

# The Freethinker

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THE MODERN REVIVAL OF JUDAISM as the official cult of the Zionist State of Israel, has again focused the eyes and the attention of the world upon the most ancient of the Theistic religions, the common denominator of which is belief in a personal Deity and in a specific Revelation believed to have been made by this Deity to his worshippers, permanently recorded in a Holy Book. These features are common to both Judaism—which may be termed the aboriginal theistic cult—and to its two cosmopolitan offspring, Christianity and Islam. The historical fact that Judaism has suffered much at the hands of its spiritual offspring, in no way affects the religious genealogy through the operation of which both Christianity and Islam originally made their entry into the world. Without Judaism, no Christianity, no Islam. Without the Old Testament, no New Testament and no Koran. Few, if any, historical genealogies can be better established than this one. No Synagogue, no Church, no Mosque; without Moses, no Jesus, no Muhammed; the belief in what a medieval heretic once termed “The three Impostors”—Moses, Jesus and Muhammed—began with Moses, i.e. Judaism.

## The Cult of Jehovah

Modern critical research during the past three centuries since Spinoza and his heretical contemporaries laid the foundations of the modern critical study of the Bible, has radically transformed the study of the Sacred Books. It is now known that the early Jews like all other primitive tribes, were polytheists, and that the cult of the Jewish tribal god, Jehovah, only acquired first a theistic supremacy and finally a monopoly at a relatively late date. The “historical” books of the Old Testament are certainly very untrustworthy, particularly in so far as they relate to the “Period of the Kings”, i.e. the epoch of Jewish annals prior to the Babylonian Exile. But it is clear, and even the Jehovist editors of our received text notably fail to suppress this fact—that the cult of Jehovah as the only god—made its way slowly and with repeated set-backs. It was those Kings “who did right in the sight of Jehovah” (“The Lord”) who advanced the Jehovist cause. The probably more numerous Kings who, we are informed, “did evil in the sight of the Lord”, were evidently worshippers of old-deities and turned a deaf ear to the unique claims of “the jealous God”, the celestial monopolist, Jehovah. It was not, in fact, until after the Jewish return from Babylon, which tradition locates about 500 BC, that Judaism founded on the cult of Jehovah, succeeded in definitely establishing itself.

## Ezra And The Victory of Judaism

Hebrew tradition, as recorded in those ancient racist forerunners of *Mein Kampf*, the now canonical Books of Ezra and Nehemiah, gives a highly-coloured account of the final establishment of Jehovism (as we may perhaps, term early Judaism). In our account, a decisive role is ascribed to the post-exilic scribe, Ezra. But our extant

narratives must be handled with caution—particularly as we know from contemporary Jewish documents discovered in Egypt, that the pre-exilic cult of Jehovah (prolonged by Jewish colonies in Egypt until after the time of Ezra) included the worship of Jehovah’s celestial spouse, the goddess Anahita of whom no mention whatsoever occurs in the narratives relating to the pre-exilic evolution of the Jehovist cult. Modern Judaism, of course, regards such a divine affiliation as blasphemous: but one may ask, if the editors of the Old Testament could suppress as they did altogether, such an important detail, what else may they not have suppressed—or added? Be that as it may, and whether due or not to Ezra person-

ally, Jewish monotheism the cult of “the jealous God”, Jehovah, had become “The one True Church” of “The one True God” probably about 400 BC. It most emphatically does not believe that any self-styled New Testament, whether ours or the Koran, represents any improvement whatsoever upon its own sacred scriptures. Was it not an orthodox (and witty!) rabbi who went on record with the classic Jewish summary of the Christian New Testament, “What’s new in it isn’t true, and what’s true in it isn’t new”? None the less, and despite the historical truth contained in this trenchant summary, it is a fact—and indeed, one of the most important facts in the modern science of Comparative Religion—that Judaism has always failed despite its own assertions, to become an authentically world-wide religion. This role has actually been attained by Christianity and Islam, both of which indisputably started as heresies on the fringe of orthodox Judaism, but never by Judaism itself. If the creed of Ezra (fictitiously ascribed to Moses) has actually made the round of the world, it is only as a *Jewish* creed: whereas both Christ and Muhammed and both the creeds of which they were the titular Founders, have transcended the bounds of race, colour and language most successfully, so that the Pauline statement that “in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, circumcised nor uncircumcised”, has long since passed from wishful thinking into historic fact. And a similar expansion, one much more spectacular at the start, can also be recorded of Islam, the later Arabian creed of Muhammed and the Koran. Why was this so? Why did Judaism fail and its spiritual offspring eventually meet with so wide a success? (Of the two later cosmopolitan creeds, Islam has certainly remained much closer to Judaism than has Christianity, particularly Catholic Christianity. The Koran in particular, represents the authentic “New Testament” of Judaism, whereas our New Testament is a predominantly Greek book).

## Racism And Religion

The fact appears to be that the ultimate failure of Judaism to become really cosmopolitan—a world religion—was due primarily to its racist basis as the cult of a “jealous” tribal god: though as Professor Benjamin Smith has indicated, there was, since a very early period, a mis-

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

## Judaism, Christianity and Islam

By F. A. RIDLEY

sionary and cosmopolitan cult in Judaism which finds expression in several books in the Old Testament, viz. Isaiah, Job and Jonah in particular; yet this attempt to sever the ethical and religious cult of Judaism from its ultimate racial basis has proved a failure. Jehovah remains today as in the Israel of the racist legislator, Ezra, the exclusively Jewish God of his Chosen Race. Hence, Judaism has failed ultimately to become itself a genuinely world-wide cult. Christianity and Islam, contrarily, early shed their racial antecedents; since Paul, Christianity has

successfully domiciled itself amongst the Gentiles—its Pauline decision to abandon circumcision as enjoined by the Mosaic Law, may have represented the decisive turning-point in this cosmopolitan evolution—whilst the worldly-wise Muhammed avoided the mistake of substituting the Arabs in place of the Jews as the exclusive "Chosen Race". Hence, both Christianity and Islam ended up as Catholic (universal) creeds whereas their predecessor and "godfather", Judaism, ends where it began as the exclusively national Church of *Israel*.

## Far From the Madding Crowd

By RUSTICUS

Season of mists, and mellow fruitfulness—Keats.

CHILL OCTOBER—also the name of a late garden pea, reputed to be mildew proof, although this writer has never succeeded with it. The "mull dew", as the older West Country villagers call it, has always ruined my efforts towards picking autumn peas. This October the apple trees are not only bending low on Linden Lea, but in every garden in our village. I have never seen such crops. Neither have I seen such prolific crops of wild hazel nuts or blackberries as 1960 has produced.

October has drawn me to the river bank. A favourite lounging place in the village is the footbridge over the river: the bridge leads to the village cricket and football pitches and is, indeed, the only access to these sporting arenas. The sports field is bounded on all sides by the river, which here flows past the village in two parallel branches, about 150 yards apart.

About three-quarters of a mile across the water meadows is an ancient and beautiful mill, festooned in creepers and wistaria. The mill once belonged to an ancient abbey; until the 16th century the abbey was situated in a nearby valley, but today not a trace remains. Until quite recent years there existed a well trodden footpath from the village to the mill, but the path is now overgrown, and is yet another example of a fast disappearing right-of-way. Before the war villagers could often be seen, out for a Sunday or evening stroll, making their way slowly through the lush grass to the old mill. Nobody goes that way now. Even the local lanes are deserted. The simple and soothing pastime of country walking seems to be a thing of the past: the moronic occupation of watching television now obsesses the whole village.

The chief reason I have gone down to the river bank is to search for a particular friend of mine—a wild swan. During the early summer I succeeded in winning the confidence of this magnificent bird, a male, or "cob" swan. I do not know of a more fascinating or rewarding occupation than that of winning the trust of a wild bird or mammal. I have always found the most effective method to consist in talking continuously, in a low monotonous voice, to the bird or mammal whose confidence one wishes to gain. After a week or two of this treatment I was able to get the swan to come to me, by whistling in a particular manner, even when he was one hundred yards away up river. The most timid heifer or intractable horse will, usually, respond to gentle vocal encouragement. I once saw a carter vainly trying to persuade a nervous horse to pass through a narrow gateway. The horse was pulling a loaded two-wheeled dung cart—known locally as a "putt"—and I firmly believe that the intelligent animal realised that there was only an inch to spare either side of the gateway, and that the approach should have been made at right angles, instead of on the "skew", as the carter was doing. The horse refused to budge, and the

carter, a vinegary fellow, applied the stick. Requesting permission to try gentle persuasion, I backed the cart several yards to get the right approach, talking to the trembling horse meanwhile, in a gentle voice. The powerful animal responded at once, passing through the gateway without either wheel touching a post.

Towards the end of last winter the swan lost his mate. The female, or "pen" swan, flew into the overhead electric cables—referred to last month—and broke her neck. Ever since this tragedy the bereaved bird has been inconsolable. A beautiful female has been pursuing the widower all spring and summer, but he treats her advances with friendly toleration only. On several occasions when I have been "conversing" with the male bird—as Hudson would have termed it—the female has appeared from up or down stream, and presented herself for inspection. She swims slowly towards the object of her obvious desires and comes to a halt, or anchorage, facing him. She then puts her head alongside his, within an inch, but never actually touches him. She does this several times, making passes at both sides of the other bird's head, but always avoiding touching him. It is one of the prettiest sights I have ever witnessed, and is the clearest example one could wish to see of a female "making up" to a male. But, alas, the stern unbending widower will have none of it. How he can resist such a beautiful female, literally throwing herself at his head, is a mystery. Perhaps swans mate for life, and remain single in the event of the death of one partner.

My search for the widowed swan was successful. I had missed him for several weeks, his usual territory being the branch of the river close to the village; this branch flows at the bottom of cottage gardens. I found the immaculate old fellow in the second branch, to which he appears to have removed for good. He was idling the time away on a lonely stretch of water, cruising slowly among the reeds, his sole companion a moorhen. He appears to keep entirely to himself, in spite of the presence of many more of his kind in the neighbourhood. Perhaps the female swan who has fallen in love with him will be able to melt his stony heart when Spring comes round again.

### CATHOLIC NATURISTS

IT SEEMS THAT Gordon Spencer said in the *Naturist* journal *Health and Efficiency* that he was sure no practising Catholics read his column. It seems, too, that he was wrong, reporting in the August issue that he had received a large number of letters from Roman Catholics saying that "they found nothing in naturism to conflict with their religious beliefs". So now Mr. Spencer has appealed for a "considered pronouncement". It might, he said, "help me understand the outlook of the correspondent who deplores attacks on religious grounds and yet asks me not to give his name and address . . . because 'in confirmation of what you have no doubt earlier suspected, I am a Roman Catholic'."

# Population and Henry George

By H. CUTNER

SOME YEARS BEFORE World War II, I was invited by the Henry George Society to speak on the Population Problem; and, naturally, I dealt with the undiluted nonsense he wrote about it in *Progress and Poverty*. I expected at least a reasoned reply or answer to the points I raised, but I got neither. The people who spoke wandered about on all sorts of things and population was lost in a haze of words.

That is what is the matter with *Progress and Poverty*—it goes on and on, and I defy anybody to read it without being bored stiff. From this, I hope Mr. W. H. Bolton will see why I did not deal with Book X, and why I preferred to call attention to the thousand millions of people living in London city. I simply could not get to Book X.

Here is the passage in George's book:—

So far as the limit of subsistence is concerned, London may grow to a population of a hundred millions, or five hundred millions, or a thousand millions, for she draws for subsistence upon the whole globe, and the limit which subsistence sets to her growth in population is the limit to the globe to furnish food for its inhabitants.

When a "sociologist" can seriously write this sheer rubbish, I hope I may be pardoned if I decline to read what he has to say on any other subject. Of course, "the whole globe sets the limit to the production of subsistence". It sets the limit to the production of coal and gold and a host of other things. Who denies it?

The great difficulty is to grow food for an increasing population, not to tell us in a sentence in a book that the "globe sets the limit". I half expected Mr. Bolton to tell us that two and two make four.

As a matter of simple fact, Mr. Bolton is rather unlucky in writing his article just before the annual meetings of the British Association: for our experts on the subject devoted a whole day to a discussion on the Population Problem with a number of damning truths which simply pulverises Messrs. George, Bolton, and the Catholic repopulators.

*News Chronicle* came out with a half page (September 6th, 1960) headed "Too Many Mouths—Too Little Food", and as far as I read the reports of the meetings, I never discovered a single reference to the classic Henry George, and his devastating slogan about the whole globe setting the limit to subsistence.

According to this report "Scientists warned you must act now for time is short". Sir George Thomson, president of the Association, "made it clear that the problem was bigger than anything scientists had so far tackled". He evidently had never heard of the brilliant solution written by Henry George, and exultingly backed up by Mr. Bolton. We were told that the world population is 2,900 millions, and by the year 2000 it will be 6,000 millions. They can all be fed quite easily if only we remember—according to Messrs. George and Bolton—that "the whole globe sets the limit".

If we do not solve the problem of limiting such a population, claimed Sir Charles Darwin, "life will become much harder . . . a kind of civilisation much less humane than any of us have known".

Naturally, some of the scientists were a little more optimistic than others. Dr. Dudley Stamp didn't think "soil erosion" was quite as bad as some people thought, but he insisted that "the need for planned use of land resources is becoming apparent in every country. In many it is urgent". But he also added that "even if the present

world population remained stationary, the problem of planning the best use of land *would be difficult*". (My italics.) Dr. Stamp should have read Henry George.

Professor P. M. S. Blackett was quite certain that the "main scientific and technical problems have already been solved", but "the world population will increase at the rate of about 50 millions a year in the next 20 years". And what can be done about it? Nothing, "except having a hydrogen bomb war"!

Of course some of our scientists admit that we could grow more food—for example, Dr. H. D. Kay who claimed that "British food production—already the highest in the world—could be increased by at least 50 per cent. by applying existing knowledge more extensively". But then comes a little damper from Dr. Norman Wright who admits that now we can "show that world food production is increasing at a slightly faster rate than population", though "these figures are related to diets so deficient as to lead to under-nutrition or malnutrition of a large part of the world's population".

Will the reader note that all these experts were speaking not in the year 1879 when *Progress and Poverty* was first published, but in 1960. By noting this, he will see how hopeless it is to go to a book written over eighty years ago for any kind of economics. The whole aspect of social progress is completely different now from anything dreamed of by economists then. Except for a few generalities, nineteenth century sociology is almost as dead as the dodo. And this goes for Malthus too. On broad aspects of the Population Problem, he is as sound as ever, but his figures are just hopelessly out-of-date. In addition, the problem has shifted from what used to be perhaps only a question of food production to such things as housing, schooling, transport, and dozens of other necessary adjuncts to a healthy and civilised life. People don't want to work the long hours inflicted on our forefathers by a grinding industrial system. They want more leisure.

Women in the main do not want to breed children condemned to hunger and poverty. If London could have 1,000 millions of inhabitants (a number too silly seriously to discuss) we should have to have thousands of hospitals, cinemas, welfare centres, schools—in fact, millions of them; and to bring food from all parts of the world, there would have to be *unlimited transport*. In Henry George's day, transport was limited to what we could only call small ships these days. I invite Mr. Bolton to tell us how many George had in his mind to bring food to 1,000 millions of people in London city alone? And how much land would be required to build houses for 1,000 millions of Londoners?

When George said that "subsistence increases as population increases", all that is meant here is that population could not increase without food, which is quite true. But to keep subsistence down to the people who need it, resulted in the past in war, disease, hunger, poverty, early death, to an almost unbelievable extent. No wonder Professor Blackett has—I am sure he said it with sorrow—declared that nothing can be done about world population "except having a hydrogen bomb war". In the past, people were wiped out by floods, epidemics, disease, early age at death, hunger, war, and many more fatal ways of clearing out unwanted people. We are slowly con-

(Concluded on next page)

## This Believing World

Whatever may be the case these days, soldiers before and in the two world wars, had a pretty rough time if they tried to evade any religious service. But the religion served out to them did not always make them "religious". The other day, a Guardsman got religion so badly that he became a Quaker, and therefore refused to obey orders. Result—six months in jail! What in Heaven can a poor soldier do? If he refuses to go on Church Parade because he does not believe in religion, he gets confined to barracks, or given dirty fatigues, or even jail; if he gets religion and therefore refuses to obey orders, he is sent to prison. We wonder what "our Lord" would have advised?

★

Marvellous how "miracle cures" turn up so regularly and hit the headlines! And marvellous similarly is the fact that only very rarely are the "no cure" cases reported. According to the *Sunday Dispatch* a girl suffering from a completely incurable disease was healed immediately when a Coventry pastor of the Tile Hill Pentecostal Assembly laid hands on her and prayed. Needless to say her doctor "couldn't understand it". So of course it was a "miracle". On the other hand, her fiancé "is a polio victim", and naturally went to the same pastor. Nothing happened, but both the young couple concerned have "faith", and so "a miracle will be performed for him as well". Such is faith!

★

Our Churches cannot keep away from discussing "Unity" which is just as likely to happen among the various Christian sects as unity between the USA and Russia on Communism. For the benefit of the young, however, one of the BBC school broadcasts recently on the question, was by Canon Greenslade of Oxford, and he was very far from being hopeful. He spoke for the Church of England, and he insisted that the Bible as God's Revelation to Man must be accepted as well as the Divinity of Jesus, Apostolic Succession, and all the "Sacraments". Every one of these "essentials" has caused a rumpus among theologians for centuries with very little agreement. It is a pity that the worthy Canon does not see that, broadly speaking, the only Church which has a semblance of unity is the Roman one. To share this unity, all the other Churches must join up with it *unconditionally*. And that will never happen.

★

Most astrologers on our national dailies are anonymous, but the *Sunday Dispatch* proudly gives space to Mr. Douglas Woodruff, and every week he gives people advice on their "problems" (whatever they are) but only according to the stars. For example, a lady the other day wanted to know if—being of middle age—she would ever marry, and Mr. Woodruff told her that as she was born "on the fringe of Cancer and Leo", she is "hesitant"; but "at the right time" she may marry. We cannot help wondering what her fate would have been if she hadn't been born on the fringe?

★

Or take the case of a lady who is a "Libran subject"—from her letter asking for advice, Mr. Woodruff candidly admits he "would never have thought so". But this uncertainty is surely the very essence of Astrology? Something may or may not happen, and if you are told it will happen, and it doesn't, is this not because the birth date was not literally right, or the stars or the Zodiacal signs were on the fringe, or were not in conjunction, or the astrologer's calculations were at fault? Does anybody know of anybody who has consistently had an absolutely true "forecast" for six months on end—or even less?

## Not For Us

ON SEPTEMBER 30th, our front page article was entitled "The Monarchy". It was, like all our front page articles, an expression of "Views and Opinions"; in this case, those of our regular contributor, F. A. Ridley. Some of our readers may share Mr. Ridley's views on the Monarchy: some may not. That doesn't worry us. THE FREETHINKER never has been afraid to voice an opinion because it was controversial, and we trust it never will be. Certainly it won't while the present editor and board of G. W. Foote and Co. Ltd., control its policy.

When, therefore, we received a letter from the North of England beginning, "It has long been obvious that Mr. Ridley's political bias intrudes most of his articles published in THE FREETHINKER, and I consider that the time has arrived when some strong protests are due or overdue", we were not unduly disturbed and merely took up the blue pencil to improve grammar and logic, as is our wont even with opponents.

The writer was known to us. He didn't need to tell us that he held "a bias that is completely opposed to Mr. Ridley's politically": it had been obvious from letters received previously when—as now—he had informed us that, "If and when, say, Socialism could become a plank in Secularist platform then my membership would cease" (the blue pencil, it will be noted, was not wielded). We had had all this out before. But when our correspondent continued, "But the article 'Monarchy', exceeds all the limits of decency, fair comment and commonsense", we saw that the writer had exceeded all the limits of reason.

It was then that we came to the footnote. "I would like this published", it read; "if not my continued membership is doubtful".

That clinched it. Quite frankly the letter didn't deserve printing. Mr. Ridley's article was not socialist (the word was never mentioned) but republican, in the tradition of Bradlaugh, Foote and Robertson. Still, with a little editing, our royalist reader's letter might have been published: we were prepared to do our best for him, as for all our critics, not out of special nobility, but because of our firm belief in the free play of ideas.

We now have no intention of doing so. Instead, we inform our correspondent (whose name we withhold) that THE FREETHINKER is the last paper in the world that will submit to blackmail. Quite irrespective of our views of Mr. Ridley's article (which happen to be high) or our views of our correspondent's letter (which it must be clear are low) we refuse to be bullied or bribed. We prefer—as a famous newspaper once remarked in similar circumstances—to print one copy less.

THE EDITOR.

## POPULATION AND HENRY GEORGE

(Concluded from page 331)

quering these terrors to life, and population is slowly but surely overtaking every reform at the command of civilisation. If we have conquered smallpox and plague, we are cursed with cancer and polio, and so on. And the biggest headache governments have to contend with is the rise in population which means more and more houses, schools, etc., more and more illness which requires more and more hospitals, and so the merry game goes on.

Henry George's contribution to all this is (I think) state-ownership of all land, and a single tax. And as for population, well, London city could easily feed 1,000 millions of people!

If that is not economic insanity, I defy anybody to tell me what is.

# THE FREETHINKER

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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.

## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### OUTDOOR

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

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

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Platt Fields).—Every Sunday, 3 p.m.: MESSRS. MILLS and WOODCOCK. (Thursday lunchtimes, THE FREETHINKER on sale, Piccadilly, near Queen Victoria statue.)

Marble Arch Branch N.S.S. (Marble Arch).—Meetings every Sunday, from 4 p.m.: Messrs. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER, C. E. WOOD, D. TRIBE and J. P. MURACCIOLE.

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Pierhead).—Meetings: Wednesdays, 1 p.m.; Sundays, 7.30 p.m.

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, Nottingham).—Every Friday, 1 p.m., Every Sunday, 6.30 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

### INDOOR

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1), Tuesday, October 18th, 7.15 p.m.: R. W. SORENSON, M.P., "The New Humanism and the Old Religions".

Humanist Group of S.W. London (Mulberry Lodge, Barnes Common, S.W.13) Sunday, October 16th, 8 p.m.: D. TRIBE, "Humanism and Entertainment".

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, October 16th, 6.30 p.m.: Professor P. H. NOWELL-SMITH, "Morality—Christian and Humanist".

Marble Arch Branch N.S.S. (The Carpenters' Arms, Seymour Place, Edgware Road, W.1), Sunday, October 16th, 7.15 p.m.: L. EBURY, "Freethought, Anti-Semitism, Racism and Legislation".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1) Sunday, October 16th, 11 a.m.: J. MURUMBI, "Independence in Africa—1960".

## Notes and News

WE WERE SORRY TO HEAR that Mr. Archibald Robertson was unable to attend the South Place Ethical Society's reunion on Sunday, September 25th, owing to a heart attack earlier in the month. We hope he will soon be better. Mr. Robertson was to have been joint Guest of Honour with Mr. Charles Bradlaugh Bonner.

WHEN MR. J.S.R. of Brighton—a FREETHINKER reader—wrote to the *Daily Mirror* objecting to its Saturday prayers feature and in general to those who "grovel in prayer to a non-existent god", he must have known he would bring the wrath of the pious down on his head. "Never have we had such angry, thoughtful, bewildered, astounded letters as we've had in answer to Mr. J.S.R. folks", reported the *Mirror* (6/10/60). On that day—with more to follow—the "thoughtful" ones were conspicuously absent. Mrs. D.M.L., of North Shields, had "never read anything so horrible as the words of the man who wrote in Live Letters that God is non-existent". "I am nineteen" continued Mrs. D.M.L., and "I know that God is real . . ."

## The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY ACKNOWLEDGED £167 14s. 5d. Mrs. A. Vallance, £1; Anon, 7s. 6d.; W. Adams, £1; Anon, 1s. 2d.; F. B. Bolton, £3 10s.; Mrs. A. Calderwood, 5s.; Mrs. E. Guelke, 10s. Total to date October 7th, 1960. £174 8s. 1d.

"Goldy" of Plymouth, "a coffee-bar incumbent, an accomplished sinner of no particular flock or persuasion", on the other hand, "humbly" opposed Mr. J.S.R., "noting the miraculous pattern and equilibrium of nature", and suggesting that "if more individuals 'grovelled' to that [Divine] Will by rendering service to humanity we surely would not need the bomb . . ." But perhaps the "Old Codgers" (who conduct the *Mirror* "Live Letters" column) had Mr. Norman Weight of Devon in mind when they used the adjective "thoughtful". "If religion, prayer and God are myths", he wrote, "we become 'nothing' when we die. A frightening question thus remains unanswered by your correspondent J.S.R. Why were we ever born? It cannot be for nothing: otherwise there cannot be a reason for anything". Could that be called "thoughtful"?

OF ALL THE SHRINES in Christendom, said the American *Newsweek* (19/9/60), "none is more sacred—or more shabby—than the 800-year-old Church of the Holy Sepulchre in the Jordanian sector of Jerusalem", built "according to legend" on the site of the Crucifixion and Resurrection. The church has certainly had a bad time of it: "rocked by an earthquake in 1927, wracked by mortar fire during the Arab-Israeli war in 1948, and ravaged by fire in 1950". Indeed, "only a jungle of massive scaffolding" holds it together. There have been five suggested plans for restoration since 1947, but "the six Christian communities . . . have been unable to agree on what should be done or who should have the privilege of paying". Now, however, the Muslim Governor General of Jerusalem, Hassan El Katib, has compelled them to come to, at least a tentative agreement to attend to very necessary work. But, "so vigorously do the various Christian communities guard their separate perquisites that any agreement is always subject to change".

PETTY RIVALRIES among the sects in Jerusalem descend to the schoolboy level. Disputes range, for example, over "which sect had the right to hang vestments in what clothes closets, and who was going to whitewash the ceiling". And it is "not unusual for the Roman Catholics and the Copts, who say mass at the same time each week in the main rotunda, to try and drown each other out". "You can't change a light bulb around here without consulting protocol", said a Franciscan, "That's why the place is so dark".

IT SEEMS THAT WE got a little confused in our references to National Secular Society Branch officials in this column two weeks ago. Mr. W. Miller is not President of Birmingham Branch, but Chairman, Mr. C. H. Smith being the President. And Mr. J. Barrowman is not Treasurer of the Glasgow Secular Society. Mr. Murray combines the Secretaryship and Treasurer'ship. We apologise to the members and branches concerned.

MR. S. WILLIAMS of 8 Hill House Road, Norwich, would like to hear from other Freethinkers in his area.

—NEXT WEEK—

CATHOLICISM IN THE USA

By COLIN McCALL

## Belfast in 1960

By S. J. YOUNG

BELFAST; with the gabled walls of buildings decorated with "Up the rebels" or "No Pope here (causing a visitor to remark, "Wise Pope"!)" A little stronger, "To Hell with the Pope!" or, alternatively, the same distinction for the "British Oppressors", and similar sentiments expressed in language which would contravene the Blasphemy Laws.

As I was passing through districts embellished as above, observing afresh the various slogans after being so long immune to them, I came upon a small boy chanting an anti-Papist war tune—and a pretty bloodthirsty one at that:—

We are the Billy Boys  
Up to the neck in Fenian Blood  
Surrender and you die  
We are the Billy Billy Boys.

(Note: All Fenians are classed as Roman Catholics and vice versa).

The little boy and his hymn of hate, sung in innocence, caused me to reflect on my own childhood days, when I was subjected to the insidious "pattern-setting mould of hate". And I wondered if there had really been any marked change in thought and relationship between the two sects since that time.

I recollected preparing for the Protestant celebration of the year in Northern Ireland, the Twelfth of July, the commemoration of the Battle of the Boyne, when the "Prods licked the Micks", gathering wood for the bonfire that would consume the effigy of "Lundy the Traitor" and chanting bloodcurdling parodies (against Papists) that would have disturbed the ashes of Old Testament Prophets.

In those days of extreme poverty when children hadn't the clothes to make them "respectable and presentable", the dire distress of the people led to subservience and humility towards seeming opulence and authority; the sheer desperate conditions made the people degrade themselves by cringing before the harbingers of promises of "Pie in the sky". When the clergy came, all racing papers were hidden; all cigarette butts were put out of sight; the poor relations of cushions were tidied; the best (and sometimes only) chair was placed close to the few remaining coals in the grate; the children warned not to say anything unto-ward in the presence of the "proper". When the gentleman did appear, gloom and the dread of admonition were the theme of the moment for the parents. "Why were the children not in attendance at Sunday School?" Unnecessarily ashamed of their inability to clothe the children for the occasion, the parents would make excuses of illness or suchlike.

If the children had appeared in Sunday School minus footwear, the cleric would no doubt have been highly indignant. Bare heads before the Lord, but bare feet? Never! The "Mediator" was regarded as having God-like proportions, attributes which the parents themselves placed in him, and which he revelled in. And with the bewildered people anxious to raise a sweet savour in his nostrils (and mainly to keep him from calling again!) the children became offerings of appeasement.

So we went to Sunday School (I for the first time) and for the innocents the education of fear, confusion and uncertainty had begun. The "Bogey Man" business had really started; one fear begat another and it was long years before I finally conquered the irrational fears. What thoughts to present to any child! The slaughter of the innocent's future stability.

As a teenager I saw great violence in Belfast. That was

a period of civil war between Roman Catholics and Protestants. Shootings and beatings were rife; innocent men shot dead—the victims of an outburst of religious rabies. I remember going to the funeral of one of the victims of this madness. I was young and impressionable then. The cortege had to pass through what was considered enemy territory to get to the cemetery. As far as the eye could see, the compatriots of the deceased filled a very long road; the air was heavy with the thought of vengeance, hatred and fear. There was no useful purpose in all this tragic nonsense that could drive a country to suicide, this religious apartheid. I saw the shallowness of the teaching of "Love thy neighbour".

And so to Belfast today, where churches, chapels, and particularly the small mission halls, are as numerous as crosses in the cemetery (and to me, both tell the same story). These spots stand out like the legacy of smallpox on the body of what could be a healthy city; I see in them a warning against a recurrence of the disease and I am thankful for the "vaccination" of Freethought.

I find that a goodly number of the 8-14 age group are sent to Sunday School, not with the intention of enriching their spiritual life, but rather to get them out of the parents' way for the best part of an hour. As for most of these children, Jesus and God are regarded as somewhat on a plane with Santa Claus. The grandparents of these children would be outraged if they could hear the language they employ. Certain cuss words in the grandparents' day were very much taboo. So naturally the child used them when out of earshot. We said them in bravado but not without a guilty feeling and a fear of being found out. Nowadays, children have less regard for taboos. They use blasphemous words quite casually and as a normal part of conversation. The sacred name of Jesus is used as an expression of disgust, anger, disappointment, and in general to flavour any conversation. "Holy Jesus" may be said fervently but not reverently. My impressions of the children's disposition is that it is to a marked degree due to the mellowed religious instruction given in the State Schools. (A teacher remarked to me, "We don't teach that sort of thing any more".) Also, the circumstances of the parents are better. As for the teenagers: in conversation with and generally observing them, the following points emerge (these are Protestants by the way): some have a belief of sorts; some are uncertain; some confused; quite a number don't believe in God or are indifferent. For the most part their experience of church is their experience of a revolving door. The majority don't care. But a surprisingly large number appear to have thought about Christianity quite a lot, their chief difficulty being to translate their thoughts into words of sufficient expressiveness. They don't agree with, or accept the must do's or shouldn't do's in Holy Writ. "I never asked Him to come and save me. If He had made me all right in the first place, He wouldn't have to save me now". And "If my Father and Mother are going to hell, I want to go with them". One can hardly argue against these opinions.

(To be concluded)

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# Personal Immortality

By NICHOLAS TOON

ACCORDING TO FREUD, the idea of immortality arose from the ambivalent attitude of primitive man towards death. The death of a stranger was regarded by him as natural, the welcome annihilation of a creature hated; but his own death was to him inconceivable. When, however, somebody close to him died, such as a relative or friend, he had reluctantly to admit that death is real even for one's self. He then conceded his own death, but denied it the significance of an annihilation. The contemplation of his loved one's corpse caused him to invent ghosts, and his feelings of guilt at the satisfaction mingled with his sorrow turned these ghosts into evil, dreaded demons. His memory of the dead gave him a basis for assuming the continuation of life after death, and also the disjunction of the individual into a body and a soul.

This disjunction is, I believe, totally erroneous. Science is coming more and more to recognise that a so-called "soul" or "mind" is inseparable from a living brain, that man is a psycho-physical unity that cannot properly be arbitrarily bifurcated; and not necessarily a human brain, since at any rate the higher anthropoids and mammals have as much right to claim a "soul" as a human being, particularly since an adult ape has greater intelligence than a newborn human babe. What sort of a "soul" has a freak child that is born with no brains inside its skull? Such a human being is of a lower order than a chimpanzee or a baboon. So I can see no justification for arrogating to human beings the unique prerogative of having immortal souls: besides which, one is bound to ask at what stage in his evolution from primitive progenitors man miraculously acquired his immortal soul. Plainly, if we observe signs of affection or gratitude, or other recognisable feelings, in the "dumb" animals, then we are bound to attribute to them a "spiritual" element, since it is in these manifestations of universal conscious feeling that spirituality consists. Our inability to imagine our own death *realistically*, as it were, does not affect its undoubted reality. Of course, it is impossible to imagine properly a future in which we shall not exist, because the very act of our imagining presupposes our existence. This is apt to give us a sense of permanence which is, perhaps, illusory.

The real reason for the belief in an after-life is, of course, wishful thinking. Nobody who has ever known happiness really wants to die; when man considers the welter of turbulent human passions, which through immemorial centuries have stirred his breast, he is bound to feel that things so deep and powerful must always have a future—they cannot all vanish into an abyss of nothingness. We all long for our moments of ecstasy to be immortalised, we all feel that certain joys and feelings transcend ourselves and belong to a higher realm than that in which we function. Indeed, these sentiments, which probably have their origin in the sexual instinct, are the mainspring of religious feeling. Yet may not the transient nature of these feelings be in fact one integral part of them? Surely life does not lose in significance if our sojourn here is brief and final—it gains thereby, imparting a sense of urgency to our lives. For it provides a real inducement to make the most of this life, which we do know for certain to exist, and to make this life, here and now on this earth, the paradise that it could be.

That the belief in immortality is merely or mainly wishful thinking is borne out by the fact that this doctrine is very widely disbelieved even by otherwise orthodox Christians.

I personally find it incredible. It derives partly from the natural desire to prolong our pleasurable experiences (and possibly too from less laudable desires for compensation and revenge) and partly, no doubt, from a feeling of "oneness" with the great Universe outside and around us, from whose dust we sprang, and to whose dust we shall return. In the sense that matter is indestructible, we are eternal. There is not a shred of conclusive evidence that man does in fact survive bodily death. The alleged evidence from the "spirit world" is worse than useless, being completely fraudulent. It is a striking indictment of the gullibility of so many people that they are still prepared to part with money in order to "communicate" with the spirits of the departed. It may well be that there do exist aspects of reality which are as yet unexplained, but it is certain that every phenomenon in the Universe must in principle be explainable in accordance with natural laws.

Furthermore, we have no more right to assume that we shall exist after we are dead than to assume that we existed before we were born; for eternity not only has no end, it equally has no beginning. However, theories of "reincarnation", "transmigration of souls", etc., are pure speculation; where is the real evidence for these theories?

But the most fundamental objection to the whole notion of "life after death" is simply that the concept is a contradiction in terms. The only life of which we know is organic life; it follows that the word "life" can have no meaning divorced from its natural context. To posit another type of "life" is to embark on the ocean of pure fantasy. The idea of a purely spiritual existence is a mere figment of the imagination—a mere piece of abstract verbiage.

To fear death, which is as natural and as inevitable as life, is morbid and unhealthy. Death is the price we pay for life, and its inexorability should be a spur rather than a dark fearsome cloud. There is an erroneous popular belief that when people approach death the belief in immortality is strongest. This is not true of those who have lived a rich and satisfying life: "I have warned my hands at the fire of life", said H. G. Wells, "and am ready to depart". Death seems a terrible thing to the young, who have their life before them; yet it is only *premature* death which is sad. People who have reached their allotted span have lived their lives and, ideally, look back with contentment on their achievements and cherish their memories. They are ready for death, and acknowledge it for what it is: the sleep from which they will never awaken, the return to the oblivion from whence they came. Seen thus death is in a way a deliverance, the termination of all our worries and fears as well as our hopes and loves. The prospect of really living forever is, as Fred Hoyle remarked, a truly terrifying one. Besides, nobody wishes to live forever in a state of senile decrepitude! If anyone whose life has been mean and colourless finds comfort in believing that the wrongs and injustices of this world will be righted in another one, we cannot blame him; but we have the right to criticize his delusion.

That the idea of immortality survives at all is largely due to the fact that it is inculcated into children at an age when they have no basis for believing anything except a faith that grown-ups will not deceive them. I remember being told as a small child that on death one's soul ascends to Heaven. This conjured up for me the somewhat macabre picture of something shaped rather like an

enormous broad bean floating slowly upwards from the corpse in a vertical line as the earthly life expired. We may laugh nowadays at the lurid pictures of hell-fire; yet in former ages, and still today among very little children, these pictures can strike terror into the mind. And if the belief in Hell is abandoned (as it is now officially by theology), so too should be the parallel belief in Heaven, for which the evidence is equally nil. In the olden times they implied each other, and belief in the one was inseparable from belief in the other. Are we to assume that everybody goes to Heaven nowadays, regardless? How much longer can this childish myth last? I venture to prophesy that the notion of "heaven" is destined for the same fate as that of "hell"—namely, extinction.

To try, however imperfectly, to make a heaven here on earth is a far better thing than to look forward complacently to twiddling our thumbs for all eternity.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### DEFINITIONS

I cordially agree with Mr. Murray that the concepts of Sin and Crime denote two quite different categories of human failure between which it is most important to differentiate. The view to which I incline is that Sin is any offence against the will of Nature—it is a waste of ethical energy; whereas Crime is any offence against the feeling of Society, and is a waste of moral or aesthetic energy. Ultimately, of course, in the Ideal State, there is no difference between them.

It is very difficult to give an equally brief definition of free-thinking, but continuing the above line of thought I would say that freethinking is the kind of thinking which applies itself to the discovery of Truth and tries to correct human failure by discovering how to avoid the waste of ethical, aesthetic, and especially scientific energy. It is therefore constantly on guard against the ethical and aesthetic impulses which the thinker has acquired during life, since these are always relative and tend to distort truth and to turn discussion into invective.

Finally, since man is the only creature who can practise free-thinking, I feel that manners (as opposed to doggers and catters) is a very important matter in freethinking. In this, as in his admiration for the Stoics, I find myself in close agreement with Mr. Bennett.

(Dr.) RICHARD HOPE.

### THE EXODUS

Having been abroad, I have only now seen your issue of September 9th, and noticed that Mr. Morrell still draws his red herrings across the Exodus issue. I had given book, chapter and verse and extensively quoted, whilst he merely offers generalisations; however, he still clings to his fixed ideas that:

(a) the Hebrews, as a political unit, were Egyptian slaves during the Tell-el-Amarna period (which is discounted by I Kings, 6,1) and

(b) that the Exodus story "is based on fact", for he cannot imagine that the authors of Holy Writ could possibly have invented a story—unless they had access to official documents!

The idea of scientific documentation in a time when historiography as a science had not yet been dreamt of, I find too grotesque for words. But let us for a moment assume that the Exodus story really grew around a real happening of sorts. Mr. Morrell himself admits that "the story of the Exodus as given in the Bible has much that cannot be accepted". In this case it stands to reason for anybody but someone out to boost religion that its historical value is nil. To start an argument about the possibility of a grain of truth behind this story is just as pointless as an argument about whether or not King Arthur suffered from an occasional attack of gout.

That "parts of the story go back to earlier times" than that of the codification of the OT has never been contested (it was even my parting shot in your issue of May 27th). We know that the barbarians of early Europe already traded between the Baltic and Asia Minor and knew of conditions in far-away lands—even without "access to documents".

The idea that nothing could be invented without a kernel of historical truth is a widespread fallacy: what are the "real facts" behind Snow White, the Sleeping Beauty or Red Riding Hood? Suppressed mythologies degenerate into traditional fairy tales and the "fact" they altogether are based upon is very simply the Great Mystery of Resurrection of Life in Springtime after a trial period of calamity. Any student of religion knows quite well that "Creation", "Exodus" and "Easter" (inter alia) are but variations on that very theme.

P. G. ROY.

### KILLING

Dr. Edward Roux states, "Existence of God" 23/9/60:

"Theists and atheists will agree that the killing (of other men) is wrong *except in time of war or in other special circumstances specified by law.*"

This is a very presumptuous statement and on the contrary I am sure that many theists and atheists will not agree. Am I to assume that Dr. Roux considers the killing of men by the State or by Authority as right? Does his freethinking stop at his disbelief in the existence of God? War is waged in the name of man and the State for reasons of power and greed. It is also waged in the name of God. Is it right that men are killed in pursuit of these ends? If one accepts the fact that criminals are made and not born, is it right that the State should murder its own product. It would appear that Dr. Roux has transferred to the State the Divine Law of the God he disbelieves in.

E. NORFOLK.

[Mr. Norfolk misreads Dr. Roux, who was stating a point of agreement between theists and atheists: that killing is wrong *except in time of war, etc.* Dr. Roux did not say killing was right in time of war or that theists and atheists agree that it is.—ED.]

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