

# The Freethinker

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THE NEWS OF THE WEEK from Cambridge as reported in some sections of the British press, demonstrates once more—if more demonstration be needed—its incapacity to report adequately and objectively a straight piece of scientific news. Just what happens between the time that a reporter scribbles something into his notebook and the moment that sees the final proof passed for printing, I do not know. In any communication channel there is bound to exist a certain amount of noise. The greater the number of links between sender and receiver the greater is the overall distortion of the transmitted message. Finally the reader is left with the semantic problem of deciding whether the meaning conveyed to him by the now mutilated message can be identical with the meaning intended by the writer of it. In passing, we merely note that it simplifies things if we omit consideration of the problem of how far the mental processes of the writer interfere with a correct appraisal of the event he wishes to report! In a modern newspaper office there are so many links in the chain, so many sources all injecting their own little quota of semantic "noise" into a message, that one wonders how often one does get a reasonably accurate account of something that happened?

## Genesis and the Universe

I was led to these reflections after reading several different accounts of Professor Martin Ryle's recent theories on the origin and evolution of the universe. One paper, the *Daily Express* (11/2/61) accomplished the almost impossible task of saying that his theory accorded with and contradicted, at one and the same time, the Biblical story of creation! In large type we read, "The world, the sun, the other stars and the entire universe were created in one tremendous atomic explosion about 10,000 million years ago, Professor Martin Ryle claimed last night. This event, if confirmed, could be interpreted as scientific evidence supporting the Biblical account given in Genesis—that God suddenly created heaven, earth, and light." A little later on, in smaller print, came the news that, "Professor Ryle does not consider that his findings necessarily strengthen the religious theories of creation. In one way his theory conflicts with Genesis. It claims that the universe was created by the sudden explosion of a mass of matter previously compressed into a small space. The usual interpretation of Genesis is that God created the universe out of nothing". The previous day, the *Evening Standard* was quite certain of one thing, that "the scientific facts fit in nicely with what the Bible says—'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth'." With great assurance this paper had got into its stride with: "Until now, many eminent scientists have clung to an opposite view. The Universe, they said, was in a steady state. Everlasting. As stars faded away, new ones were created. But the total of matter in space never varied . . . This theory, which clashes with the Christian precept that the

Universe has a definite life span, now appears false". The paragraph ended with these words: "The Cambridge findings should spur churchmen and philosophers to offer new explanations or demand fresh faith". I like the use of "or" in the above context. Churchmen are not exactly notorious for offering fresh explanations about anything. Explaining things is not their strong point. They are much more likely to demand fresh faith. The confidence trickster is the last to admit his credentials are bogus. If only his victims will renew their faith in him all will be well!

## Cosmological Models

But let us get back to Professor Ryle. I am not now concerned with whether his theory is true, false, or somewhere in between. In fact the statement above, that "until now many eminent scientists have clung to an opposite view", is quite misleading. The verdict of the scientific world on the Professor's theory has still to be pronounced. Anyway, the subject matter is highly technical and outside the competence of most people other than experts in astronomy and related scientific disciplines. I shall simply indicate that as far as religious theories of creation are concerned, Professor Ryle's theory, properly understood, has no more to do with the Biblical account of "creation" than it has with the proposition that the moon is made of green cheese! The theoretical situation can be summed up as follows: Two broad types of cosmological theory have, in recent years, been worked out in some detail, and present theories about galactic formation are usually set within one or other of these cosmological frameworks. In one category of cosmological models the universe of stars and galaxies of stars is thought of as originating from the explosion of a core of super-dense atomic material some ten to fifteen thousand million years ago. The scattering of the fragments is believed to account for the present observed "expansion of the universe", which is the expression used to denote the fact that nearly every galactic nebula of stars outside our own is receding from us and every other galaxy at a speed which is proportional to distance. The farthest galaxies from us are also travelling from us the fastest. This category of cosmological models is distinct from others in that all these models assume a universe which has changed radically with time. Also, in such a universe, all the galaxies comprising it would have formed at an early stage.

## The Steady-State Theory

In the other broad type of cosmological theory stands the steady-state cosmology of Hoyle, Bondi and Gold, which holds that the universe has always had a constant density and that, viewed from any given segment of time, the overall features of the universe would remain substantially constant. The universal expansion of the galaxies is balanced by the genesis of new matter which continues through time to condense into clusters of new galaxies. This cosmological model postulates no upper limit for the age of the universe.

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

## In The Beginning

By JACK GORDON

It should be noted that neither the evolutionary model nor the steady-state model says anything about "absolute" beginnings. Professor Ryle's theory, for example, claims to account for the present state of the universe by considering it to have evolved by means of an explosion from an assumed initial state many millions of years ago. The theory says nothing about the previous history of the initial state. "Initial" is here used not in the sense of an absolute beginning but rather as a convenient starting point. Every *theory* must start somewhere. Nor does Professor Ryle's theory say anything about the cause of the explosion, or where the original matter came from, or how long it had existed prior to expansion. Nor is it meant to. Ryle himself admits that if and when the question of the appropriate cosmological model is settled, he would like to devote himself to consideration of how the matter in the universe is changing—and to many other related questions. Similarly, Professor Fred Hoyle's theory says nothing about the genesis of new matter. Nothing is known about the mechanism of the "spontaneous" appearance of hydrogen atoms in the vast reaches of space; nor is it easy to see how any experimental proof of the fact can be forthcoming. There is, however, plenty of indirect evidence from optical astronomical studies of irregular galactic configurations which suggests that these unusual objects may well be galaxies *in an early stage of evolution*. It would not be possible to assimilate this

evidence within the framework of an evolutionary cosmological model; but, on the other hand, the existence of such galaxies at any given time is expected, even demanded, by steady-state theories.

#### Cosmology—A New Science?

The Science Correspondent of *The Guardian* (11/2/61), in what I thought was a fair coverage of the news and controversy over Professor Ryle's theory, concluded with these words: "This [evolutionary] framework is obviously one that lends itself to concepts of creation by deities. However, it is not the only possible way in which an evolutionary universe could have begun. Indeed, it is even possible that an evolving universe need not have begun at all". That sums it up rather well; and as for the deities—well there are people who will see the operation of deities in anything you care to name. They will see it because *they want to see it*. Yet the day may not be far off when the world's deities will take their place alongside the devils and the witches (and their forks and broomsticks) and all those other denizens in the limbo of discarded notions. Professor Ryle is quoted as saying that the discovery of the radio source in Cygnus in 1951 signified that it had become possible to think of turning cosmology from a philosophy into a science. The gods and the ghosts of gods still occasionally haunt the labyrinths of philosophy; in science their graves are so many milestones on the road of progress.

## Guessing Games

IT WAS A PLEASURE TO READ *The Glasgow Herald* Science Correspondent on Monday, January 16th, 1961, when he reviewed *Man: the Known and Unknown* by John Langdon-Davies (Secker & Warburg, 21s.) under the heading, "Telepathy: Science or Magic?"

After reminders of glaring errors in Mr. Langdon-Davies's predictions of a quarter of a century ago (and it should be remembered that he held man's future to be inexorably determined) we are informed that his knowledge of the science he attacks in his new book "is not impressive in extent or maturity". For example, he declares that it is not certain that the sun will rise tomorrow morning. "The sun, we are told, is in a state of unstable equilibrium, and at any time within the next few million years may fall in on itself and become a dwarf star".

"Who told him that?" asks *The Glasgow Herald* Science Correspondent. "Certainly not a scientist with any knowledge of what has been going on in astronomy during the past 30 years." And Mr. Langdon-Davies's discussion on atomic structure "abounds in technical errors and misconceptions". His book is, in fact, "a caricature of science, a catalogue of inexplicable happenings, a rousing appeal that science and magic should sink their differences and work together in the fuller development of man's hidden powers".

These "hidden powers" are allegedly displayed by Mr. Langdon-Davies's cook and kitchen maid who have scored well in extra-sensory perception tests. The Science Correspondent deals with these so-called "parapsychological" phenomena on the proper level. "What is the new wisdom that knocks in vain at the scientist's door?" he asks.

In the form most often advertised it consists of figures obtained in guessing games. One player takes a card from a pack and the other player guesses what it is. In a long series, a proportion will be right, merely by chance. If the score actually obtained is better than this, the intervention of some supernatural agency is claimed. Several experimenters

including Mr. Langdon-Davies have reported high scores in these games, played with supposedly sensitive assistants. Calculations can be made to show that such scores would occur very rarely indeed if chance alone was responsible. Scientists (and most other people) are not impressed by these calculations, made after the experiment has been done. The spectacular performances cannot be repeated at will, and most of the successful guessers lose their powers after a while. The reported results can, the critics say, be attributed partly to coincidence and partly to conscious or unconscious deception.

This, it will be agreed, is refreshing after so much rubbish has been written about the Rhines and Soals and their "sensitives". *The Glasgow Herald* thus joins *The Guardian* as a debunker of ESP (the latter paper having let Mr. C. E. M. Hansel of Manchester University expose Dr. S. G. Soal's telepathic schoolboys, the Jones cousins, 24/4/59). And in no uncertain fashion, "Telepathy, parapsychology, and other fungi on the face of science", says the *Herald's* Science Correspondent, "must be cut down occasionally by a sweep of Occam's Razor". It is a sound principle, he reminds us, "not to suppose that more things exist than we have evidence for".

C.McC.

## TWO ANNIVERSARIES

ON SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 24TH, French Freethinkers are celebrating two anniversaries, each of fifty years, both of André Lorulot, President of the French Federation of Freethinkers and Vice-President of the World Union of Freethinkers. One is his Golden Wedding; the other of his periodical *L'Idée Libre* which he has produced, edited and often largely written without a break for fifty years. Consider that twice in those fifty years France has been overrun by the Germans; that for ten of those years France was swept by war; and you will begin to perceive what a noteworthy feat this publication has been. I do not think it would have been possible without the patient support, unflinching encouragement and help of Madame Jane Lorulot. What a splendid vista to look back on! We, nous autres Anglais, wish you many years to come of vigour and valiance, Jane and André. Vive *L'Idée Libre!*

C.B.B.

# The Holy Book

By FRANK MAITLAND

AN INTERESTING REPORT appeared in *The Times* on January 25th, about the problem of swearing in two Sikhs at Uxbridge Magistrates Court. The case against them could not proceed because of the absence of the Granth Sahib, the Holy Book of the Sikhs. The clerk of the court, Mr. Laurence Crossley, said that the book would have to be brought to the court and added, "I think you will have to bring the priest as well, as he will not part with the book".

The report also refers to a similar situation which arose a year or two ago. "A holy man brought the book to the court and it was placed on a cushion with two cows' tails while the Sikh took the oath. It appears that in the presence of the book the Sikh will not tell lies". The cows' tails, I presume, add to the sanctity of the whole business.

While Protestantism as a whole and the evangelical sects in particular—the Adventists and Witnesses and so on—lay the greatest store in the studying and interpreting of Holy Writ, this is clearly a revolutionary break with the truly religious attitude towards the Holy Book. After all, is that not the social content of the Reformation?—the demand that every man shall read the word of God for himself and no longer be content with a priest mangling it in atrocious Latin?

The Uxbridge Court's experience of truth being told in the presence of the Granth Sahib reminded me of the curse cast upon Spinoza, when that earnest philosopher was excommunicated from the synagogue in Amsterdam. It runs like this:

"With the judgment of the angels and the sentence of the saints, we anathematise, execrate, curse and cast out Baruch de Espinoza, the whole of the sacred community assenting, in presence of the sacred books with the 613 precepts written therein . . .".

Note the words, "in presence of"!

That an oath to tell the truth in court and an oath of fealty to the monarch are taken with the Bible in the right hand is common knowledge. Of course, it is not so well known that Charles Bradlaugh and the pioneers of freethought eventually obtained from a reluctant Establishment the right of affirmation instead of oath taking. Nor do the takers of oaths reflect that the Bible in their hands is nothing but a magic talisman. Truth will not be present unless the sacred words are uttered. The lamp of Aladdin will not work unless the correct words of magic are spoken as the hand rubs the lamp.

Perhaps the best example of how Christianity has treated the Bible as a talisman, and not as a system of philosophy, of ethics or of divine revelation and all the other things that have been read into the Bible in modern centuries, is the story of St. Columba and St. Finian's psalter, a saintly tale of the sixth century. There are many versions of the story. Instead of giving a fresh one in my own words, I should like to quote the story of the psalter as told by C. F. Gordon Cumming in his delightful book, *In the Hebrides*. I am sure that readers of THE FREETHINKER will appreciate the naivety of the tale.

Supernatural light of a visible kind had been vouchsafed to Columba in his youth, when as a student (always of a devout turn, and so greatly addicted to sacred studies that his companions bestowed on him the name of Colm-Kille, i.e., Malcolm of the Church) he had been struck with special admiration of a Book of Psalms belonging to St. Finian. The latter, saint though he was, must have been a noted churl, for Columba dared not ask leave to copy the manuscript,

but determined to do so in secret (on the excellent principle, of doing what you wish first, and asking leave afterwards! a system which if it has occasional drawbacks, has also undoubted advantages). For this purpose the young student remained in the church every night after vespers. He had no candle, but a miraculous light shone from his hand and illuminated the page while he wrote. After a while, this mysterious light attracted attention and led to his discovery. St. Finian, however, feigned ignorance till the work was completed, and then he claimed it for his own—a claim which the vexed scribe resisted. The matter was referred to King Diarmid, who decided that "To every cow belongs her own calf", hence to every book its copy, a judgment the injustice of which Columba resented so hotly, that this, coupled at a later period with the treacherous murder of his friend, the young Prince of Connaught, led to his taking so violent a part in what we may call the Civil Wars, that he was eventually recommended to carry his fiery energies across the sea, which he accordingly did, greatly to the benefit of Scotland.

This Psalm Book was afterwards known as the Catach or Book of Battles, by reason of the great battles and bloodshed to which it gave rise. Soon it came to be used as a charm, which secured victory to any army which possessed it, provided it was carried thrice sunwise round the host on the morning of battle. This most precious relic is still preserved in the Royal Irish Academy in Dublin; it is a Psalter encased in a highly ornamental silver shrine.

This is a remarkable impression of Finian, the jealous possessor of a powerful charm, one of the few Holy Books then in Ireland, being swindled by the ambitious Columba, aided by a "miraculous light" which emanated from divine sources clearly without any moral rules about property. And when King Diarmid decided against him, Columba defended his pilfered Psalter with the sword. Altogether a delightful picture of the hagiological age, when honest saints had to harrow their souls in order to decide between a Catach or an Excalibur, between a concubine or a bed of thorns, between the blood of the heretic and the recalcitrant or the blood of the Lamb. Perhaps the sting is in the three words italicised by Gordon Cumming—"carried thrice sunwise". Even the Holy Psalms are not effective without the pagan ritual!

## OBITUARY

### Dr. C. V. DRYSDALE

The death of Dr. C. V. Drysdale on February 7th last, has removed perhaps the most brilliant propagandist of this century of the Malthusian theory. His father was Dr. C. R. Drysdale who wrote and lectured on the problem for most of the latter half of the nineteenth century and his mother was one of the early pioneers of women doctors, Dr. Alice Vickery, both of whom spoke for Bradlaugh in the historic trial of 1877. And though published anonymously *The Elements of Social Science*, perhaps the most powerful plea for Malthus written last century, was the work of Dr. George Drysdale—C. R. Drysdale's brother.

On the death of his father in 1907, Dr. C. V. Drysdale took over *The Malthusian* which he edited for many years (it was, after World War 1, edited by R. B. Kerr with the title changed to *The New Generation*), and he lectured and debated all over the country writing as well some notable pamphlets all in favour of Malthusianism. He and his wife, Mrs. Bessie Drysdale, in fact devoted their lives to the Population Question, and in 1927 they organised the Jubilee Dinner in commemoration of the Malthusian League founded after the Trial by Charles Bradlaugh. H. G. Wells was in the chair and—for some inexplicable reason—Annie Besant was the Guest of Honour. She had long since given up, for Theosophy, not only Malthusianism but Socialism and of course Freethought.

Increasing age—Dr. Drysdale was born in 1875—the death of his wife, and the fact that most sociologists had long since adopted the Malthusian Law of Population, caused him to retire soon after the close of World War 2. He had seen victory for the cause he had so much to heart. To his surviving son we extend our deepest sympathy.

H.C.

## This Believing World

What a wonderful press any Pope gets free and for nothing. The present Pope has already been the subject of innumerable articles, all proving his wonderful humanity and love for everybody. This, it is true, is stressed in advertisements by the Catholic Enquiry Centre (which have to be paid for), but even the much-read *News of the World* will publish an article like a recent one on "This Most Human Pope" by Gerald Fairlie in which Pope John is made out to be perhaps the greatest man living, and certainly one of the greatest of all Popes. As Mr. Fairlie stresses, "The Pope is, let's face it, the absolute spiritual head of some 400,000,000 people in the world". He must be *absolutely* great if that is the case.

Note how, in all these articles praising the Pope, the one thing which is literally excluded is the simple question, "Is Christianity true?" To people like Mr. Fairlie this question must not under any circumstances be put. It is taken for granted that the Devils and the Miracles, the Virgin Birth and the Assumption of Mary, her appearances at Lourdes and Fatima, to say nothing of similar imbecilities, are all literally true. Have these eulogists never read anything? Are not the Pope and his bunch of Cardinals perpetuating an out-worn religion based on Pagan and other silly myths?

Ghost doctors have become a commonplace now what with healing the sick and curing completely incurable cases—but we wrongly thought only among humans. However, *The People* has at last discovered that the Spirit World also houses horse-doctors, for they give particulars of a horse condemned to die of an incurable disease who was "miraculously cured by spirit healing and prayer"—though we suspect that prayer was the vital factor. Perhaps in addition to vets, there are also spirit herbalists, homoeopaths, nature healers, osteopaths, and patent medicine experts all ready to help poor suffering humanity from the ghostly Summerland—or is it now called the Etheric World?

The shortage of parsons in the Church of England is so serious that the Convocation of Canterbury's Lower House (230 parsons without bishops) has voted for "assistant clergy" who will be allowed to work at a job in daytime, and put on a "dog-collar" in the evening and on Sunday. These part-time clergy may not even speak good English, but this does not matter if they can persuade people to go to church.

But why should it be assumed that such clergy can bring people into church? If the better-educated and full-time clergy have so disastrously failed, why must we assume that the average "working man"—who may be far better educated than the average "worker priest"—will tamely accept what he begins to suspect is nothing but a religious racket; or that he is quite ignorant of the fact that, in the ultimate, Christianity is nothing but an Oriental conglomeration of Pagan and Jewish myths?

We often wonder exactly what Christians mean when they talk so much about "eternal life" or "eternal life in Christ". Mr. Hugh Redwood in the *Daily Mail* gives us every week what he calls "one minute sermons"—it may well be a good thing for the Churches to adopt this brilliant idea—and in one of them recently he tells us what eternal life *really* means. To all who accept Jesus as the Son of God, it simply means "nothing less than his own

timeless life". In other words, eternal life in the Gospels does not mean eternal life for anybody except Jesus, which must be a great consolation for all good Christians who so thoroughly believed that after they died they would immediately be transported "safe in the arms of Jesus".

The really astonishing thing about all this is the way in which twentieth century theologians are always ready to throw overboard Christian conceptions of what Jesus means (or the Gospels mean) when they realise so much is sheer nonsense. And they do their utmost to prove that, if nobody else knows, *they* do—as if anybody (except Mr. Redwood) knows what is meant by the "timeless life" of Jesus. The expression is just as silly as "eternal life".

The most interesting part of ITV's "About Religion" programme the other Sunday, dealing with it in South Africa, was the way in which the speakers, medical missionaries and bishops, all agreed that apartheid was not Christian though they did not explain why it emanated from such pious Christians as the Boers. Another interesting fact elicited was that while there was a shortage of white clergy, there was no shortage of black clergy. The way the coloured people brought to viewers to express their opinions were all such thorough believers was most significant. The more ignorant they were the more they believed!

### "PIE IN THE SKY"

(Anti-contraception Hymn)

The Church's one foundation  
Is now, and e'er shall be,  
Unhamper'd procreation  
Of Romanists-to-be.  
Let lapers and backsliders  
Escape to Freedom's shore—  
We are the Pope's providers  
Of starvelings evermore.

In surreptitious scanning  
Of cuttings from the Press  
On wicked Family Planning  
We ne'er shall acquiesce.  
Let weak and sinful mortals  
Peruse them as they please—  
Inferno's yawning portals  
Stand open wide for these.

No over-population,  
No plea for Birth Control,  
No vile sex-education,  
Shall turn us from our goal.  
The direst malnutrition  
Where Papistry holds sway  
Shall strengthen our submission  
To await the Brighter Day . . .

O Prelate's table groaning!  
O Dives up-to-date!  
Heed not our wayward moaning  
Who lie without your gate:  
We know—the Church has told us—  
Tho' doomed to Want in this,  
The Next World will enfold us  
In everlasting bliss.

W.H.D.

## NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY 55th ANNUAL DINNER

in honour of H. CUTNER'S 80th Birthday

Followed by Dancing

SATURDAY, MARCH 4th, 1961

at the PAVIOURS ARMS, Page Street, Westminster, S.W.1

RECEPTION 6 P.M. DINNER 6.30 P.M.

Vegetarians catered for

Evening Dress Optional

TICKETS 21/- from the Sec., 103 Borough High Street, S.E.1

# THE FREETHINKER

103 BOROUGH HIGH STREET, LONDON, S.E.1

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THE FREETHINKER can be obtained through any newsagent or will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates: One year, £1 15s.; half-year, 17s. 6d.; three months, 8s. 9d. (In U.S.A. and Canada: One year, \$5.00; half-year, \$2.50; three months, \$1.25.)

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1

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. (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

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Midland Institute Cinema, Paradise Street), Sunday, February 26th, 6.45 p.m.: CHARLES H. SMITH, "Facts that produce Atheists".

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1), Tuesday, February 28th, 7.15 p.m.: GEOFFREY ELKAN, "Mystical Experiences—Knowledge or Nonsense?"

Glasgow Secular Society (Central Halls, Bath Street) Sunday, February 26th, 3 p.m.: OLIVER BROWN, M.A., "Decline of Christianity and Rationalism".

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, February 26th, 6.30 p.m.: PERCY DOWNEY, M.N.I.M.H., M.B.R.A., "Our Daily Poison".

Marble Arch Branch N.S.S. (The Carpenters' Arms, Seymour Place, W.1), Sunday, February 26th, 7.15 p.m.: DR. JOHN LEWIS, "Christianity and Social Progress".

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Education Centre, Broad Street), Sunday, February 26th, 2.30 p.m.: REV. PETER M. CAPORN (Rector of Eastwood), "D. H. Lawrence and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1), Sunday, February 26th, 11 a.m.: DR. W. E. SWINTON, "The Orient Turns to Science".

West Ham and District Branch N.S.S. (Wanstead Community Centre, The Green, E.11), Thursday, February 23rd, 7.45 p.m.: D. H. TRIBE, "The Secularist Sixties?"

## Notes and News

AS WE ANTICIPATED, there has been a very favourable response to the honouring of Herbert Cutner's 80th birthday at the National Secular Society Dinner on Saturday, March 4th, and we would urge all those intending to come to apply for tickets without delay (details opposite). We are pleased to report that Mr. Cutner has successfully thrown off a rather serious attack of bronchitis and hopes to be "fighting fit" for what may justly be termed an historic occasion.

★

DESPITE REPREHENSIBLE REFERENCES to "proofs of Genesis" (notably in the *Evening News*, *Evening Standard*, and *Daily Express*: the *Herald*, *Mail* and *Mirror* were much better, as was the "serious" press) the newspaper publicity given to Professor Martin Ryle's theory of the "origin" of the universe showed the general public how

exciting science can be. And on the morning of Wednesday, February 15th, the BBC brought us splendid television pictures from Europe of a total eclipse of the sun. We were again reminded of the enormous potentialities of this medium for interesting and educating the public in scientific matters. Would that they were always exploited as fully as this!

★

BUT CREDIT WHERE DUE; and many viewers must have benefited from Dr. Tom Margerison's lucid explanations and wise assessments of scientific data from time to time on TV programmes like "Tonight". Dr. Margerison is now Science Editor of *The Sunday Times* where, on February 12th, his consideration of the "big bang" and "steady-state" theories was typically sound yet stimulating. We hope that soon the BBC will provide Dr. Margerison with a regular weekly TV science feature to match his newspaper column.

★

FROM THE SUBLIME to the ridiculous. On the BBC (radio) news a quarter of an hour before the TV pictures of the eclipse, we were informed that Sir Winston Churchill's pet budgerigar was still lost in Monte Carlo. Sad no doubt for Sir Winston but hardly, we would have thought, rating a mention in the seven o'clock news bulletin.

★

LET US, HOWEVER, turn again to praising the press. This time, *The Guardian* (15/2/61) for its "Miscellany" column by Michael Frayn. The memory of two of the previous week's events, wrote Mr. Frayn, "still haunts and depresses me". He was referring to the Riley hanging and the talking out of Mr. Kenneth Robinson's Medical Termination of Pregnancy Bill; which he said "make our public theology and public procedure—and the spiritual vacuity of those who are bound to them—painfully and shamefully clear". "Our elected representatives at Westminster did not choose to halt or delay" the hanging. "They did not even choose to find a way of discussing the question of whether or not the man should be put to death until he was already dead". Many of the arguments used against Mr. Robinson's bill were, of course, religious, and as Mr. Frayn said, once one starts to use "non-factual" talk about the soul, "it suddenly gets difficult to differentiate between a human being and a 13-week-old foetus. In which case, one starts thinking soon, abortion is murder".

★

THE NEW ZEALAND Rationalist Association has generously given a cheque of £50 as a subscription and towards the expenses of the World Union of Freethinkers. Mr. Wallace Nelson, who represented the Association two years ago at the Brussels International Congress of the World Union, sent a goodwill message with the cheque, and expressed the hope that New Zealand's gesture may be an example to other countries.

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NEXT WEEK THE FREETHINKER proudly publishes the first instalment of Dr. J. V. Duhig's translation of the last chapter of Professor Prosper Alfaric's *Origines Sociale du Christianisme*. Much of the substance of Alfaric's great 3-volume study is summarised in this final chapter, now appearing in English for the first time, and though the author died without being able to revise the text, it is sure to evoke wide interest.

NEXT WEEK

ADDRESS TO THE HIPPOCRATIC SOCIETY

By CYRUS EATON

# The Triumph of Inoculation

By Dr. J. V. DUHIG

I SEE THE DUTY of the Secularist as the propagation of Truth and the promotion of Justice. In this he is primarily concerned with the destruction of the major swindle of supernaturalism and the minor swindles of organised religion, especially the corrupt, totalitarian system of Catholicism.

In my own work over 47 years I have striven to know the truth about disease and the promotion of justice to all by the application of that knowledge to the relief of human suffering. Not least of my work was in Preventive Medicine and I was primarily responsible for making Brisbane (pop. 600,000) the first Australian city to be diphtheria-free.

After Pasteur's discovery of bacteria as the cause of most major infective disease, Bacteriology became a vital progressive science. Robert Koch formulated his famous "postulates" which required a certain rigid routine of proof for incriminating any given organism as the cause of a given disease. But in his great work he found that his technique was inadequate for diphtheria. Then Emil Roux, later Director of the Pasteur Institute in Paris discovered that the organism of diphtheria was entirely different from all other known forms in that it secreted an "exotoxin" by which it exerted its effect at a distance from the site of infection rather than directly there. e.g. many children with a throat infection died of poisoning of the heart muscle by diphtheria toxin. Roux grew the bacteria in broth and put the culture through a bacteria-proof filter and the filtrate was proved by test on guineapigs to contain toxin. The largest amount of toxin which would just not kill was called the minimum lethal dose (M.L.D.). The hint was taken by a German scientist, Von Behring who found that guineapigs which survived inoculation with toxin were later refractory to it, that is, immunised. He then inoculated horses with increasing doses so that they acquired an immunity to very large doses of toxin. Assuming that the animals would have anti-toxin in their blood, he bled the horses, sterilised the serum by filtration and used it to cure diphtheria; he succeeded. This chain of discoveries was in my opinion one of the greatest in the history of mankind. Inoculation of the pure sterilised horse serum into children suffering from diphtheria caused an enormous drop in the mortality from the disease, which had been quite unaffected by the improvement in sanitation about this time, when futile fumigation of dwellings was commonly practised. Before anti-toxin the overall mortality from diphtheria was 30% in Britain; after its use up to 1930 this dropped to a case mortality of 5% but in the Brisbane Children's Hospital after the introduction of concentrated serum it fell to 2%. For a specially dangerous form of the disease, Laryngeal Diphtheria, the figures of case mortality were: before anti-toxin 66%, after 28%.

This secularist miracle was enhanced when it was found that the anti-toxin was bound with only one of the protein fractions of the serum and it was a simple matter for the organic chemist by "salting-out" and dialysis to discard the useless fraction and so concentrate the anti-toxin that the bulk of a dose was greatly reduced, with great comfort to the child and a diminution of unpleasant allergic reactions. The anti-toxin suffered no loss of potency by this; on the contrary the anti-toxin was much increased per unit of volume. But occasionally (and I am sure the AV cranks will be on to this) checks occurred, such

as a most virulent epidemic in Berlin in, I think, the late twenties, with a high death-rate in spite of anti-toxin. It was then found that there were two main strains of diphtheria organism with marked difference in virulence, "gravis" and "mitis". At the Brisbane Children's Hospital, of which I was a staff member, we had such an epidemic in the thirties. At first we blamed loss of potency in the anti-toxin until I advised the specialist concerned, a very good doctor, of the probable facts; with increased anti-toxin dosage the death rate immediately fell to near zero.

However, diphtheria naturally continued to occur and in our hospital we never had less than 30 cases, many convalescents and at least 5 nurses down with the disease. This was a heavy economic drain in three ways—the upkeep of patients, in those days, at least £1 a day per patient, the pay of nurses who had to be replaced at the same rate of pay, and workers in my Department of Pathology and Bacteriology had to examine anything from 60-120 throat swabs a day, work entrusted only to highly paid workers and this included tests for virulence of positive swabs on guineapigs.

Thus in spite of our low death-rate of about 2%, the situation was very costly and unsatisfactory, both in the economic and social sense. Prevention appeared the only answer. About that time, the late Dr. William Park of the New York City Health Department, in his day the greatest living hygienist, made a gigantic test of a prophylactic in New York involving something like 30,000 children, half inoculated, half not, as a control. The substance used was a mixture of toxin and anti-toxin, so graded that the anti-toxin protected against the first toxin effects long enough for immunity to set in as, I explained, in experimental animals. This had an enormous success and the incidence fell like a stone in New York and everywhere the prophylactic was tried. My eldest daughter was the first in Queensland to be protected and when enough of the prophylactic was available I campaigned solidly for months and years until the City Council took it up. Then one day I came into my hospital laboratory to be greeted with the epochal news that there were no swabs to be done that day as there were no children as patients and no nurses down with the disease. That day Brisbane was the first city in Australia free from diphtheria. But by then the prophylactic used was entirely different from Park's mixture and perfectly safe. The old toxin-anti-toxin mixture could not be considered entirely safe. I know of at least 4 centres in the world where children received by mistake pure toxin without the neutralising anti-toxin, with dire results.

By a most strange accident the perfect prophylactic was discovered by Dr. Glenny, of the Wellcome Research Laboratories, Beckenham, Kent. He was assaying some toxin for inoculation into horses for the production of anti-toxin at the Borroughs-Wellcome farm. This toxin was stored in barrels. On one occasion it was noticed that the toxin was harmless even in large doses to guineapigs but, in spite of this, it produced the usual refractory immunised state. Tried out on horses it was again found harmless in very large doses, but produced anti-toxin. Clearly there must be two fractions in the toxin, a toxic fraction which had disappeared from this batch and an antigenic fraction; that is, one which would produce antibodies, the neutralising fraction in the serum, in other

words an immune response. On enquiry Glenny found that the barrels used for storing the toxin had contained formalin and had not been properly washed out before use for storing the toxin. Further experiments confirmed the hypothesis of the two fractions; the formalin had neutralised the toxic, but the antigenic fraction remained unaffected.

Never again could diphtheria prophylactic be responsible for child deaths as had the old mixture. Diphtheria Toxoid, as the formalinised toxin is called, infallibly protects, properly used, and causes no trouble.

The only fatal cases in our hospital in recent years were those of two children of religious parents who refused the "filthy" inoculation and the "filthy" anti-toxin. Diphtheria in Brisbane and Queensland is a fast disappearing disease. Where formerly there used to be about 220 cases a year in the whole state, there would hardly be 5 now, always uninoculated.

Exactly similar lines of development were followed with tetanus, which is also associated with an exotoxin; but tetanus anti-toxin is not nearly as effective as diphtheria anti-toxin, varying very much with the incubation period of the former and with the skill of the attending doctor. I think, however, there has been an improvement. It is entirely a different story with tetanus toxoid which is just as effective as diphtheria toxoid, so much so that tetanus was practically unknown amongst inoculated Australian troops in World War I. In World War I the mortality from tetanus treated with anti-toxin amongst USA soldiers was 14 per 100,000 but in World War II it was only 0.44 after prophylactic inoculation with toxoid. (*Preventive Medicine for the Doctor and the Community*. McGraw-Hill Publishing Coy.). And like diphtheria, tetanus is fast disappearing from civilian life, as practically all children are now coming up for inoculation with the quadruple prophylactic protecting against diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough and poliomyelitis. This way life, happiness, health and money are saved, a triumph for Medical truth and justice.

In conclusion, I would like my readers to know the difference between anti-toxin and toxoid. The former confers only a very transient "passive" immunity in the production of which the body cells play no part, the immunising agent being present only in the injected serum, while toxoid confers an active, highly refractory "active" lifelong immunity produced in the body by its own cells in response to the immunising agent, the formalinised toxin, namely toxoid, the safe perfect prophylactic. Inoculation, not Jesus saves.

## Space Facts and Fancies

By H. CUTNER

LET ME ASSURE Mr. Tribe that while I may have "little real knowledge of Science", I have been reading scientific books ever since at school I passed some stiff exams in mechanics, magnetism and electricity, sound, light, and heat, and theoretical and practical chemistry. Most of my early Freethought reading was on the scientific side—Huxley, Tyndall, Samuel Laing, Darwin, Buchner, Haeckel, Grant Allen, and many others.

I have deliberately given the names of these men because, foiled in trying to prove that I have no interest or knowledge of science, Mr. Tribe will now be able to say that among them is not one *modern* scientist. Well, does he want me to name some I have read within the past ten years, or does he insist that I have never read a 1961 scientist?

In my article I was trying to show that, with the information we have, it is just nonsense to say that we are being watched from outer space by "beings" more or less like ourselves. And let us go to the latest book on the subject, published in 1961. It is *Flying Saucers and the U.S. Air Force* by Lieut-Col. Lawrence J. Thacker of the Washington U.S.A.F. Information Office. The price is 25s. 6d. Now, I have *not* read this book yet but a review by Kenneth Allsop in the *Daily Mail* (January 28th) is headed by "All My Eye and Betty Martian" and "America shoots down the Saucers . . .".

And what does Col. Thacker say? "The astral prowlers are a figment; the notion that the earth is on the itinerary for trippers from the Moon and Mars is moonshine, all my eye and Betty Martian". The U.S.A.F. has systematically probed into 6523 "sightings" which consisted of "flying saucers, flying teardrops, flying lights, flying cigars, and flying pie plates". What were they? And the answer is—"All manner of optical deceptions, meteors, sun-dogs, jet vapour glimpsed through fog, kites, searchlight dazzle on clouds, fireworks, meteorological balloons, and gaggles of geese."

Moreover, Col. Thacker examines the psychology of the "avid saucer-believer" who, in the Middle Ages, would have seen some religious portent in the sky, but now it is "science-fiction portent". In fact, Col. Thacker says "there is a specific dotty fringe private telephone lines to Venus". And he thinks that the flying saucer era is now drawing to a close.

Of course, I dealt also with our own experiments in trying to send a man up to the moon, and ventured an opinion that we couldn't take our atmosphere with us. If Mr. Tribe answered this, I have failed to come across the answer.

And, naturally following his own suggestion that I know nothing about science, or wasn't interested in it, he pins a stupendous error upon me. I actually referred to "thousands at least of other and similar galaxies", when any fully informed reader of scientific books—like Mr. Tribe—would have said "*thousands of millions*". I did say "at least"—but what of that? There is a heck of a difference between thousands "at least" and "thousands of millions". I am quite sure that had I said "thousands of millions" Mr. Tribe would have immediately retorted with "thousands of billions".

If we put the matter in concrete figures it may be easier to understand. Let us say I said "at least" 978,758; No, triumphantly declares Mr. Tribe, the number should be 97,875,000,008, and perhaps in 50 years another Mr. Tribe would comment on our crass ignorance in presenting such small figures. It ought to be 97,875,000,000,008 (or something like it).

For me, I am content with *any fantastic figure whatever* for the number of stars and planets in the Universe. The more powerful our telescopes, the more of these are seen. And if Mr. Tribe can see in his mind's eye what these fantastic figures really *mean*, he certainly is very much more scientific than I am. I am sorry to say they make as little impression on me as the figures given by the ancient monks of the number of Angels who could dance on the point of a needle. To put the matter in another way: I look upon the number of stellar bodies in the Universe as illimitable.

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## CORRESPONDENCE

## COMMUNISM

It is a sad thing that earnest people are so often so completely devoid of humour, the fanatic Antivivisectionist, the solemn Freethinker, the literal-minded vegetarian, the reverent Rationalist to whom a little quip of light blasphemy is just as anathema as the picture of a half-naked beach beauty to a Bishop. I can assure Mr. Carey that Grandma Duhig learnt to suck eggs over 40 years ago. When I referred to Communism as a religion I was trying to be funny and in another article I extended the (alleged) joke to naming the Communist god, its Pope, its Vatican and its hierarchy. And in that article I specifically stated that the word Religion unequivocally implies a belief in a supernatural agency.

I admit that my opposition to Marxism and Dialectical Materialism derives from a long refutation, in the *New Statesman*, by the late Professor G. D. H. Cole and the gaseous and intensely boring jargon of the local exponents of the creed, which sounded all the time to me as pure abstraction. I do not want to be a Communist solely because it would require me, on pain of liquidation, to accept ready-made ideas about Ethics, Economics, History and Politics. On these matters I want to form my own opinions and to express them without fear of reprisals of the sort that sent millions of innocent people to their death under Stalin. Until that obstacle to a serious study of Communism by myself is removed, I feel I would be wasting my time. Whether the undoubted success of much Soviet science can be held to justify Communist theory on the undesirability of freethought about political theory is a moot question; personally I do not think it can.

(Dr.) J. V. DUHIG.

[This correspondence is now closed.—ED.]

## SOCIAL DEMOCRATS AND RELIGION

I would agree with Mr. W. Steinhardt's remarks on Herr Willy Brand's speech: that the attitude of Left Wing Continental political parties towards religion has undergone a significant change. The old German Social Democratic Party, the classical Marxist party of the Second International, did not accept any type of Christian for membership. When however, I was in Hamburg during the last general election in 1957, I attended SPD meetings addressed by Helena Wessel (former leading member of the Catholic "Centre" Party), and by Dr. Heinemann (a leading Lutheran and former Ministerial colleague of Dr. Adenauer). Both were subsequently elected as Social Democratic MP's. This state of things is not, I understand, confined to Germany. The infiltration of religion (including Catholicism) in Western Labour and Leftist parties is one of the most disquieting signs of our times. The Labour Party here represents an outstanding example: when a self-confessed Agnostic like Aneurin Bevan dies they drag in a bishop to caricature atheism in his memorial sermon! All this surely underlines the necessity for a non-party militant Freethought movement, freed from the allurements of vote-catching and of power-seeking?

F. A. RIDLEY.

## IT THAT "MAN" AGAIN

With great surprise I note D. H. Tribe's attitude relative to the historical Jesus Christ—"It's That 'Man' Again" (THE FREETHINKER, 13/1/61).

Mr. Tribe as follows: "Though Mr. Cutner may be right, I do not see how he can prove it, or why it matters". Indeed, Mr. Cutner is right, and it does matter enormously. Because, based on "The Biggest 'Story' Ever Told", man is Christianity infected with schizophrenia, and all its allied mental and emotional illnesses. This charge can be proven by personal depth psycho-analysis.

Mr. Tribe quotes scriptures to help prove his historical point, but it does not work. "Have I not seen Jesus Christ" means seeing—or understanding—the truth that the historicity of Jesus Christ is indeed "The Biggest 'Story' Ever Told". Mr. Tribe please note the following: "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever". Hebrews 13:8. This certainly destroys the time and place concept of that "Man". Every time Mr. Cutner denies the historicity of Jesus Christ, he is serving both truth and Mankind. I, for one, salute him.

SONJA BIERSTED (USA).

I was much interested in friend Cutner's and Mr. D. H. Tribe's articles on Jesus. I look upon a Christian as one who truly says, "I believe in God, the Father, Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth", and the rest of the Apostles' Creed. I consider it the main objective of Freethinkers to expose this and other theological superstitions whatever their views on Jesus or other topics.

C. E. RATCLIFFE.

[We think most readers will agree with Mr. Ratcliffe on our main objective. We consider it part of our job, however, to provide a forum for intelligent and controversial opinion, and we feel sure Mr. Ratcliffe will agree with us on that.—ED.]

## THEATRE

THE OPPORTUNITY OF SEEING a Gorki play is rare enough in itself; to see *The Lower Depths* produced by Levcho Zdravchev of the Bulgarian State Theatre is an opportunity that should not be missed. And as London theatre-goers know, Unity Theatre (1 Goldington Street, N.W.1) is very different from the average amateur theatre. Mr. Zdravchev, who has produced in Sofia and Belgrade, reports that he was infected by the actors' enthusiasm; they in turn have responded admirably to his direction, and the characters of the "cave-like basement" setting are convincing in their (verbal) efforts to find a meaning for a hopeless existence.

They talk about life because there is nothing they can do about it. And *The Lower Depths* may be compared with *Waiting for Godot*—to the disadvantage of the latter. To my mind Gorki's play is much deeper in its human understanding. Of course I have a general preference for realism over symbolism, but for precisely the reason that these two plays illustrate that realism is the deeper, more universal language.

Be damned to the view that understandable speech is superficial speech! Gorki's characters speak to be understood. They speak with an outward simplicity but an inner profundity. "I wait, and I look forward", says the young Natasha. Then: "What do I have to look forward to?" And again: "God! What do people live for?"

"Everybody lives so that it'll be better some day", says one character, but nobody believes him. Most of them are—in the words of another—"Sick of living; sick of people". Yet they "must have been born for some reason".

"You're a good fellow. You'll be rewarded", one of them is told. "Where?" he asks; and the reply is, inevitably, "In the next world". But what if, like the dying woman, "I've been in rags all my life"; "will I be punished with suffering in the next world as well?" Remember how she had complained to God that her husband beat her? It "didn't do any good".

These, one feels, are truly voices from the lower depths.

C.McC.

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