

The Freethinker

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NOBODY IS BETTER QUALIFIED to write a study of evolution and its significance for man than George Gaylord Simpson, Professor of Vertebrate Palaeontology at the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard, and that is what he did in 1949 in *The Meaning of Evolution*. The book is now available in the attractive Yale Paperbound Series for the reasonable price of 11s. 6d. (Yale University Press, London: Oxford University Press), and I haven't the slightest hesitation in saying that it should be on every reader's bookshelves. It has been called by Professor M. F. Ashley Montagu, the "clearest and soundest exposition of the nature of the evolutionary process that has yet been written". It

is certainly the best that I have read since T. H. Morgan. Professor Simpson—as those familiar with his work would expect—refuses to argue about the truth of evolution. This has been conclusively established by generations of study and the "accumulation of literally millions of concordant facts . . .". It requires no further proof to anyone who is "reasonably free of old illusions and prejudices", and it is a waste of time arguing with the others. So he gives us a geologic time scale and begins to consider the origin of life. There is, of course, "no reason to postulate a miracle. Nor is it necessary to suppose that the origin of the new processes of reproduction and mutation was anything but materialistic". And the absence of pre-Cambrian fossils and the appearance in the Cambrian of most of the animal phyla known as fossils is put into perspective. The length of the Cambrian period was probably between 60 million and 90 million years.

Even the early part of the period had a duration of not less than 20,000,000 years and quite likely of 30,000,000. These are long times even to a geologist, and a great deal of evolution could occur in them, even at moderate rates of evolution. Thirty million years ago your ancestor was something like a primitive ape and 60,000,000 years ago something like a tree shrew. The various Cambrian animal phyla do not all appear as fossils in the very earliest rocks of that period but they straggle in throughout its earlier part, or later. As a whole, the early Cambrian representatives of the groups that did appear then are markedly simple and generalised, as if near the origin of their respective lines.

Natural Selection

Many of the fallacies about evolution rest on false premises. It is "not some over-all cosmic influence" that changes living things in a regular way. Nor should we over-simplify a process that has been varied, diverse; not completely at random (limitations are always present) but not in straight lines. The "major (if not the only) non-random, orienting factor in the process of evolution is reasonably identified as adaptation", and this has a "known mechanism: natural selection acting on the genetics of populations".

Individual differences may arise in three ways "and in these ways only": 1, through the environment (particularly important in plants, and reduced to a minimum in mammals); 2, by the mechanism of sexual reproduction (almost, but not quite, universal among plants and

animals), and 3, mutation. Selection can only act upon variations that occur, variations that are random and not necessarily—or indeed usually—the best from the standpoint of adaptation, but the general tendency is for it to be more effective the larger the population. It is in fact populations, not individuals that evolve, and the popular ideas of "the struggle for existence" and "survival of the fittest" need correction today. The modern concept of natural selection "has been considerably broadened and refined and is not quite the same as Darwin's . . . In the modern theory natural selection is differential reproduction, plus the complex interplay in such reproduction of heredity, genetic variation, and all the other factors that affect selection and determine its results".

Unified Theory

This may be termed a "synthetic" theory of evolution (which Professor Simpson holds along with, for instance, Fisher, Haldane, Huxley, Darlington, Waddington and Ford, to mention only English names). And although all problems have not been solved or are ever likely to be,

We seem at last to have a unified theory—although a complex one inevitably, as evolution itself is a complex interaction of different processes—which is capable of facing all the classic problems of the history of life and of providing a causalistic solution of each.

Certainly there is "neither need nor excuse for postulation of nonmaterial intervention in the origin of life, the rise of man, or any other part of the long history of the material cosmos".

Materialistic

Simpson is—inevitably, I almost said—a materialist. He believes, with justification, that his book provides "thoroughly conclusive evidence . . . that organic evolution is a process entirely materialistic in its origin and operation . . .".

Man arose as a result of the operation of organic evolution and his being and activities are also materialistic, but the human species has properties unique to itself among all forms of life, superadded to the properties unique to life among all forms of matter and of action. Man's intellectual, social, and spiritual natures are altogether exceptional among animals in degree, but they arose by organic evolution. They usher in a new phase of evolution, and not a new phase merely but also a new kind, which is thus also a product of organic evolution and can be no less materialistic in its essence even though its organisation and activities are essentially different from those in the process that brought it into being.

Incongruity

This is a sounder, more scientific conception than Sir Julian Huxley's idea that "minute mind-like activities accompany all the processes of living matter" (*vide The Observer*, 17/7/60). One may regret the ambiguous "spiritual", as one may the assumption in the Prologue that, it is "self-evident, requiring no further discussion, that evolution and *true* religion are compatible" (italics in original). Professor Simpson doesn't define "*true* religion" and, although he dismisses "purpose" from evolution and denies that it has a goal; although he firmly

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

Evolution: The Modern Concept

By COLIN McCALL

asserts causality, he gives religionists the chance to distort his whole, splendid thesis by these ambiguities and by the following:

Yet the origin of that cosmos and the casual principles of its history remain unexplained and inaccessible to science. Here is hidden the First Cause sought by theology and philosophy.

He goes on to say that the First Cause is not known and "I suspect that it never will be known to living man. We may, if we are so inclined, worship it in our own ways, but we certainly do not comprehend it". But the damage has been done, and religionists might see some significance in "living man" in the penultimate sentence. Might it then be revealed to man after death? These few sentences are, in fact, quite incongruous in *The Meaning of Evolution*, where Professor Simpson has previously said (in the same chapter):

Once causalism is abandoned, there are no limitations on flights of the imagination and there are about as many separate vitalist and finalist theories as there have been vitalists and finalists.

It must be emphasised, though, that there are only just a few sentences to fault in a book of immense scope. For, having plotted the course of organic evolution and then interpreted it for us, the Professor goes on to consider human social evolution and ethics. Efforts to educe an ethic from evolution as a whole are useless. Evolution is amoral. "There are no ethics but human ethics, and a search that ignores the necessity that ethics be human, relative to man, is bound to fail."

Man possesses purpose and exercises deliberate choice to a unique degree, even if, indeed, these capacities can be said to be the same in kind in any other animals. It is most improbable that any other animal has more than an inchoate or largely instinctual sense of values, while in man this is normally conscious, orderly, and controlled. (This does not contradict the fact that, even in man, the *origin* of his valuations is in considerable part unconscious and may be quite uncontrolled.)

But

Conscious knowledge, purpose, choice and values carry as an inevitable corollary responsibility.

It follows, among other consequences, that blind faith is immoral. It is a special necessity that there should be "specialists in each field whose profession it is to examine and to test such truths as pertain to it". And when specialist judgments conflict it is "the moral duty of the nonspecialist . . . to choose the judgments of that authority whose qualifications are greatest in the pertinent field and whose submitted evidence is best." We can't guarantee the right choice, but the important thing is that we should adopt the right *method* of choice, and that method is "evaluation of evidence and avoidance of authoritarian dogma." "The present chaotic stage of humanity is not, as some wishfully maintain," says Professor Simpson, "caused by lack of faith but by too much unreasoning faith and too many conflicting faiths within these boundaries where such faith should have no place. The chaos is one that only responsible human knowledge can reduce to order".

Swinburne Still Sings

By H. GEORGE FARMER

TO ALL WHO HAVE EYES in their heads it is known that Swinburne—like his contemporaries Morris, Meredith and Hardy—was an outspoken Freethinker. His radiant *Poems and Ballads* and the heroic *Songs Before Sunrise* fully attest that his militancy was more patent than that of Shelley. The latter so enthralled me as a youth that I composed an overture with that title which so intrigued the late G. W. Foote that he wrote me saying "I hope I shall hear it one day". Swinburne's attack on Christianity and the idea of God was as thrilling as a trumpet blare. One recalls those lines in "Before a Crucifix" which is a challenge to Christ.

Hast thou fed full men's starved-out souls?
Hast thou brought freedom upon earth?
Or are there less oppressions done
In this wild world under the sun?

Again, in his "Hymn to Proserpine" he flings this taunt at Christianity:

O lips that the live blood faints in, the leavings of racks
and rods!

O ghastly glories of saints, dead limbs of gibbeted gods!
Though all men abase them before you in spirit, and all
knees bend,

I kneel not neither adore you, but standing, look to the end.
Nor is he less reticent in his "Song in Time of Order":

The blood on the hands of the king,
And the lie at the lips of the priest.

Lastly, in his "Hymn to Man", that surging, triumphant paean to Man as the "Master of Things":

O God, Lord God of thy priests, rise up now and show
thyself God.

They cry out, thine elect, thine aspirants to heavenward,
whose faith is as flame;

O thou the Lord God of our tyrants, they call thee, their
God, by thy name.

By thy name that in hell-fire was written, and burned at the
point of thy sword.

Thou art smitten, thou God, thou art smitten; thy death
is upon thee, O Lord.

And the love-song of earth as thou diest resounds through
the wind of her wings—

Glorify to Man in the highest! for Man is the master of things.

When Swinburne saw the millions supplicating a fictitious heaven for succour, whilst the remedy was here at hand on mother earth, he was moved to sing:

What ails us gazing where all seen is hollow?
Yet with some dream fancy, yet with some desire,
Dreams pursue death as winds a flying fire,
Our dreams pursue our dead and do not find.
Still, and more swift than they, the thin flame flies,
The low light fails us in elusive skies,
Still the foil'd earnest ear is deaf, and blind
Are still the eluded eyes.

Yet our purpose in recalling the above is to centre attention on an article in the current number of *The Book Collector*, Spring, 1961, which is one of a series—No. 37—on "English Literary Autographs" by T. J. Brown, which includes an autograph reproduction of a Swinburne MS. in the British Museum (*Ashley MS 5093*, fol. 3). In this fragment, Swinburne is as militant as ever. It is dated September, 1899, just after the notorious Dreyfus trial, in which the clericals played so dastardly a part. Here are the lines:

Indomitable as honour. Storms may toss
And soil her standard ere her bark win home:
But shame falls full upon the Christless cross
Whose brandmark signs the holy hounds of Rome.

OBITUARY

E. A. McDONALD

With the death of Eric A. McDonald in Johannesburg on April 17th, I feel a very real sense of personal loss. Although I had never met him, we were regular correspondents and I shall treasure his last words to me: "Glad to see you are keeping your end up in THE FREETHINKER. Good wishes to you and your wife for 1961".

Eric had just passed through a severe mental crisis—"next door to a mental breakdown" he called it—owing to difficulties in personal life and the circumstances in South Africa. However, he never lost his mental control thanks to a sense of humour and strong character, and at the end of last year he assured me that he was "almost completely recovered". Now I learn of his death. He was 75.

COLIN MCCALL.

The Devil of a Mess

By F. A. RIDLEY

IN THE CALVINISTIC SCOTLAND of the 17th century, the golden age of witchcraft, the Prince of Darkness attracted much more attention in religious circles than he does in our own more degenerate days. Many eloquent and learned sermons were preached upon the formidable personality and startling merits—or rather demerits—of the sinister character called in the Bible impartially, Satan, the Devil or the Prince of this world. In the era of the Protestant Reformation, an age consecrated to the Devil in both theory and practice—a new title was added to the satanic repertory, “Old Nick”, derived (or so, at least it is usually explained) from the then sinister, and even black magical reputation ascribed to the Florentine political theorist, Niccolo Machiavelli the great political master of the cult of the immoral. The vast majority of the sermons—often replete with strange Satanic lore—that date from this period, are long since forgotten, and may only be found by the curious seeker after diabolical wisdom, in that repository of all extant wisdom, human, divine and diabolical, the Reading Room of the British Museum.

It was there that I chanced upon an ancient sermon written (as one would naturally expect), by a Scottish divine in the hey-day of the Presbyterian Kirk (I have unfortunately forgotten his name, it is a long time since I read his truly edifying discourse) which opened with three notable and challenging queries (which a lawyer might denominate as “leading questions”) which put the substance of “diabolical theology” in a clear and unambiguous form, viz.: “Today my brethren we shall consider the Devil and we shall begin by asking three questions: (1) Where the Devil does he live? (2) How the Devil does he live? (3) What the Devil does he do?”

These theological pronouncements are peculiarly apposite, when the Church of England has just discarded the Devil, and when there is a general tendency in theological literature (if we may import a military metaphor) to put him on half-pay. Even the Roman Catholic Church whilst still affecting lip service to Christ's old tempter, shows an undeniable tendency to whittle down the time-honoured diabolical attributes: e.g. it has discreetly withdrawn from circulation those fiery pamphlets issued by such notable authorities as Fr. Furniss and Fr. Rickaby, S.J., which described Satan and his hellish circumlocutions without restraint. In short, the Devil and all his works appear to be in the Devil of a mess.

As the German historian, Karl Kautsky once indicated, the Devil (and again, all his works) flourish best in troubled times. Perhaps that era which we have already indicated as the Golden Age of Satan affords still the best and the most spectacular example of this historian's dictum: the Reformation era, roughly equivalent to the 16th and 17th centuries; the era which began with Luther throwing his inkpot at Satan and ended with the ghastly witchcraft trial of Urbain Grandier at Loudon. Following the macabre narrative of Aldous Huxley, I outlined this trial some time ago in this paper and it has recently formed the subject of a play (*The Devils* by John Whiting) which has been praised in no uncertain terms by two Secularists, Mr. Colin McCall and Mr. E. Gomm.

During this fearful era in which Kautsky himself remarked Europe resembled a madhouse, countless witches (of both sexes) either perished writhing at the stake, or screamed their lives out under torture. As has been

aptly commented, the Christian Church—both Catholic and Protestant—demonstrated its sincere belief in hell by making this world as much like it as it lay in its power to do. Nor did fiction fail to keep pace with fact, for it was during this self-same period that Satan, along with his handmaids, the witches, entered world literature in a big way in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, deliberately intended by its author to play up to James I, who was one of the greatest authorities on witchcraft in theory besides being a mighty burner of witches in practice.

Later, in the same century, Satan took on a wholly different role as the infernal leader of a lost celestial revolution. “Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven”. For, as the French author Chateaubriand demonstrated long ago, the Miltonic genius in *Paradise Lost*, cast Satan in the role of an infernal Oliver Cromwell, steadfastly resolute in adverse fortune and persistently plotting against the Heavenly tyrant, God, a celestial replica of the earthly Charles Stuart.

However, *Paradise Lost* really sang the Devils' swansong. For the next great literary work to renew this theme, already depicts Satan reincarnated as Mephistopheles, a Voltairean sceptic. The Devil of Goethe's *Faust* is none other than our old friend, the first Freethinker. He is the spirit of Doubt Incarnate.

It has, we fear, to be sorrowfully conceded that *Faust* marked the beginning of the end of the Devil and of diabolism in general. It is, after all, only a little more than three centuries—a very short chronological period—since the incredible goings-on at Loudon, when a convent of nuns confessed to being bewitched by a parish priest, and when the clerical Inquisitors who hounded the priestly sorcerer to the stake themselves perished in agonising paroxysms of diabolic “possession”.

As Mr. Huxley has noted, in the mid-20th century we cannot even *think* the thoughts that obsessed an entire generation (c.f. Aldous Huxley, *The Devils of Loudon*). Indeed, since then the Devil and his inseparable shadow, the “sin of witchcraft” have been on the down-grade. Now, *Ichabod*, “the glory has departed”, though we note a last minute effort to re-establish Satan in the Church of
(Concluded on next page)

WORLD UNION OF FREETHINKERS

Week-end Conference, September 8th to 10th, 1961

Beatrice Webb House, Holmbury St. Mary, near Dorking, Surrey.

The British Committee of the World Union of Freethinkers has arranged the following programme:

Friday, Sept. 8th. Assemble at the Beatrice Webb House at 6 p.m. Dinner 7 p.m. Opening Session 8.30 p.m. Speakers: Lady Barbara Wootton, F. A. Ridley, J. Hutton Hynd.

Saturday, Sept. 9th. Morning Session: Professor Lucia de Brouckère (Brussels University), Dr. W. E. Swinton: “The Relation between the Scientific Worker and Society”. Break for morning coffee between the two addresses. Afternoon: Outing if fine. Evening: Fenner Brockway, “The Challenge of Africa”.

Sunday, Sept. 10th. Morning Session: Speakers to be announced. Afternoon: Final meeting and dispersal.

The charge for the conference, including lodging for two nights and three meals each whole day, i.e. six all told, and morning coffee, will be £3 10s. (tea beverages extra). As the number of places is strictly limited, those who wish to attend should apply as soon as possible to—Colin McCall, National Secular Society, 103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1, and state if they are vegetarians or have special requirements.

Beatrice Webb House can be reached by bus from Dorking North Station, which is about 23 miles from Waterloo, Victoria or London Bridge Stations. Green Line coaches run to Dorking Town, services 712, 713, 714.

This Believing World

As April 26th was the 250th anniversary of the birth of David Hume, the BBC arranged for Professor Antony Flew to give a talk on the famous philosopher and historian. And the announcement in the *Radio Times* reads, "Professor Flew talks about Hume's notorious essay on Miracles". In "Meeting Point", dealing with the religious work of the "Brothers of the Desert", we are told that they follow the "example of the famous Father de Fouchauld" (our italics). Thus, even in such a small thing, we get the usual bias in favour of Christianity.

★

Hume's essay made mincemeat of "Miracles" and the idea that "evidence" for one or many could possibly be given. Though many Christians made desperate efforts to answer it, they all have miserably failed. No wonder the religious people who still control even the *Radio Times* used the word "notorious".

★

"Alas, poor George" was how Mr. John Jelley in the *Daily Mail* (April 21st) introduced his lamentations on the eclipse of the once famous St. George for Merrie England (c 300 AD). "Poor old St. George," he said, "seems to shrink with every decade. He has vanished from our coinage with the sovereign and the crown". And to cap all, even "the Roman Catholic Church has officially demoted him to a third class saint". Perhaps all this is because the only historical claim we have is that George was a swindling contractor and tyrant of Cappadocia who was eventually lynched.

★

Milman, in his edition of Gibbon, points out that the Roman Catholic Dr. Milner did his best to vindicate George as the tutelary saint of England, but does not think he succeeded. In any case, April 23 is far more celebrated for the birth of William Shakespeare than for St. George. Gibbon considers that the fame and popularity of the saint began only with the Crusades.

★

We extend our sympathies to the Bishop of Southwark who has to look after a parish of 23,000 people with only one priest. He does worse than a parish in Birmingham where according to his article in the *London Evening Standard* (April 11th), "three clergy are expected to look after 40,000 people". The idea that a priest is expected "to look after" hundreds of people strikes us as being rather humorous. What is actually the way people are looked after by a priest?

★

Our contemporary "Today" (April 22nd) has an article by Mr. Fielden Hughes who appears to be quite unable to answer clearly the question put in another article, "Has GOD a place in a classroom?" A schoolgirl we are told says "We feel our elders have replaced true religion with a kind of pseudo-ceremony", and who ought to know what "true religion" is better than a schoolgirl?

★

On the other hand, a headmaster tells us, "There is nothing more modern than a child—but the image of God we put before him is at best Victorian"—which just goes to show you, doesn't it? In truth, there were hundreds of "images" of God, not only in Victorian times, but for centuries before. This is one of the most fatuous and silly remarks we have encountered for a long time. The modern image of God, even if demonstrated by this particular headmaster, would be just as futile and just as absurd as any Victorian one.

Mr. Hughes tells us that a boy once asked his teacher, "How do you prove the existence of God?" and after being given the usual answers from the Bible and the First Cause, the boy repeated the question but got no genuine answer. Instead, we are given the way the famous Dr. Jowett dealt with one of his students at Oxford who said he was not a believer. Dr. Jowett's brow "clouded like thunder", and he angrily said, "If you are not a believer by noon today you will be sent down from the university". It must be heartbreaking for headmasters to be unable these days to make believers out of unbelievers in exactly the same way. Only a little earlier, the gentle methods used were prison, torture, and burning at the stake—by true Christians of course.

Space News

VENUS, NEAREST PLANET TO THE EARTH has a dense atmosphere, believed to be composed of carbon dioxide. This prevents surface heat from escaping into space, causing the so-called "greenhouse effect" and keeping the planet like a dust bowl at a temperature of 600° F—far too hot for human habitation.

Recently in *Science* (journal of the American Association for the Advancement of Science) Carl Sagan a young (26-year-old) astronomer at the University of California, put forward a scheme for the reclamation of Venus. As summarised in *Newsweek* (10/4/61), Sagan's "microbiological planetary engineering" job involved the sending of masses of blue-green algae from our own stagnant waters to—or near to—our planetary neighbour by rocket.

As the interplanetary rocket passed near Venus the algae would be jettisoned, would drift downwards, and—as Sagan hopes—reproduce. Twenty miles above the planet's surface, said *Newsweek*, "they would pass through the famous Venusean cloud deck and absorb water. Then passing through the lower atmosphere, the water-laden algae would inhale carbon dioxide and exhale oxygen—performing the photo-synthesis reaction of plants that makes earth life possible.

"This would bring about a similar life-sustaining chain reaction: The carbon-dioxide content would fall, the greenhouse effect decline, and surface temperatures begin to cool.

"Now, Venus would lack only water. Performing their final job as they near the still-hot surface, in Sagan's words, '[the algae] would be roasted, decomposing ideally according to the symbolic equation: Carbohydrates plus heat give carbon and water'. Eventually later waves of algae would further decrease the greenhouse effect and cool the surface to 'room temperature'."

THE DEVIL OF A MESS

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England Prayer Book from which he had been banished. Probably, as Mr. Huxley has implicitly suggested in his macabre work of post-atomic fiction, *Ape and Essence*, only a nuclear war and its grisly aftermath can now effectively revive the cult of the Devil. That is, if any potential Devil-worshippers are around at the end of it! Failing which, the Devil would seem to have "had it". In a few centuries' time only a few erudite sceptics will search the shelves of the British Museum library to pay "the tribute of a silent-tear" to the oldest and greatest Freethinker of them all!

—NEXT WEEK—

ON THE RESURRECTION MORNING

By F. A. RIDLEY

THE FREETHINKER

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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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Lecture Notices, Etc.

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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.)

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Sundays, from 4 p.m.: MESSRS. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER, C. E. WOOD and D. H. TRIBE.

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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, May 7th, 6.45 p.m.: GEORGE BRIDGEN, "The Mysterious God v. the Rational Man".

Romford Humanist Group (93 Havering Road, Romford), Friday, May 5th, 7.30 p.m.: COLIN MCCALL, "The National Secular Society".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1), Sunday, May 7th, 11 a.m.: VADAKKAN V. ALEXANDER, B.A., "Rabindranath Tagore, A Centenary Tribute".

Notes and News

THE CASE OF Mr. Anthony Wedgwood Benn, the reluctant Lord Stansgate, has been compared to that of Bradlaugh. But in *The Times* on April 17th, Sir Lionel Heald denied any parallel. The case of Bradlaugh, he wrote, "was entirely different. He was not a disqualified person and was excluded only because he refused to take the oath". This, of course, is quite untrue. As Mr. Charles Pannell, M.P., remarked in *The Times* two days later, "Sir Lionel's understanding is at variance with the facts". Mr. Pannell proceeded to give the facts of Bradlaugh's struggle and—we hope—improve Sir Lionel's understanding.

★

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND may be theologically bankrupt, but financially it is more than solvent. As *The Guardian* reported (25/4/61): "The deployment of the Church's money in industrial equities and ordinary shares is providing a steady and increased income for the local church organisations investing through the investment fund of the Central Board of Finance of the Church of England. According to its latest report there are 37 dioceses, five cathedral chapters, seven diocesan boards of education, nine colleges, and 13 church societies which invest their money through the investment fund, which is quite separate from the finances of the Church Commissioners".

IN THE CURRENT ISSUE (Vol. 1, No. 4) of *The Wellsian* (journal of the H. G. Wells Society, 39 Rugby Road, West Bridgford, Notts.), Michael H. Briggs of Victoria University, Wellington, NZ, has collected two dozen references to religion in Wells's novels. In his autobiographical writings, says Mr. Briggs, Wells "outlined his religious development from the 'old hell-and-heaven Thunder God' of childhood to complete disbelief in all organised religions in maturity", but it is in his popular, widely-read works of fiction that he perhaps exerted most influence upon contemporary thought in these matters. Here are two quotations from *Babes in the Darkling Wood* (1940): "But Christianity had planted itself in the way of the modernisation of thinking, just as, by its Creationism, it still blocked the way to a clear biological vision of life". "We two are Atheists right out, and to us, you, with your religion, seem like a man who has been squeezed into antiquated and quite useless armour that does nothing but impede the freedom of his life and mind".

★

The Wellsian also hailed Major Gagarin's space flight and asked if it was too much to hope that space travel would become the adventure of mankind instead of a new dimension of the cold war. Again it quoted the far-seeing Wells (from *The World Set Free*) "In a little while men who will know how to bear the different gravitations, the altered pressures, the attenuated unfamiliar gases and all the fearful strangeness of space will be venturing out from this earth. This ball will be no longer enough for us; our spirit will reach out . . . Cannot you see how that little argosy will go glittering up into the sky, twinkling and glittering smaller and smaller until the blue swallows it up? They may succeed out there; they may perish, but other men will follow them".

★

CONTRAST THE IMPERTURBABLE Dr. Fisher: "I reach out far into space every time I say my prayers and it doesn't excite me one little bit. Why should people be excited by the news that a man has stepped into space?" (*Daily Herald*, 25/4/61).

★

CLERICAL AUTHORITIES in Quebec Province are undoubtedly worried about the new Mouvement Laïque de Langue Française, which our Canadian correspondent, Joseph Da Sylva, reported on last week. Premier Jean Lesage said he had received letters from children of St. Hyacinthe begging him to keep religious education in Quebec's schools (*The Gazette*, 14/4/61). The letters, he said, "all follow an identical pattern" and were obviously the result of concerted action. One little girl, whose name he refused to give because he didn't wish to embarrass her parents, wrote: "I have heard the authorities were going to take the Roman Catholic religion out of the schools. I beg you to let us keep our catechism, because it is the book we little Catholics like the best. Please let us keep it". *The Gazette* described the Prime Minister as "obviously angry" when he spoke from a prepared statement: "Why do these letters all come from the same region? Who is the poisoner of children's minds spreading such a calumny? Whose interest is it to act in this way? As a Crown prosecutor would say: 'Whose profits does this criminal act serve?' For this is truly a criminal act, even though the expression might seem out of proportion at first glance. It is a criminal act because the first victim is an impressionable mind, because it uses glaring deceit to scandalise children . . .". People who incited children to write these letters, he added, have lost not only the sense of morality but their morale as well since they now rely on tactics of treachery.

"The Greatest of all Mysteries"

By H. CUTNER

THE JOURNALIST who appears to be always welcomed by our national journals at Christmas time and at Easter-time is the one who sets out to show how literally true are the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Virgin Birth *must* be true because it was prophesied by Isaiah in the Old Testament; and the Resurrection is just as true because, as Mr. Guy Schofield says in the *Sunday Dispatch* (April 2nd), it is "the greatest mystery with which mankind has ever been confronted", and which "stubbornly resists 'explanation' in spite of endless inquiry and the sweeping growth of knowledge". Continues Mr. Schofield, "Incredible? To many people, yes. Yet Christianity, unlike most religions, is set securely on a historic basis and invites and challenges historic investigation."

So strong indeed is the "history" upon which Christianity rests that, "as the years go by", little "scraps of information bearing on this history come to light", and "its authenticity is being steadily confirmed". What these little scraps of information really are—I mean of course from historical sources—we are not told; but if you repeat the dear old arguments which have done duty for a thousand years in somewhat the same form, they are bound to become "historical". All that Mr. Schofield means is what we have always been told in Christian apologetics, that the Resurrection is "the best-authenticated fact in history". And the plain and sufficient answer is that there is not a scrap of evidence anywhere for it. The documents in which is described the Resurrection were completely unknown before Irenaeus (c. 180 AD) named them. Not only were they unknown, but no one even at this day knows who wrote them, when and where they were written, or in what language they were originally written.

Freethinkers have been pointing this out for centuries, but as they are nearly always boycotted by Christians, they never or very rarely get answered; and, thank heaven the average Christian, and particularly journalists like Mr. Schofield, never bothers to find out what are the true facts of the case. If they wrote the kind of thing I am now writing, they certainly would never enjoy the hospitality of such journals as the *Sunday Dispatch*. Mr. Schofield does know however something of the *late* date of the canonical Gospels, though he disposes of this particular argument quite easily. He tells us.

It was once contended that the Gospels originated long after the time of Christ. Nobody suffers from that delusion now. In fact, since 1935 we have been in possession of a papyrus fragment of St. John's Gospel dating from about 100 years after the Crucifixion, indicating that it was written probably around AD90.

I consider this extract delicious. Notice how "nobody" suffers from this "delusion" now—the delusion being that the Gospels were written "long after the time of Christ". To shatter the "delusion" once and for all, we are told that a fragment of a papyrus "dating from about 100 years after the Crucifixion" from the Gospel of John is in our "possession"—and thus there is no longer any doubt whatever (or there should be no doubt) that St. John wrote his Gospel "probably" around 90 AD. I have always loved these "abouts" and "probablys".

We Freethinkers should keep as far as possible a sense of proportion on the problem of dates. We do not deny that long before the present four canonical Gospels came into being, there were floating around many others. Even

Luke tells us that. How much they contributed to this or that Gospel no one knows, but there could be nothing surprising if we learnt that some of the many "sayings" of Jesus were incorporated in various Gospels. The real point to note is that our canonical Gospels are *never* mentioned anywhere before 180 AD, and that only if we accept this date for Irenaeus.

The one "witness" who should have mentioned *all* the Gospels if they had been known is Justin Martyr who wrote two "Apologies" for Christianity dated about 150 AD, though this date is not certain. He quotes some documents entitled "Memoirs of the Apostles" to prove his case but these "Memoirs" cannot be our Gospels which are not memoirs at all, but various accounts, contradicting each other, of Jesus Christ. The "Apologies" of Justin shatter any statement that the four Gospels were known in his day.

The "fragment" of John mentioned by Mr. Schofield if dated about 130 AD proves that it was certainly written "long after" the supposed date of Jesus. What we are never told is how comes it to have speeches put in the mouth of Jesus thoroughly "Gnostic" in tone, and completely unlike those put into his mouth by the writers named Matthew, Mark, and Luke? Moreover, are we supposed to believe that the Jews listening to them would have really understood them? If they were spoken in Aramaic, the language current in Palestine then—who took them down in that language, and then 100 years later translated them?

Mr. Schofield claims that John was written "about" the year 90 AD, but this is pure speculation. So is the statement that the other "three Gospels are known to be earlier". Nobody knows anything whatever about their *origin*. Personally, I have long come to the conclusion that John was probably the first Gospel which few people then understood, while Mark is the latest, written in an attempt to make Jesus more of a human being.

Naturally, Mr. Schofield works in Acts and the Epistles of Paul as "contemporary"—more or less—"with the things they affirm"—which, in these days of Biblical criticism, must cause a roar of laughter among real Christian scholars. Acts is sheer *fiction*. Nobody knows when it was written and, though it is claimed that its writer was Luke, as we do not know who this Luke was and, as it is almost certain whoever the writer was, that it is, like the Gospel of Luke itself, late second century, Acts does *not* describe contemporary events. It was probably written to harmonise the quarrelling Petrine and Pauline factions of the Church, and bring "unity" into an otherwise discordant Christianity. Moreover, it completely contradicts many things dealt with in the Epistles of Paul.

Noting all this, it will not surprise any observant reader that Mr. Schofield then drags in Josephus, "the celebrated Jewish historian", to prove that he mentions Jesus as "the Christ", that is, the Messiah, which of course no orthodox Jew (as Josephus was) could possibly have written. The passage is a flagrant *forgery*, but it never pays a journalist to say so for it might cause readers to question his other statements. Not only is it because Josephus was a Jew that he could not have written what is now generally admitted as a gross forgery, but nowhere else does the historian mention anything whatever about the first Christians. He says nothing about the twelve Apostles, nothing about Peter and Paul, nothing about the wholesale

conversions of Jews to Christianity. None of the miraculous marvels narrated in Acts are even hinted at. No wonder our learned Christian historians turn away from Josephus in disgust.

But there remains for Mr. Schofield the wondrous "mystery of the empty tomb". I hope to deal with this in my next article.

(To be concluded)

"Under the Tree of Life a Stone . . ."

By OSWELL BLAKESTON

"ONCE I SUPPOSE, they had a gardener; and he used to dust the petrified tree and the stone flowers."

Gay tried to play her part. "It's better like this, Charles. A fossil garden ought to be neglected. How did you know it would be here?"

He was pleased, for he understood that she implied, "But then you always do". His wife, Una, wrote poems; but he said that he lived them. It was his gift; and it was his bond with Gay—his nose for strange places. His sermons were dull; but then he confessed that he didn't take his sermons very seriously. It was when he could slip away with his lady sacristan that he came alive and found more than a sermon in a garden of stones.

Who else but this strange clergyman would have suggested an expedition to Portland Island as "a journey in a sputnik"? One thought of the famous lighthouse and the Pulpit Rock and the bathers' huts and the Admiralty's secret station surrounded by a wire fence and notices saying: "Police Dogs At Work" and officers in mufti talking secrets in loud uniform voices. But that wasn't the Reverend Charles Peter's Portland.

He'd sensed the necropolis of stone and rubble and rusty cranes, the surrealist landscape, off the tourist track, left by the individual quarrymen who have paid yearly taxes of a farthing notched off on a reeve's stick.

They walked through the village with its exceptionally wide street and large square; and they went into a little pub with a large skittle alley where the landlord told them about the Portland sheep, a special breed now extinct, and about the wild goats which were still on the island. One might not see the goats he said, but suddenly you might smell them.

Charles beamed, and turned to Gay as if to say, "Aren't you glad we came?"

"But look out," the landlord said, "you must never say 'rabbits'."

He could speak when others couldn't, he told them, because he was a "kimberlin", a foreigner, although he had lived on the island all his life. But his father had come from the mainland to what had been named The Island of Slingers, and the inbred community had flung stones at the stranger's back. "Come on, man, pierce the white stone", the old people said; and if your name wasn't among the Pierces or the Whites or the Stones, you were a foreigner.

"But the rabbits." Charles said, "you were talking about the rabbits."

That was a fact, the landlord admitted. Even the rationing authorities during the war had to respect the taboo of the old people and speak of "underground mutton". No, it wasn't witchcraft. It wasn't a business of people turning themselves into rabbits as some country people used to turn themselves into hares, or so they said. It was simply that rabbits burrowing mocked the activities of the quarrymen who worked on their own. Ironically, the island had escaped the myxomatosis.

"All you have to do is to turn a corner," Charles murmured contentedly, "and you're in a foreign country." He meant, "If you can sense the way, and leave off your

dog collar, and take your lady sacristan on the spree."

They went to the local museum, to the cottage which Hardy had made famous as the home of Avice, the heroine of the *The Well-Beloved*, and which Dr. Marie Stopes had bought and presented to the island. And Charles did not pause to look at the Roman skulls mounted on perches, the prehistoric bones and coins which had been turned up when men burrowed like rabbits in the ground. He went, as if by instinct, straight to the boots made of stone.

"Look," he said, "the label says a convict made them to pass the time."

There was also a tile which had fallen off the prison roof and which had been seized by a forger and embellished with a scratched design of amazing intricacy.

They left the museum and strolled out into the fine afternoon, for the rock on which they walked thrusts out into the South and rakes the sun for early crops. Cottages had the beautiful colour of Portland stone, and the fields were cultivated in strips for families could not break up the small estates and inherited land in "undivided shares", a younger son owning an undivided fifth of an undivided seventh of a small field, a strip which the island laws decreed that he could not sell separately from the family heritage . . .

They had tea at the hotel where they booked a room for the night. It was an eighteenth century castellated mansion built by George III for John Penn, military governor of the island, who named it after the American colony founded by his grandfather. The lounge was a circular turret room; and the terrace hovered over a cove guarded by another castle, a genuine bow-and-arrow ruin.

Charles said gleefully, "It couldn't be nicer, Gay, really it couldn't be nicer, could it?"

After tea, he was still ready for adventure; and he insisted that they explore the cliff path, beyond Rufus Castle. So, from the cliff rim, they looked down at the old railway lines which skirted the island's seaweed. Ahead, in the setting sun, was The Borstal Institute (the old prison), surrounded with ornate parterres and clipped bushes.

"It must give the boys something to do," Charles said airily, as if the event of a prison like a palace was the least of his discoveries.

They walked on in the Dali-esque world, till the rough track plunged down before the old barracks, The Verne Prison, the great moat, the tiny drawbridge, the grim castle; and, tired as she was, Gay caught her breath.

Then they fell down the road to the bay, and a perfect little smugglers' pub where, in a storm, the bottles were washed from the shelves. The place had been owned by the same family for 250 years, and the landlord mentioned that there were two tiers of cellars to deceive the excise men.

Charles began to talk about trap-doors in the mind.

They caught the bus back. The Gothic doorway of the hotel was outlined in silver against the golden flood lighting. But there was a telegram for Charles: Una had slipped on the stairs and had broken her hip.

"But Charles," Gay exclaimed in shock, "how did she

know where to find you? I thought you told her you were visiting your brother's parish?"

"Oh," he said distractedly, "I'll have to go to her . . . You know how journalists can get hold of a story. I must stop any scandal."

And suddenly Gay knew the truth. It was as if she had smelt the wild goats without seeing them. Charles had been to Portland before—with Una. Una was the poetess who discovered the frissons. With Gay, Charles simply claimed the credit so that someone would look up to him. So much for her undivided share of Charles!

She told him to go alone.

Oh, she cried to herself, my heart is ready for the petrified garden.

She sat, a prisoner in the lonely bedroom, writing a final letter to Charles. Finally, she tore it up. Instead she sent to the priest a rather shaky drawing of the thing that must not be mentioned—a rabbit.

THEATRE

"Altona"

THIS IS A TERRIBLE, and terribly important play. How dare anyone condemn the remilitarisation of Germany? How dare anyone even write a play of "commitment"? The answer in each case is, only Jean-Paul Sartre dare do it. Had an Englishman tried we should have heard the same old cry from (most of) the critics that art and propaganda don't mix (the truth being they don't like the kind of propaganda). We have heard it from a few of them about *Altona*, but they can be ignored, and the public in fact is ignoring them and packing the Royal Court Theatre, London, where Sartre has mixed art and propaganda superbly and given us a momentous three hours or more—three hours that grip our bodies and disturb our minds.

The National Anthem no sooner over than we are in another, the German, and the curtain rises on the home of the von Gerlachs, rich shipbuilders who supplied Hitler and have now had their corporation revived by the Americans. The father is dying of cancer and is handing over to his younger son. But the elder son, Franz, mad and self-confined upstairs for 14 years becomes the central figure as the play proceeds. He has fought for Germany, killed and tortured for her; he still worships her, believing she is beaten and in ruins. The shock of learning she is prosperous is too much for him. He quits his cell for ever. But his place there is taken by his incestuous sister.

Sartre hopes to shock us: to shake us out of our lethargy, not merely over the rearming of Germany, but over the whole atrocious society in which we live. Franz is guilty, yes; Germany is guilty; but who is not guilty. "Have they never raped and pillaged?" asks Franz. "Did we drop the bomb on Hiroshima?" At least he is aware of his guilt but, as he remarks when he sees his father for the first time for 14 years, "you haven't changed".

The von Gerlachs haven't changed. It is too much to expect them to change. The vital question is, have we changed? It is the great merit of *Altona* that it compels us to ask that question after stirring the very marrow of our bones. Kenneth Haigh gives a stupendous acting performance as Franz, and it is a touch of Sartrean genius that this man who has "taken the century on my shoulders" should ask his fateful final question in absence: what are we doing about it? As Sartre says, "He who does not do everything does nothing". C.McC.

CORRESPONDENCE

MRA

Frank Maitland's contribution "Buchman's Way For Britain" came very aptly, as many places are now being inflicted with the MRA film "The Crowning Experience" with all its attendant publicity. Thousands of full colour leaflets were distributed in Mansfield, where I live, and secretaries of voluntary organisations were canvassed to attend the Mansfield Premiere! Out of curiosity a friend and I decided to see the film, and we were met in the foyer of the cinema by a bevy of extremely attractive girls (which considerably brightened proceedings) vending souvenir booklets at 2s. 6d. The audience, by contrast, was composed almost entirely of middle-aged women. I found the film itself insufferably tedious. It followed the usual revivalist pattern, and I had the greatest difficulty in keeping awake. Give me Jayne Mansfield every time, and not just on grounds of civic pride.

R. MANN.

RITUAL SLAUGHTER

It would be a poor sort of man, and no sort of freethinker what-

soever, who would add even the minutest propaganda to the considerable amount forever being levelled against the Jewish people. But as a freethinker abroad, who has been kept in touch with the movement through the goodness of my old friend, Fred Hornibrook, and his good offices in sending me the paper regularly, I feel that I must write to thank you for publishing Roland Denyer's piece on "Ritual Slaughter", just to hand although over two months old. During a time when the eyes of the world once again are being focused on the Jewish people through the trial of Eichmann; when once again the vilest sort of tortures heaped upon a whole people are being exposed; during a period when even the mental defective voices of home grown fascists have been temporarily silenced, if not entirely chastened, by the enormity of the crimes again publicised through the trial of yet another nazi criminal, it ill behoves any persecuted minority to continue to practise ritual slaughter. If the RSPCA insists upon making an exception of those who are cruel to any living thing—four legged or two legged animals—because it might interfere with an exceptionally barbaric aspect of a religion, then let those progressive MP's of Jewish origin band together in attempting to bring pressure to bear upon those members of Jewry who, although alive to the cries of their helpless compatriots throughout the world, would appear to be oblivious to the squeals of millions of beasts of burden. Mr. Denyer's article has served a useful purpose in reminding us of the obvious, which because of its universal acceptance is all too easily forgotten. One thing is certain: where cruelty is, no good can ever flourish. The good (and progressive) Jew must state the truism loudly and clearly and, if necessary, restate it in thunderous terms to the most primitive sections of the Jewish religion.

PETER COTES (Australia).

"RACES?"

If Mr. Kingston considers any "gentile" ethnical group in segregation—Maltese, Cypriots, Scotsmen, Spaniards, Irish—he will find that they all have developed and are maintaining their peculiar facial expressions and other idiosyncrasies as a result of centuries of inbreeding. This does not betray "their origin", but their surroundings (voluntary or otherwise, e.g. religious apartheid), the whale has the appearance of a big fish, yet he never originated from fish.

I can recognise Irish from afar; does this mean they are a "race" apart.

O. WOLFGANG.

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