannot generate passions? Because I would deny the

first two whilst being able to endorse the last. At any rate the contention of his letter appears to be to deny the possibility of men having reached a stage of psychological development at which conscious purpose and rational consideration of proposals to attain an agreed objective can replace uncontrollable passions as the chief determining factor in the action required to shape human social order anew.

Now I do not contest the possible argument that many people in the world have not yet reached the rational plane in psychological development and I am not or rather was not concerned with sub-rational individuals when I wrote that article. After all, I believe that it is only possible to secure the kind of agreement required to create a world society on a rational plane and thus it was only commonsense for me to aim my article at people at this level of psychological development in the first instance. What I did not expect was to get a letter which is framed as a rational argument seeking to point out to me that I should recognise the anti-rational basis of action as the only real one. Surely if ever there was a bad foundation for a letter that is it! If Mr. Smith "feels" very strongly that ideas and rational co-operation are ineffective he should be doing something for a magazine which might be called "The Freefeeler" rather than posing as a rational person whilst denying the effectiveness of rationalism in THE FREETHINKER, because I "think" that the majority of the readers of THE FREETHINKER are with me in my acceptance, rather than with him in his derogation, of thought and purposive action as our best hope for modern human social salvation.

I appeal to men at rational level because I wish to make the world safe for rationalists as the highest expression of human nature the world has yet seen. And, since I accept the theory of biological evolution and have met coloured people who are just as certainly at the rational level of development as I am, I see the absolute necessity of laying it down as a principle that the world society we must seek will be free from colour prejudice by law at least. Moreover, I have discussed this subject with such persons and my opinion is that climate and local culture do not deter possible agreement on the general ideas concerning a world society — particularly when the individuals concerned have educated themselves beyond the domination of the more primitive cultures which they have been subjected to in Britain and elsewhere.

Once we have discovered for ourselves that it is safe to experiment mentally without the culture of the nation in which we have been born it becomes evident that the death of the old religions and ideologies which surround us will be a good thing and not something to be safeguarded against as Mr. Smith apparently wants to do. The old must die if the new are to live and old ideas in social affairs are now too dangerous for us to become sentimental about them.

E. G. MACFARLANE.

I think it hopeless to expect all Atheists to unite on any bill or measure with social purpose, except it be affecting religion. All Atheists cannot agree even with some National Secular Society objectives.

It is futile to aim for agreement on measures, outside Religion. Unity of thought and action is only possible in the direction of destroying theological superstitions; leaving Atheists free to follow their own bent re other matters affecting social purpose.

As Mr. Macfarlane suggests: "Search for Truth . . . investigate the mysteries of the universe without any fear of Gods, devils, or any kind of supernatural beings." The job of the militant Atheist is to make more Atheists. In this task unity of social purpose is possible.

C. E. RATCLIFFE.

HISTORICAL JESUS

The various views on Jesus Christ and the New Testament which I have read in THE FREETHINKER all seem to ignore the real nature of early Christianity. Its central feature was a belief that the world was coming to an end. The people were living in the "last days" and the time was short. The Last Trumpet was due to sound any moment, and many of them would not die at all but would, in the twinkling of an eye, be "changed." The dead would then rise from their graves and, at least temporarily, come back to life again. The Son of Man would appear on the clouds of heaven and whisk off the elect, i.e., the Christians, into a new state of eternal bliss in the Age to Come, while the rest were presumably destined for the place where the worm dieth not.

I cannot see any prima facie reason why this sort of nonsense should not have been put in train by a person called Jesus — a common enough name at that period — who gave himself out as the Messiah. Roman writers like Tacitus had no doubt that he was the author of this crazy and mischievous creed, for which he had — quite rightly, of course — been executed by order of Pontius Pilate. The fact that after his death a mass of obviously spurious incidents were associated with his name is no argument

against his existence. Modern Christian apologists do their best to obliterate this phase of their religious evolution, but there is no point in Freethinkers going out of their way to help them.

W. SMITH.

PILATE AND JESUS

Surely in "This Believing World" (29/4/60), the writer misses the whole point of Anatole France's story, "The Procurator of Judea" when he says it suggests that there is no evidence that Pilate ever knew Jesus at all. On the contrary: the story suggests that Pilate had known Jesus but the Son of God had made so little impression on him that he (Pilate) had even forgotten his name!

VERNON MILES.

NOT A HOPE IN HELL!

Colin McCall, referring to the Catholic believer, says, "All his experience, all his humanity tells him one thing: his Church tells him another. And he follows his Church!" All Catholics are familiar with St. Paul's famous heart-cry: "I find one law within my members, yet another in the gospel of Christ!" This is the dilemma of the man who adheres to the psychotic doctrine of Original Sin. The dictates of ordinary decent humanity must be rejected as unwholesome and moribund. They are of "the natural man," "the Old Adam." Those who follow them receive the everlasting wrath of God as their wages. But, God be praised! there is a way out. By joining "the infallible Church" and obeying her clergy without question one can "enter into the life of Christ" and be "born again of the Spirit." You must henceforth deny the flesh (i.e., human nature) and serve the Spirit (i.e., the paralysing, inhibiting dictates of religious neurosis).

This is why there is "not a hope in hell" of Catholics obeying common sense and common humanity. They reject lost humanity in favour of their Church.

S. W. BROOKS.

THE DOLLAR AND THE VATICAN

Some months ago I informed you that I had been successful in getting Avro Manhattan's *The Dollar and the Vatican* into my branch library. I wrote and told you then, and you quoted me in your paper, that I would keep a look-out for the book, as I feared it would soon be "spirited away."

When I applied for it recently I was told they had not got it, but I replied that I had already had the book and wanted to refer to it again. I was asked to leave a postcard for the book which I did. After many weeks waiting I asked again (on two occasions) but was told the book was not available.

I have since received the enclosed note that the book is "missing". Just as I expected it would be.

S. DAWSON (Bradford).

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