

The Freethinker

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THE HEBREW BIBLE, our Old Testament, begins with the categorical declaration "In the beginning the gods created", what was then described in some detail in the narrative. It is well-known to all non-Christian, as probably to most Christian, scholars that the translation given in the first verse of the Book of Genesis (i.e. "God"), is an inaccurate one; one could almost call it a dishonest one in view of the controversies that have arisen over the origin and meaning of the Genesis narratives. For the Hebrew word *Elohim* which occurs in the opening verse, does not mean "God"; it is plural, not singular and literally translated signifies "Gods". "In the beginning the Gods created", so runs the originally polytheistic version as composed in ancient Mesopotamia and probably at a much later date (800 BC is the conjecture of the great French scholar, Turmel) was rather clumsily edited by worshippers of Jehovah in ancient Israel.

The Original Genesis

It is now known with virtual certainty that Genesis (i.e. the Hebrew one), represents a rather obvious monotheistic editing of an originally much earlier polytheistic legend. There is little doubt that the original version was of Babylonian origin; it remains possible that the clay tablets which recorded the Mesopotamian version may eventually be dug up in a manner similar to the modern discovery of the Babylonian version of the Flood story a few decades back. No doubt the original Babylonian Garden of Eden represented a polytheistic paradise, created by a number of *Elohim*, into whose exclusive society the Babylonian Adam attempted to gatecrash by tasting of the magical tree of knowledge whose fruits conferred, presumably, omniscience and immortality. Upon which the *Elohim* promptly threw Adam and Eve out of the Garden! In our version, which has been edited rather clumsily, considerable traces of the original polytheism remain. Jehovah even complains that Adam and Eve wish to become like one of us—viz. the Gods. But the editor of Genesis was of course, a monotheist. Jehovah, in the present narrative, took his evening stroll "in the cool of the day", *alone*. The other Gods had followed Adam and Eve in their unceremonious exit from the Garden of Eden.

Genesis and The Creation

There is obviously no mystery about the Book of Genesis; it represents a very primitive, if undeniably picturesque, piece of guesswork as to how the world was created. As noted above, this version is an edited version of a probably still more primitive account of the origins of the Universe. In this year of grace and of startling astronomical and cosmological progress, this ancient fairy tale would long since have been relegated to the appropriate company of Hans Anderson and of his fellow authors of stories for the very immature, but for the ominous fact that the literal (or at least approximate) accuracy of the old Hebrew Mesopotamian legend has long ago become an article of faith; a religious (or rather

theological) dogma for three cosmopolitan religions—Judaism, Islam and, most of all, Christianity, the last-named in both its Catholic and Protestant forms.

These still powerful and world-wide creeds are in varying degrees based upon the alleged veracity of Genesis, conceived as an at least substantially truthful and historical account of the beginnings of our species, our planet and the Universe of which both form part. Consequently, in an age of unprecedentedly rapid advance and of sequential cosmological speculation about the origins and nature of the Universe, potent religious interests are constantly on the alert to reconcile even the most staggering modern scientific theories of the

Universe with the ancient Hebrew narrative; a narrative which, despite its undoubted literary merits, must be considered from any strict historical or scientific point of view as belonging to the domain of fairy tales of the early adolescence of the human race.

Modern radio astronomy has by hook, or more frequently crook, got to be brought into some kind of conformity with the legend presumably originated by some ingenious Chaldean story-teller long before any conception of scientific astronomy—or still less, of a cosmology founded upon actual observation—was remotely conceived. In which connection one can relevantly add that the historical accuracy of Genesis is probably more important for Christian theology even than for its Jewish originators. For since Paul (or whoever wrote the Pauline Epistles) first based the whole scheme of Christian theology upon the Fall of the first Adam and upon the descent of the second Adam (Christ) in order to redeem us, the literal, or at least the symbolical, accuracy of the Genesis narrative, is a question of life—or death—for orthodox Christianity.

Genesis and Modern Cosmology

The facts noted above were very obvious in connection with the most recent theories advanced by modern cosmologists in order to ascertain the origin and nature of the Universe. One still remembers the explosion of Christian wrath that followed upon the widely-publicised lectures of Professor Fred Hoyle and his then advocacy of a steady-state (i.e. eternal and essentially unchanging) Universe. (The horrified BBC promptly put up an orthodox writer of detective stories to reply to the Cambridge astronomer—perhaps an appropriate apologist for Genesis!)

Now that another Cambridge astronomer, Professor Martin Ryle, has advanced what sounds at least to a layman, a most impressive array of experimental evidence in favour of a rival cosmological theory (the picturesquely-termed "big bang" theory of cosmic origins), the press—and no doubt the academic theologians too, when they have had time to digest it—are positively falling over each other in order to prove that the new theory entirely confirms the primitive hotch-potch of guesswork in

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

Genesis and the Big Bang

By F. A. RIDLEY

Genesis. The fact of course is, that neither presupposes either a personal creator or any *initial* creation: the steady-state theory regards the Universe as eternal, whilst even the "big bang" only exploded already existing (and densely packed) matter. An earlier apostle of the big bang theory, the well known American astronomer, George Gamow had already surmised that prior to the initial bang, a Universe of unknown appearance and dimensions must have existed, so that the question of creation does not appear to arise.

However, we do not suppose that the above considerations will prevent a future spate of books and articles

designed to demonstrate the fundamental identity of God's Holy Word with both (or either) the most positive, as well as the most speculative conclusions of modern cosmology. At least upon past evidence we shall be very surprised if there isn't.

Footnote: Professor Gamow actually refers to his hypothetical Universe before the bang, as "St. Augustine's Universe" since this famous Christian doctor asked the leading question, "What was God doing before he created the Universe?" But here our astronomer appears to be talking quite unscientifically. For there is no evidence that any god was responsible for the "big bang" or for any initial creation of the matter involved in it.

Tribute To H. Cutner

HOW OFTEN HAVE WE HEARD it glibly said that a good time was had by all? It may truthfully be said of the National Secular Society's Annual Dinner in the Pavilions Arms, Westminster on Saturday, March 4th, which honoured the eightieth birthday a month earlier of Herbert Cutner.

The toast to Mr. Cutner was proposed by the Society's President, F. A. Ridley and seconded by Vice-President L. Ebury. Both paid tribute to Mr. Cutner's long and faithful service to the Freethought cause, and to his scholarship, as well as to his many other interests (including, as Mr. Ridley reminded us, boxing). The keynote of Mr. Cutner's activities, said the President, was "integrity". If he believed in something, he supported it wholeheartedly, whether it was popular or not. Mr. Cutner's forthright manner had brought him many enemies (he had a capacity for making enemies that Mr. Ridley often envied) but it had also brought him many friends. And he was deservedly being honoured by the Society he had served so well.

Mr. Ebury recalled "old times and old battles". "Remember the old Reform Club?" he asked Mr. Cutner, whom he sought leave to call "comrade".

Mr. Cutner remembered all right. And he thanked the President and Vice-President for the very nice things they had said. He didn't know whether they were true. That was for others to decide. Then he gave us the benefit of his remarkably widespread searchings for knowledge and satisfaction. How he had followed the great stalwarts, Paine, Bradlaugh, Ingersoll and John M. Robertson. He wouldn't refer to his numerous battles in the pages of THE FREETHINKER, but he would show that it was not true (as so many people had told him when he started writing for the paper) that devotion to Freethought would mean the death of his appreciation of culture. And he took an aphorism from Ingersoll as his theme: "The time to be happy is now; the place to be happy is here; the way to be happy is to make other people happy".

Making people happy! Who had made the greatest contributions to the happiness of man? In order to answer this question, Mr. Cutner thought we had to go to the arts: to painting, sculpture, literature, music; to men like Rembrandt, Michelangelo, Dickens and Beethoven. But one shouldn't forget the lesser figures; they had contributed enormously to human happiness. Who in the last 100 years, for example had given more people happiness than Johann Strauss?

Mr. Cutner ended with a reference to another minor-master, George du Maurier, whose book *Trilby*, he had read in serial form at the age of 14 or 15. What a picture of the world of art and artists, and what a delightful little French poem to sum it up! Mr. Cutner read it in French

and then gave du Maurier's paraphrase:

A little work, a little play,
To keep us going—and so, good day!
A little warmth, a little light,
Of love's bestowing—and so, good night!
A little fun, to match the sorrow
Of each day's growing—and so, good morrow!
A little trust that when we die
We reap our sowing! And so—good bye!

The speech was enthusiastically applauded and then William Griffiths, Chairman of G. W. Foote & Co. Ltd., presented Mr. Cutner with a Parker pen and pencil set and Mrs. Cutner with a bouquet of flowers.

Mr. Ridley then called on the General Secretary, Colin McCall, to propose the second toast, "To Our Overseas Branches and Members". Mr. McCall said that, though his speech must inevitably be something of an anti-climax, his subject wasn't. The National Secular Society was very proud of its members and branches abroad, mainly though not exclusively in English-speaking countries. They were carrying on the struggle for secularism, often in an individual capacity, but sometimes in Branches. And special tribute was paid to the two Trinidad Branches, Fyzabad and San Juan, and the excellent work they were doing. At the moment, Head Office was preparing a collection of books to send out as the basis of a library for San Juan Branch.

An Indian member, G. N. Deodhekar, responded to Mr. McCall's toast. Thanking the Society for its special thought for overseas on this occasion, he said the main struggle against religious obscurantism had essentially been won years ago. But mopping-up operations were far from complete. Apathy and indifference were widespread, and the recent banning of the Family Planning Association poster showed the necessity to keep on fighting. The survival of superstition was a paradox of the 20th century, said Mr. Deodhekar, and because overseas countries were tackling their problems now, they might be able to go to the roots of them. He hoped so.

Mr. Ridley then closed the first part of a memorable evening, and dancing and friendly conversation followed. Mr. and Mrs. Cutner received personal congratulations from most of those present and were given a number of telegrams and letters from well-wishers.

A pleasing feature of the Dinner was the presence of many old members, including octogenarians like F. A. Hornibrook and T. C. Laird, alongside a good many young people.

This is to let you know how much I appreciate everything Mr. Cutner writes. I hope he may be able to continue the good work for some time to come. I am the same age as he and a reader of THE FREETHINKER for about fifty years. May he and the paper continue to flourish!

[This letter is typical of many received.—Ed.]

W. MAYBANK.

Religious Education In Schools

By "DOMINIE"

THE TORY M.P. for Selly Oak, Mr. Harold Gurden, thinks that juvenile delinquency is partly due to shortage of teachers of "Christian conviction and conscience" in our schools. Forty years' experience as a teacher has proved to me that religious education, or lack of it, has no effect on the moral behaviour of schoolboys.

During the years immediately following the first World War, a city Council Boys' School had for its headmaster a Sunday school superintendent, and its two senior masters were practising Christians; one of them was a Methodist lay-preacher. All would have measured up to Mr. Gurden's standard, and the religious education of the older boys was in their hands. The headmaster even introduced into the morning assembly several hymns from his Sunday school hymnal. This verse is from one of them:

The day begun, who makes the sun
Look forth with shining face?
When day is done, who takes the sun
So quickly from his place?
Who lights the star that twinkles far
Just like a loving eye?
The moon so soft, that shineth oft,
Who draws it through the sky?

Silly stuff for lads up to 14! Especially so since they went on to learn, in the geography lessons, the truth about the solar system, including the causes of day and night, the seasons, and the sequential time-zones round the world. But quite possibly the boys never gave the words a thought, unless one, gifted with unusual imagination, while singing the last two lines of the verse visualised a couple of lower-grade angels told off to haul a yellow globe of light across the sky with a windlass! Religious instruction was regular and thorough, with much memorisation of Bible passages (the Ten Commandment, Psalms, the Beatitudes and other parts of the Sermon on the Mount, etc.).

But headmasters retire, class teachers get promotion or transfer; and by 1926 the school staff had almost completely changed. The new Head had no religious convictions: one of his favourite books was Winwood Reade's *The Martyrdom of Man* (Watts & Co.'s Thinker's Library). Seven years later he was succeeded by a man who, too, would have failed to satisfy Mr. Gurden's requirements. His morning assembly was a perfunctory affair. On one occasion, the pianist mildly suggested that

Summer suns are glowing
Over land and sea

was hardly a fitting hymn for a dark morning in mid-December. The Head's reply was, "Nonsense! they're glowing somewhere", and the school went on singing it throughout the winter, often when the only "happy light flowing" was from the gas-mantles—and that was neither "bountiful" nor "free"! Scripture was a subject of minor importance; two classes were combined for a short lesson on four days a week, and one teacher "took" the Old Testament and the other the New. Over the years, there was an average number of personal changes, but I cannot recall more than one church-going Christian on the staff after 1926, and he was capable of taking only the very youngest. In 1941, the Boys' Department was closed, to my deep regret. I had been on the staff over 21 years.

Now, if Mr. Gurden's views are correct, the moral behaviour of the boys of this school would have been high up to 1926; and then there would have been a decline, perhaps gradual but nevertheless definite, during the next fifteen years. But there was no decline. The standard

of conduct, in school and out, remained high over the whole period I was there. They were not the same boys, of course, but they belonged to the same social plane. The district in which the school stood was a good one of working-class and lower-middle-class homes. The boys had good parents; and that doesn't mean that a large percentage of them were religious, but rather that they were conscientious and concerned about their children's welfare. The tone in school was always good; and outside—well, only once in this long time were we visited by officers of the local CID in search of a juvenile wrong-doer.

An East Yorkshire vicar—and many other clerics—labours under the same delusion as Mr. Gurden. According to the *Bridlington Free Press*, the reverend gentleman declares in his parish magazine that the present wave of teenage crime will only recede when young people start to attend church regularly. But the majority of these youngsters find church services and all forms of religion extremely boring. A lady correspondent to another East Riding weekly journal, answering a letter from "Angry Adolescents" appealing for a cinema to be opened on Sunday evenings, invites them, with much missionary zeal and more optimism, to her "place of worship" on Sunday nights. But they won't go!

In school, under good discipline, an intelligent Fourth-year boy (14-15) will listen to an RE lesson, and probably get a brief laugh out of such absurdities as sea voyages in a whale's inside. But he doesn't believe such stories; while the New Testament promise that "the meek shall inherit the earth" and the advice to "turn the other cheek" or "take no thought for the morrow" to him are simply unrealistic. They don't fit in with this "Christian" age. Indeed, his opinion of almost all religious instruction may be summed up in the remark of a 14-year-old who, having listened in class to the story of the Temptation in the Wilderness, turned to his neighbour and whispered, "Isn't it bunk?"

Naturally, he doesn't go in search of any more of it on Sunday: he finds a more congenial occupation. A few years ago, a dozen of my Fourth-year boys started their own cycling club. By 9 o'clock on a Sunday morning in summer they were on their way along the Yorkshire coast to Scarborough and Whitby or heading inland towards York, Knaresborough, and Harrogate. By night-fall they had pushed on their cyclometer numerals by 100 to 120 miles. And by spending the day on their bikes instead of part of it in church, they didn't become juvenile criminals. They remained lads of exemplary character, and benefited physically by their days' outings.

But Mr. Gurden, and others like him, will go on believing in the old "mixture-as-before" — labelled "Religion"—as the correct remedy for social ills. Free-thinkers know it is worthless. Character in young people stems mainly from two closely-related roots—heredity and home environment. When a youth is due to appear before the Juvenile Court for some misdemeanour, the headmaster of the school he attends (or last attended, if he has started work) is asked to make, on a prescribed form, a confidential report on the youth's character, for the guidance of the magistrates. The headmaster deals with the essential factors (conduct in school and school attendance, father's long absences from home through his work, both parents out at work, father a permanent

(Concluded on next page)

This Believing World

In a recent article in the London "Evening Standard" the Bishop of Southwark expressed his joy at the splendid way in which his "parishioners" in the prisons of his diocese have always received him. He gets "splendid Communion services"—in fact, "the congregation was more responsive" he adds, "than in many a parish church". We have no doubts about this whatever. We have in these columns pointed out over and over again that our prisons are full of genuine Christians, and we have never been surprised that the authorities can find no room for the "ministrations" of a Secularist visitor for Freethought prisoners; there are none or only in very few numbers.

★

The Bishop also tells us in the same newspaper that, in any discussion on devils, "we cannot dismiss too easily allegations of evil influence"; for, "it is sensible not to be too dogmatic". In fact, dealing with psychical research, he claims that, "to dismiss phenomena as 'spooks' and to put the label 'spiritualist' on people who have had psychical experiences is neither helpful nor intelligent". Churchmen "should have an open mind" on the possibility of life after death!

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All this sounds rather strange coming from a Bishop. Not even the personal existence of a Devil is more firmly taught than "eternal life" in (or with) Jesus by Christianity—and nobody knows that better than Dr. Stockwood. If Christians do not believe in "life after death" what is meant by "eternal life"?

★

An item in the London "Evening News" the other week indicated that Vatican officials were on the verge of "solving one of the world's greatest mysteries", the problem of whether they had found the remains of St. Peter. That is, whether some bones found under an altar in the Basilica of St. Peter in Rome were those of Peter himself. No doubt the Vatican officials will decide that they are.

★

So far no one has discovered the slightest trace anywhere, either in Palestine or Rome, through archaeology, of either Peter or Paul, or of any of the Apostles. (This goes for the Old Testament heroes—Moses, Joshua, Noah, and the others—as well.) They all certainly exist and have existed in sacred books and nowhere else. But for all Christians, Peter, Paul, John, and even Judas, once walked this earth like lesser known folk, and it will take a lot of persuasion to make them think otherwise. That is one reason why Christianity still flourishes.

★

An arrangement between Church of England bishops and a Roman Catholic priest allowed the latter to hold a Roman Mass in an Anglican parish hall, much to the disgust of all fervent Protestants. The really interesting thing about this is that under no circumstances would a Roman Catholic bishop allow a full-blown Protestant service in a Catholic parish hall. We often wonder whether the Vatican would allow an Anglican in Italy to call himself say, the Archbishop of Naples—just as the Church of England allows a Catholic to call himself the Archbishop of Westminster?

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We note, not altogether with amusement, that the Humanist Union of India describes Humanism—among other things—as "content to fix attention on this life and this world . . ."—a description, we think, not altogether unknown to Secularists for something like 100 years at least.

We are naturally proud that our own Secularism has thus been taken over by Humanists, even if it is not so acknowledged. After all, a rose smells just as sweetly even if given another name.

★

The question of the influence of our religious press was discussed on ITV's "About Religion" programme recently but it was difficult to assess from what was said how great or how little it really is. Two facts emerged—the Roman Catholic *Universe* had now a circulation of 300,000 while the *Methodist Recorder* could boast only of 80,000 every week. In other words, in a predominantly Protestant country, a Roman Catholic newspaper had what must be called a huge circulation. Why? Is "Protestantism" slipping? Is "Unity"—that is, a victory for Romanism, well on its way?

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

(Concluded from previous page)

invalid, parents separated or divorced, mother a widow, drunkenness, sheer criminal neglect, etc.). He is not expected to supply any particulars about the boy's lack of religious education or his neglect to attend church; he would never dream of giving these—simply because it is generally accepted by people dealing with juvenile delinquency that religion has "nothing to do with the case".

RELIGIOUS STATISTICS AND THE GENERAL CERTIFICATE

In view of "Dominic's" article I feel that FREETHINKER readers may be interested in the statistics published by London University for General Certificate Education examinations set by the university, in particular those that relate to the GCE examination in Religious Knowledge; the figures refer to the 1960 examinations. The total number who sat were: Advanced level, 28,756; Ordinary level, 88,703. Of these 5,165 entered for the Ordinary level RK examination, 1,260 being boys, 3,905 being girls. For the advanced level the figures, as is to be expected, are much lower, the total of entries being 380; of these boys made up 116 and girls 264. The percentage of passes was (totals), Advanced, 67.1; Ordinary, 59.0.

The entry figures for RK examinations are very small when compared with many other subjects, for example English Language had a total entry of 52,141 (Ordinary), Physics (Advanced), 7,787. In view of RI being an obligatory subject in schools the number of entries for the GCE examinations in the subject must be a cause for concern for religious educationists. Another interesting feature the statistics bring out is that far more girls than boys enter for the examination. Perhaps this demonstrates a feeling I have long had that the fair sex is far more prone to superstition than are men.

R.W.M.

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY

On Sunday, March 6th, the Leicester Secular Society, celebrated the 80th anniversary of the opening of their hall in 1881. About 20 members attended the AGM in the afternoon and about twice that number in the evening to hear Mr. F. J. Corina of Bradford who was this year's Guest Speaker. Mr. Corina mentioned during the course of his remarks that our 80th anniversary coincided with the 40th anniversary of his entry into the Freethought movement.

Musical items were provided by the Doris Stillwell Trio, whose programme of light music was enjoyed by all. The meeting concluded with a report on the N.S.S. dinner by Mr. J. G. Cartwright, which he and Mrs. Cartwright attended on the previous day, after which sincere regards were sent from the meeting to Mr. Herbert Cutner on the occasion of his 80th birthday. We hope he will yet see many more birthdays in the movement which he has served so well.

C.H.H.

—NEXT WEEK—

TRANSPORT COMMISSION PROTEST

By COLIN McCALL

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.)

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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. (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, March 21st, 7.15 p.m.: CHAS. KENNEDY SCOTT, "Ethical Religion and the Arts".

Humanists Group of S. W. London (Mulberry Lodge, Barnes Common, S.W.13), Sunday, March 19th, 8 p.m.: "Looking Ahead—a plan for Positive Humanism".

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, March 19th, 6.30 p.m.: R. POWE, "Religion, Secularism and Socialism".

Marble Arch Branch N.S.S. (The Carpenters' Arms, Seymour Place, W.1), Sunday, March 19th, 7.15 p.m.: MARGARET McILROY, "The Roman Catholic View of Sex".

North Staffordshire Humanist Group (The Guildhall, High Street, Newcastle), Friday, March 17th, 7.15 p.m.: A Meeting.

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Education Centre, Broad Street), Sunday, March 19th, 2.30 p.m.: GEORGE DARLING, M.P., "What Makes America Tick?".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1), Sunday, March 19th, 11 a.m.: DR. W. E. SWINTON, "Livingstone's Africa".

West Ham and District Branch N.S.S. (Wanstead Community Centre, The Green, E.11), Thursday, March 23rd, 7.45 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, A Lecture.

Notes and News

A DEPUTATION OF FOUR, comprising National Secular Society members, Mrs. Margaret McIlroy, Miss Laura Peacock and Colin McCall, and the Secretary of the Ethical Union, H. J. Blackham, was received by British Transport Commission representatives in the Commission's Offices in London on Saturday, March 11th. Petition forms signed by some two thousand people in the London area protesting against the ban on a Family Planning Association advertisement, were handed over by Mr. McCall, while pickets directed by W. J. McIlroy circled the building with 30 posters urging "End the Ban!".

The deputation briefly stated its views and was told that these, with the petitions would be put before the Commission the following Monday. After the picket, a short public meeting was addressed by Mr. McIlroy, Mrs. Margaret Howard of the Family Planning Association and Mr. McCall.

"WHO IS STOPPING the religious elements in the BBC from putting on services every Sunday, instead of one Sunday in two? Who is stopping them from using the time they now neglect between 6.10 and 7 p.m.? Is it humanist influences?" These questions were asked by the Earl of Longford during the Broadcasting debate in the House of Lords on March 1st. Answering them himself, he said he hardly thought that it was humanist influences; "no doubt they have exercised their own control over programmes such as the 'Brains Trust', but in the matter we are discussing now, I do not think that it can be put down to the humanists". No, he thought that the Religious Department of the BBC, "deeply dedicated clergymen, as I know them to be", calculated that "they bore their audiences and do no good to their cause by putting on more religion than at present". He believed that this was a miscalculation on their part. Another speaker, Lord St. Oswald, thought that "there is a great deal of evidence to show that millions have been prompted to think seriously about religion by religious programmes on the television screen". All we can say is, they can't have been the religious programmes we have seen.

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"AFTER A LONG STRUGGLE we have been successful at last." This is how Mr. C. H. Hammersley, Secretary of Leicester Secular Society, reported that the Leicester City Council had approved a motion by Councillor Philip Ashwell (Conservative) to permit the playing of games in the parks between 2 p.m. and normal closing hours. Councillor Kenneth Bowder (Conservative) seconded, while the main opposition came from Alderman Bertram Powell (Labour) who was against games on "practical as well as moral grounds". "Can you imagine Victoria Park on a Sunday afternoon filled with cricket pitches", he asked, "and people going on the park who want to sit in peace, risking being struck by a ball?" (*Leicester Mercury*, 1/3/61). Members of the Council dismissed that awful prospect from their minds and swallowing the lump in their throats, voted 32-14 for the games.

★

IN FRANCE, as in Britain, the Roman Catholic Church persists in its foolish and—ultimately—futile opposition to birth control, in face of what *The Guardian* (7/3/61) called a "growing rebellion". The present French law forbidding contraceptives or their recommendation by doctors dates from shortly after the First World War, which had enormously reduced the population, but the birth rate continued to decline. And, as *The Guardian's* French correspondent, Darsie Gillie, said, the law "certainly contributed to shockingly widespread amateur abortion, which is apparently harder for the police to combat than the sale of modern contraceptive equipment or the advocacy of its use". Population trends have been reversed since the war through a generous policy of family allowances, but "the problem of the unwanted baby and widespread abortion" remains. And it is the Roman Catholic vote that prevents revision of the law.

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MEMBERS OF THE Birmingham Branch of the National Secular Society who are taking part in the Aldermaston march at Easter will carry a "National Secular Society" banner, and it is hoped that members of other Branches who join the march en route will seek out their fellow members. Further details may be obtained from Mr. Thomas H. R. James, who was elected Chairman of the Birmingham Branch at its Annual General Meeting on March 2nd. Mr. James's address is 49 Cole Valley Road, Birmingham, 28.

From Jewish Messianism to the Christian Church

By PROSPER ALFARIC
(Translated by J. V. DUHIG)

III

This origin of the Christian faith allows us to understand better the popular representation of Christ originally held. As the first visions in which his (fancied) likeness appeared were provoked by reading and meditation of the Biblical oracles, so it was from the Bible that the first visionary images were derived. Paul's Epistles are proof of this. And they give us a glimpse of what prophecies were above all employed.

In a particularly important text of the Epistle to the Philippians (2, 5-11) which constitutes a far-off sketch of Christology, Jesus is presented as a divine being who assumed human form and made of himself a servant in voluntary humility and obedience even to the length of death on a cross and who was then exalted in direct proportion to his lowly acts.

All the features of this picture were already clear in passages well-known to be doubtfully authentic in the Book of Isaiah where is described an "ebed Jahve" which became, in the Greek translation of the Septuagint which the apostle used, "a son of the God". We read of him in the same text,

We have seen him, he had neither face nor beauty
His aspect was miserable and fleeting before the sons of men . . .

The Lord delivered him for our transgressions,
And he through his trial did not open his mouth,
And he behaved like an ewe to be slaughtered
And like a lamb silent before the shearer
He did not open his mouth . . .

So he will have a numerous progeny, he will share
The riches of the powerful.

In this sketch there is no lack of correspondence with that of Paul, but for the mention of a crucifixion. Still it might be said that it is implicit there, or can at least be deduced. It is enough for a meticulous reader to wonder what death was actually reserved for this nameless servant. For a Jew at the beginning of our era it was that of the cross that most naturally came to mind, for it was the most cruel, the most ignominious and unfortunately the most usual. It seems then that the Pauline version of the Christ will above all have been suggested by the picture presented in the pseudo-Isaiah.

This does not mean that Paul would have been the first to have such. Nothing in his statement allows us to think that he presents it as a novelty. Rather he talks of it as if his readers already knew it, as if all admitted it without discussion according to a well-established tradition, and doubtless it must be regarded as the most ancient representation of the Christ current in the Church. It is only the more significant to note that not the slightest reference can be picked up which is not already the realisation of an oracle.

From that point it is possible quite easily to understand how, without ever having seen the Christ or met anybody who had seen him with his own eyes, the first Christians came to form an idea of him. Convinced like the partisans of Judas the Galilean, like those of Theudas and of the anonymous Egyptian, that the time of the Messiah was at hand, they could not decide to identify him with any of these adventurers.

They were loyal subjects of the Empire, thankful to Rome for establishing public order. They were also pacifists, to whom any bloodshed was a subject of horror. Instead of conceiving the Christ as a triumphant warrior who would crack the heads of his enemies or make of

them a footstool for his feet, they identified him with the Servant of Jahveh, humble and despised, jeered, tortured, suffering and dying to expiate the sins of his brethren. For them that was enough to explain why silence had closed over him and why nobody around him knew a thing about his life of merit or his saving term of suffering. Was it not written that nothing in him attracted attention, that his face had nothing striking, that he was rejected of all men and counted for nothing?

Other texts besides offered them a similar portrait. In the Book of Wisdom (2, 10-20), for example, they saw an ideal Sage tracked down by maniacs who plotted his destruction. In many passages in the Psalms, there are similar references to a persecuted innocent man who put his trust in Jahveh.

These details, even more than those of the pseudo-Isaiah, suggested the image of the crucified. And, too, the oldest of the Evangelists puts into the mouth of the dying Christ the first verse of Psalm 22 (Mark, 15, 34). John recalls the division of the clothes and is careful to add the reason, "that the Scripture might be fulfilled" (John, 19, 24).

Such parallels are revealing: it is truly impossible to explain by chance coincidence the narrow agreement evident between the presumed oracles and Christian stories. Unless, with the theologians, we admit that the oracles were conceived with the stories in view, we must then allow that the stories were patterned on the pretended oracles. The essential scenes of the Passion are simple transpositions of texts concerning the persecuted just man. The vision of the crucified, in the minds of believers, is fabricated in the style of a composite portrait from models successively superimposed and more or less fused. And just as much can be said of all the others by which the faith of the infant Church was nourished and which served to form the remainder of the Gospel.

Quite early, the Christians must have built up for the needs of their faith and propaganda a collection of Biblical texts which corresponded best to their first idea of the Messiah. In them they saw as many prophecies as could not fail to be realised: it was a sort of Proto-Gospel of a simple type which each person could fill in as suited himself. The Evangelists had simply to transpose it on to the historical level to get out of it a "life" of Jesus.

Factors of another order must have intervened in the formation of the new faith. The Mystery religions of the Hellenic world, above all, those of Attis, Osiris and Mithra, played a role. They too put forward a saviour-god who suffered and died to resume a new life later. This conception was widespread throughout the whole Mediterranean world, particularly in Syria, and without doubt it helped the first Christians to become familiar with that idea, which had little in common with Jewish orthodoxy, of a God become man and put to death on a cross. On the other hand a close relationship of beliefs favoured a similarity of religious practices. The disciples of Jesus sought to be united to and incorporated into their God as were the ancient mystics: they practised similar rites. According to Justin, their eucharist strongly resembled that of the adepts of Mithra, but the apologist is very careful not to conclude that it arises from it. For him it was Mithraism which copied Christianity. But this thesis is highly improbable, and it seems much more legitimate to admit that the more ancient religion served

as the model. And anyway Paul is already presenting the new faith as a "mystery", and certain expressions he uses in speaking of the spiritual union of the Christian with God are like an echo of those used by the adepts of Attis or Osiris. Even so, the great "salvation" religions have less influence on Christian thought than had the Gnostic sects: above all it was through them that such action was exercised.

They were too far removed from Christianity to touch it effectively, and the latter lent itself little to any kind of union. From its Jewish origin and its fundamental monotheism, it took a rigid refusal to compromise which was at once its strength and its weakness. Gnosticism, on the contrary, was right from the start a syncretist system. Convinced that, here below, good is found everywhere to be mixed with evil, it endeavoured to follow it in all its varying phases and to extract it from its matrix. It discovered a part of truth in the Greek, Syrian and Egyptian mysteries as well as in the Hebrew Bible, and attempted to group its scattered elements. The attitude adopted towards Judaism agreed too well with that of the disciples of Jesus not to attract and indeed captivate them.

There were Gnostics before Christianity appeared. That is evident from the testimony of ecclesiastical writers explaining their doctrines. All derive them from Simon, called a sorcerer, who according to the Acts of the Apostles was already the object of a cult in the country around Samaria before the Gospel was ever preached there. According to Irenaeus who must have had his information from Justin, this Simon, for his adepts, was

the Son of God, his "Great Power". He had received from his Father the mission to come here below in human form to raise up the fallen "Wisdom", to wrest back the Spirit from the evil Powers which had drawn it away and wrapped it in the body of matter. He had acquitted himself of this task by recalling to sinful souls their divine parentage and showing them the path to the lost paradise and in preaching the liberating Gnosis to them. Thanks to him the ancient servitude ended. He had given back to them the liberty of the sons of God. This dogmatic and moral theology strangely resembles that found sketched right through the great Pauline Epistles. And it is to it that priority belongs, for it is manifestly much more coherent.

Other Gnostic groups, for example, those of the Ophites, or the Nassenians, the Perates, the adepts of Barbelo, appear to be equally archaic; their origin is pre-Christian. Now, it happens that they also professed a faith with an affinity to that expressed in the Pauline writings. They too invited their disciples to do penance, to struggle with their passions, to chastise their body, and to reduce it to bondage so as to liberate the spirit. It is from this complex and very vigorous environment that the main lines of Christian theology issued.

Paul is fluent in the language of the Gnostics; he uses their most typical and most mysterious idioms, without appearing to feel the least need to define or explain them. Very early, doubtless right from the start, Messianism became impregnated with Gnosis.

(To be concluded)

Immortality

By "FRANCIS WALSHINGHAM"

NO ONE SPECULATES whether a man, born in 1900, existed in 1850. But the religious of all races and ages rush to describe his existence in 2050+. The descriptions outvie one another in absurdity, but this unanimity of feeling that something persists after death is as tangible a fact as any of those of science. It must, therefore, have some material basis.

That basis is the characteristics of human brain tissue, which is like a plastic, unrecorded gramophone record, with stylus poised above it, swinging freely. The position taken up by the stylus and its first tentative cuts are determined by pre-natal forces, which also control the growth of the disc. Later, myriads of external stimuli continue the recording. The stylus loosens up and the recordings grow ever more numerous. Soon, any present stimulus causes the stylus to flash instantaneously over past recordings, associate them, and present a mental picture of some event lying only in the future. The ape-man meditates a leap to an adjacent branch. His stylus instantly groups all associated recordings, made by watching others perform leaps, and his muscles tense, estimating forces and distances. The future presentation becomes actual accomplishment as the leap is made, and this successful leap is immediately recorded for future use. Human consciousness exists.

And then a rotten branch gives way, and he falls to the ground and does not move again. He makes no sound. There is no breathing, his heart has ceased to beat. If left, his body is attacked by the bacteria of the air, and rots, just like the bodies of the animals who meet with a similar end. But several of his companions have witnessed the fall. The styli instantly present a picture of the start of a leap—the sudden realisation that one has fallen

short—the earth rushing up to meet one—and then swing wildly to and fro. They can no more construct a mental image of this state, which we call death, than a gramophone record is capable of making a recording of its own smashing!

Only one thing is possible. The stylus cannot remain poised indefinitely, and so it descends on to tracks already recorded, and makes a hotch-potch of these to achieve a future presentation. And this, just this, and nothing more, is the basis of all religious belief, the outpourings of theologians, and the ghastly crimes that have been committed—and are still being committed—in the name of religion. It is this which makes millions of believers give their mental and economic allegiance to despotic religious hierarchies in order to keep the neurotic obsession intact.

Analogies prove nothing, but the following may be suggestive:

1. The neurotic religious presentation of a non-existent future is composed of a jumble of individual *past* experiences. But no two individuals have the same past experiences: therefore contradictions and divergency of views result, these engendering the inevitable concomitant of all neurotic fear: hatred.

2. Hence the notorious love of religious sects for one another.

3. The neurotic belief being contrary to reasoned thought, it must be reinforced by group suggestion. No believer is content to say his or her prayers privately in the bedroom, but must herd with others in buildings, where each is confirmed in the neurotic obsession by the visual, auditory (and even olfactory incense) impressions produced by the antics of the rest.

The reader can trace out for himself this ghastly obsession to its myriad end-points. He will find that incalculable human suffering has its origins in this illusion of immortality.

U.S. NOTES

MRS. AGNES SANFORD, the wife of an Episcopal rector in Westboro, Massachusetts, USA, believes in faith healing, reported the *New York World Telegram and Sun* (4/3/61). And if she is asked why, she has a simple and—the paper quite rightly said—“unarguable” answer: “I’ve seen it happen—hundreds of times”. During the past 20 years, we read, “Mrs. Sanford has laid her own compassionate hands on a great number of people who were suffering from a wide variety of mental and physical illnesses”. Alas! (and isn’t there always an alas?) “She has not tried to keep a score-card of recoveries . . .”. And, of course, failures must not be blamed on God “but to our failure to live near enough to God so that He can accomplish His will in us”. After all, “When you turn on an electric light and it fails to shine, you don’t question the existence of electric power”, she says. “You know there’s something wrong with the lamp, or the wiring, and you get it fixed”. That, said the *World Telegram and Sun*, is the analogy that Mrs. Sanford “likes to use when people say they cannot believe in the reality of spiritual healing . . . She does not attempt to engage in the theological debate with any minister who is dubious about it”.

★

AN EX-CATHOLIC, the Rt. Rev. James A. Pike, Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Diocese of California is accused of heresy by a group of Episcopal clergymen and laymen in Georgia. Not without justification, either, for he has expressed disbelief in the virgin birth, the Holy Trinity, and the necessity of salvation through Jesus Christ alone. According to a report from San Francisco on February 12th (New York [?] *Daily News*, 13/2/61), Bishop Pike regards religious myth as “one of the avenues of faith”. He spoke of “the myth of the Garden of Eden” and its value in explaining the nature of man, “Yet I do not know a single member of the Anglican communion—bishop, presbyter, deacon or layman—who believes the story literally”, he said in a pastoral letter which he ordered all rectors and vicars of his diocese to read. As for the virgin birth, it was a myth which churchmen should be free to accept or reject. In contrast to Bishop Pike’s fellow Episcopalians in Georgia, a Unitarian minister, the Rev. Walter Donald Kring, has praised the Bishop’s “free-thinking approach to Church dogma”.

CORRESPONDENCE

INOCULATION

When Mr. Newton proves that the introduction of antitoxin failed to reduce the deaths from diphtheria, Dr. Duhig continues to think that antitoxin saved millions of lives and that its discovery was greater than the discovery of the North Pole (could anything be of less importance than the latter?). In fact, whether one takes a period of five, ten or fifteen years before and after the introduction of antitoxin as a therapeutic measure, the deaths, and death-rates, were higher after than before. Perhaps, as Dr. Duhig has such a bad reaction to laymen, I could quote briefly from an article by W. J. Martin, D.Sc., Ph.D., which appeared in the *Medical Officer* of November 4th, 1960: “Diphtheria was one of the first infectious diseases for which the causative agent was established. *C. diphtheriae* was discovered in 1883 and the antitoxin was isolated in 1889. These discoveries, however, had no effect in reducing the mortality, and the death-rate for twenty years afterwards was larger than in the preceding decades.” So much for Dr. Duhig’s claim that this wonderful substance caused an enormous drop in the mortality from the disease.

The doctor seems to think that immunisation is also a wonderful thing. It may be, but the claim would be very difficult to prove. Diphtheria almost disappeared from Britain once before

(in the 1850s) but it came back again. By 1940 (when our own immunisation campaign was just beginning) it had almost disappeared from Sweden without any immunisation. I would refer Dr. Duhig to an Epidemiological Report of the World Health Organisation dated February-March, 1951, which gives a great many relevant figures. The author, M. Pascua, M.D., Director of the Division of Health Statistics, said in his commentary: “Neither can a great proportion [of the decline in diphtheria mortality] be attributed to preventive immunisation against diphtheria, which has been practised on a very small scale, if at all, in some of the countries considered”.

Anger and contempt are not very scientific. I would ask Dr. Duhig to look at a bit more evidence, and look at it calmly. There is plenty of it; but this letter has been deliberately kept short.

WILFRED TYLDESLEY.

ONLY A THEORY

Mr. A. Hawksworth’s suggestion that the reddening of the galaxies is due to inter-stellar gas pre-supposes that the gas is distributed uniformly throughout all space. Large pockets of such gas or inter-stellar dust exist in our galaxy and in regions outside it. However there is no evidence that space is uniformly filled with the gas. Consequently we cannot attribute the red shift in extra galactic spectra to the presence of such gas.

Ever since Eddington’s time, the recession of the galaxies has been accepted by most astronomers and cosmologists because no better explanation of the red shift has been forthcoming. In cosmology, where the ratio of speculation to verified knowledge is rather high, most theories are bound to be tentative; but during the past thirty years the theory of the expanding universe has held its own and is regarded now by many astronomers as probably true. A Freethinker is not committed to support any particular current view of science. If a scientist considering an available body of scientific evidence bearing on a problem impartially arrives at a conclusion after sifting and weighing the relevant data, a Freethinker can hardly be expected to do more.

JACK GORDON.

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