

# The Freethinker

Volume LXXXI—No. 21

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Sixpence

LET ME BEGIN by making it clear that I do not remember any events which happened eighty years ago. But the fact remains that this journal of ours, which has always attracted a loyal and devoted band of readers, published its first number in May 1881—not as a weekly but as a monthly, and was a success from its first number.

It had on its front page the name of G. W. Foote as the Editor, and this was one reason why the paper immediately "took on". For Foote, though only thirty-one years of age, had already made a considerable mark on the Freethought of his day as a splendid speaker, a formidable debater, a brilliant writer, as well as possessing literary gifts and scholarship shared by few other contemporary Freethinkers.

## The Freethinker's Beginnings

The genesis of the Freethinker is perhaps not so well known. Actually it was thought at the time by many Freethinkers that there was room for a journal which where necessary could be lively and humorous, and should always be backed up by sound scholarship. The man they had in mind was not, curiously enough, Foote, but Joseph Symes, an ex-Methodist minister who had the qualifications in no small measure, but was at the time unable to come to London. He was a fearless debater, and some of his very able pamphlets—like *Blows at the Bible*—can be read with interest even at this day. He went to Australia, however, in 1883 and there continued a very vigorous campaign against Christianity in his journal, *The Liberator*. Symes died in 1906 soon after his return to this country.

Foote had already helped in editing a couple of journals, but for one reason or another he did not get on well with his co-editors—Charles Watts and George Jacob Holyoake. His great friend was Joseph Mazzini Wheeler with whom he shared a deep love for literature. Wheeler was never happier than when exploring the highways and byways of the many curious books in the British Museum as may be seen in the old volumes of THE FREETHINKER. Readers who have his *Frauds and Follies of the Fathers*, *Footsteps of the Past*, and *Crimes of Christianity* (this was written by Foote as well), and particularly his *Biographical Dictionary of Freethinkers* will appreciate his very wide reading. Wheeler's frail health resulted in a breakdown, and comparatively early death in 1898.

## A Penny Monthly

THE FREETHINKER in May 1881 was wonderful value for one penny, though it could never have done more than pay its way, if that. It could never have provided Foote with an income. It had eight large pages, and besides a striking editorial had over two columns of "Acid Drops" and a column of "Sugar Plums" both features still continued though not under those titles. There are some excellent articles as well, and two reviews. One gives Foote's (or Wheeler's) estimate of the famous lecture by Colonel Ingersoll, *What Must I do to be Saved?* and the other, of a reprint of a scarce work by "an Indian

Officer" entitled *The True Source of Christianity*—a work which nobody could appreciate better than Wheeler.

But readers of this first editorial even now would be particularly intrigued for it deals with a subject very much to the fore at this moment. Like Mr. Wedgwood Benn (or Lord Stansgate) who was properly elected for Parliament the other day by a big majority, so was Charles Bradlaugh in 1880 for Northampton. Vigorously protesting that he did not believe in God, and therefore asking leave to affirm instead of taking the oath, Bradlaugh said he was ready to take it if that was the law. He was however refused, and later entering the House of Commons in spite of that,

he was brutally ejected by the police. The whole sorry story is given in detail by John M. Robertson in the second part of *Charles Bradlaugh, A Record of His Life and Work* by his daughter Hypatia Bradlaugh Bonner; and I think that in the whole of the annals of Parliament, there is not one incident which can make us feel so ashamed of both Liberals and Tories as this impudent ejection. Indeed, so ashamed was the House later of what happened at its request, that on his deathbed Bradlaugh knew that the old motions excluding him were to be expunged from its records. It may surprise some readers here that it was a Liberal government which expelled him, and a newly-elected Conservative government which allowed him to take his seat, oath and all. Bradlaugh became one of the best members of the House, admired by both Parties for his courage and sincerity.

## A Topical Editorial

When Foote wrote his first editorial for his paper, Bradlaugh had not been forcibly and brutally ejected from Parliament; he might well have written something which expressed the disgust and indignation we all feel now that a man who was freely elected as a Member of Parliament should have been subjected for six years to the howls of the followers of "gentle Jesus" when he tried to take his seat. As it was, Foote agreed that if an elected person was obliged by law to take the oath of allegiance, then he had to do it if he wished to enter Parliament. Bradlaugh's Oaths Act which allowed anybody to affirm wherever an oath was previously required, settled the problem once for all; but, as Foote showed, though "the Parliamentary oath has been so whittled down that anybody with any kind of God may take it", it still "is simply a relic of the tyrannous imposition of a dominant creed, and is upheld chiefly by those who represent in the present the worst traditions of the past". He saw nothing "degrading" in taking the oath for Bradlaugh "considers the oath unmeaning", but the old oath was "a degrading formality" with its "on the true faith of a Christian".

## Intolerable

Mr. Wedgwood Benn has not the religious issue to face, but I think Foote would have been wholly on his side. It is intolerable, and Parliament must be shown that it is, that a fully elected citizen of this country cannot

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

## Our Eightieth Year

By H. CUTNER

take his seat because of some antiquated law about the "nobility". Whether we need "Lords" or not can be argued without descending into the—more or less—drivel about the rights of the "aristocracy" formulated centuries ago. Bradlaugh put up a terrific fight and won. Let us hope Mr. Benn will fight as well, and take his seat.

Foote's penny-a-month paper had such a wonderful success that from September 4th, 1881, he turned it into a weekly with some of the "blasphemous" illustrations used by Leo Taxil for his *La Bible Amusante* in every issue. These and some of the articles caused—as I think Foote knew they would cause—a lot of trouble. In the number dated July 6th, 1882, is the heading "Prosecuted for Blasphemy" with Foote's editorial "At last". But this is a long story though it deserves to be told and retold until the infamous Blasphemy Laws are wiped off the

statute books. The one question which their upholders never answer is—how can a man "blaspheme" against a non-existing deity? The prison and the stake are no answer. But note how anyone is allowed to "blaspheme" against Jupiter, for example, as much as he likes. Why? Simply because Jupiter is "non-existent"—a myth. So is "Jehovah".

THE FREETHINKER has always fulfilled its first editor's expectations. It was (and is) lively, humorous, sarcastic, and provoking. Foote made it talked about. Our modern readers all hope, we are sure that it will continue to do the same, to make people think, to oppose the pretensions of all religions, and to keep the flag of truth ever aloft. After eighty years, its objective has never been more necessary and so hard to achieve in the face of such powerful opposition. Yet we *shall win!*

## Unity of Christian Spirit

Report on the House of Lords Debate, May 10th, 1961

By FRANK MAITLAND

THE EARL OF ARRAN moved in the House of Lords:

"That this House welcomes the recent consultation between leaders of the Christian Churches and trusts that this will lead to a greater unity of Christian spirit."

There ensued a long and spirited, rather than spiritual, debate, in which the Archbishop of Canterbury spoke.

"My Lords," said the Earl of Arran, more or less epitomising his own position, "it is rather a dreadful thing that 1,000 years and more after the birth of Our Lord, we Christians are still not united, even in spirit."

The Bishop of Southwell, who followed, seemed to be rather oppressed by the materialist conception of history.

"We all inherit today a situation which has been handed to us by history—a situation which we did not create and for which we are not responsible, any more than we are responsible for our own inheritance or our Constitution. It is just the material that life hands to us. We have inherited a certain religious situation handed down to us by history, which we cannot ignore, which we cannot by-pass."

After this excellent recognition of historic reality, the Bishop expressed the belief that "the whole atmosphere is changing fast", and he pointed to a fact of significance on the question of unity, that "The impetus towards Christian unity came to the Western Churches . . . primarily from the mission field," although he did not explain what significance this had for us.

Viscount Alexander was next. An enthusiastic Baptist, Lord Alexander reminded the Lords that the Christian religion was founded on the Scriptures, that Britain was a Protestant Country, that the Church of England was a Protestant Church (this brought a pained cry from the Archbishop of Canterbury, who wanted to be regarded as much Catholic as Protestant) and that the Pope still insisted on being the infallible Head of All Christendom.

Lord Alexander reminded the Archbishop of this:

"The Archbishop knows that we stated our case to him when we met him before he went [on his journey to Rome], and he knows that he assured us of two things, which we gladly accepted. The first was that he was going only on a visit of courtesy. The second thing we gladly accepted was that he was a Protestant, had always been a Protestant, and had defended Protestantism. These were his words to us in the course of our discussion at Lambeth Palace."

This brought the immediate interruption from the Archbishop:

" . . . while that is the truth, it is not the whole truth and nothing but the truth . . . I happen to be both a Catholic and Protestant."

To which, Lord Alexander stoutly replied:

"It all depends on what you mean by a Catholic, does it not? But if you are first a Protestant, it should be a Protestant view of a Catholic, should it not?"

The Archbishop found nothing better to say to that than—  
"I am sorry, but that is my view."

After Lord Alexander had quoted Boniface VII:

"We declare, affirm, define and pronounce it to be necessary to salvation for every human creature to be subject to the Roman Pontiff."

and had roundly begun to challenge the Archbishop of Canterbury,

"If the Archbishop would . . . say openly that what he is bent upon is the reform of Rome—"

he was interrupted by Canterbury, who declared:

"what I am out for is the reform of every Church including Rome."

These dialectics brought the tart rejoinder from Lord Alexander:

"Yes, I know; I wish I could be equally clever in such verbal replies as that."

The Archbishop then took refuge in piety, in that sacerdotal piety into which he no doubt hoped that Lord Alexander could not follow, ardent Bible expositor though he is.

"But that is my profound belief for which I pray and work all my time."

But Lord Alexander persisted:

"All I have to say on that is this: that this was the Pope's view, expressed openly to that great 500,000 strong Congress in Munich only last August, and I am quite sure that he believes it today."

Lord Alexander got the better in that argument. When he went on to remind the Lords of the millions which Mussolini gave the Pope to obtain the Lateran Treaty of 1929 and the Papal blessing on the troops going to Ethiopia, this brought a protest from the Earl of Arran about the "great distress" he was causing. Lord Arran asked him to leave out "the political side". But the Protestant warrior again proceeded to cross swords with the Archbishop, by reading out the Queen's Oath to uphold the Protestant religion and the Protestant succession. It ended in the Archbishop refusing to argue the question of Catholic or Protestant, or Catholic and Protestant, in the Lords.

Lord Ferrier continued, quoting from the speech of Sir Thomas Taylor, Principal of Aberdeen University, at the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland's celebration of the Quater-centenary of the Reformation, in which the Principal said:

" . . . we repudiate the Mass and the Mariolatry whether in their Roman Catholic or Anglo-Catholic or Scoto-Catholic forms."

(Continued on page 167)

# The Ways of God

By G. W. FOOTE

"And justify the ways of God to men."—MILTON.

WE WOULD take off our hat to John Milton the poet, we would take off our hat twice to John Milton the stylist, but we would not touch the brim of our hat to John Milton the theologian. If the truth must be told, Milton the theologian was a colossal joke. Not only did he make God Almighty quibble like a school divine; he utterly failed to carry out the promise of the last line in the stately exordium of *Paradise Lost*. He did *not* justify the ways of God to men. He left them as unjustified as ever. Nay, he capped the mystery of evil, as illustrated in the story of the fall of Adam and Eve, with a monstrous piece of farce by making Satan tell all the devils in hell that he had actually seduced this wonderful pair, the last consummate work of God's, with *an apple!* It was enough to make the proud chief of Pandemonium laugh, and powerfully excite the risibility of every other denizen of the establishment. With a mere pippin he had played ducks and drakes with creation, frustrated the designs of Providence, and spoiled the vast six-days' effort which had taxed the energies of the Omnipotent. Yes, it was not only a joke, but the joke of jokes. Nothing could equal it. Hardly anything could come within measurable distance of it. A single stroke achieved the very perfection of low comedy.

Where the great John Milton failed, we do not see how smaller men can hope to succeed. And let not these smaller men (by the way) feel hurt at being told that they are smaller. It is no disgrace to them to stand in the shadow of such loftiness.

The Rev. Charles Voysey, therefore, will understand us as not wishing to insult him. This gentleman sends us a printed copy of the sermon he preached at the Theistic Church on Sunday, January 31st [1904], in reply to our article in THE FREETHINKER of January 10th on "God at Chicago". With it he sends us a note, hoping it "will be found a courteous criticism". Yes, it is courteous enough, and we trust that our answer will be no less so in Mr. Voysey's estimation.

Mr. Voysey, although a Theist, who came out of the Great Lying Church a good many years ago, appears still to preach from Bible texts; and the one he selects for this sermon is "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?" No doubt this text is striking and convincing to a believer, but how can it be expected to make any impression on an unbeliever? Judges and justice are not always inseparably associated; moreover, it is not so much the judge as the ruler of the world whose "ways" are under consideration; and, in any case, a general question is no reply to a definite argument.

But let us come to what Mr. Voysey himself has to say. He starts by taking Atheism as involving Pessimism. Is he, however, correct in this? Most of the Atheists we have known were neither Pessimists nor Optimists, but Meliorists. They thought it possible that the world might be improved. This is a modest creed, but it has the advantage of practicality.

Mr. Voysey's definition of Pessimism is peculiar. He regards it as "that state of mind and feeling in which one looks upon the sorrows and sufferings of the world as proofs of the negligence, impotence, or malignity of the Creator". And he says that he is ambitious to "suggest to the Pessimist that he stands in need of more and deeper thinking".

While not accepting this definition of Pessimism—which really has no necessary relation to theology—we may cheerfully admit that the Pessimist (if Mr. Voysey will continue to think us one) stands in need of more and deeper thinking; only we happen to believe that this need is quite universal, and ought to be universally felt.

Mr. Voysey instances our article on the "dreadful catastrophe at Chicago" as a specimen of the "dogmas of Pessimism". He quotes, fairly enough, a passage from the article, ending with our invitation to our readers to follow the details of the catastrophe with their imaginations. "Then follow the details", he says, "painted with a master hand, too horrible and heart-rending to be repeated here".

Why did Mr. Voysey find those details—which, after all, could have been but a shadow of the grim reality—too horrible and heart-rending to be repeated before his congregation? Was he afraid of the facts? He ought not to have been, because his argument is that these facts, and all other such facts, are proofs of God's goodness, if you only view them in the right light. Is not his shrinking from the facts tantamount to a mistrust of his theory?

Mr. Voysey takes the position that the fire at the Iroquois Theatre was due to natural causes; there were faults in the structure, defects in the management, and panic fear on the part of the audience so that "the catastrophe could not be averted without a miracle" and the question at the finish is whether miracles would or would not be part of a wise dispensation. Mr. Voysey argues that they would *not* be. But he must admit that the vast majority of religious people, including Christians *do* believe in miracles, and ask for one every time they pray.

"Which is best for mankind," Mr. Voysey asks, "to have certainty or uncertainty in the operation of natural laws?" This question admits of only one answer. But what has the Theist to do with *natural* laws? His theory is that there is no such thing. He holds that all which happens is really the act of God. He also claims that God has infinite power, wisdom, and goodness. He is therefore bound to meet the sceptic's objections based upon the wide and continuous existence of evil. It is no answer to say that a specified change might only make things worse. Some other change might make them better. And, according to the definition, God knows how to do it, if it can be done. If he cannot do it, he fails in omnipotence, if he does not know how to do it, he fails in omniscience. That is to say, he ceases to be God. Unless, indeed, you argue that God is a limited being, bounded by other existences, and limited by other powers; and that what he does, wretched as it so often is, is the best he is able to do in the circumstances.

Mr. Voysey will pardon us, perhaps, for reminding him of the truth which Newman stated so logically and fearlessly, that the great difficulty, after all, to the Theist is not why evil continues, but why it ever began. Here, as in so many other instances, it is only the first step that costs. When all is said and done, the theologian faces a "mystery". That mystery is simply a contradiction between his theory and the facts. He has always to fall back upon faith. We must trust in God now, he says, and the explanation must be left to some future, and perhaps far-off, revelation of his Providence.

This is really what Mr. Voysey does. He confesses that "if there be no future life after all is over in this life"

(Concluded on next page)

## This Believing World

The recent Exhibition of Christian Books at St. Martin's-in-the-Fields Church in Trafalgar Square must have shown thousands of works and pamphlets which no Christian, however great his faith, could possibly hope to read in a dozen lifetimes. Every possible aspect of Christianity must have been touched upon; and it may well be, that the same number of *new books* could no doubt be produced in the next decade, with the hope that some of them will appeal just as much to wavering Christians. Those already caught in the mesh have no need of any books—except the Bible perhaps, and heaps of Faith.

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With one exception we did not see a single “anti-Christian work—not even a direct reply to any. There these Christian books were, set out to the glory of God and Jesus, and not even a vague smell of heresy among them. As far as this Exhibition was concerned, there were no infidels, no Freethinkers, not even anti-Christian Humanists alive. It was both amazing and amusing, for indeed Christians fear nothing so much as a sturdy and uncompromising Freethought.

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The one exception we noticed was Albert Schweitzer's *Quest of the Historical Jesus*. No writer more than Schweitzer has shown such contempt for the various “lives” and “biographies” of Jesus which have appeared since Reimarus tried his hand at one in the eighteenth century; and though he believed that there was a Jesus, all we know of him is that he was a religious enthusiast who believed in “eschatology”, in the “final judgment” after death, and that is about all. Schweitzer's Jesus is as far away from the Christian Jesus as is the Talmudic Jesus Ben Pandira. Which is why the famous *Quest* is shunned by nearly all good Christians.

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The thirty or forty “wives” of Brigham Young, the venerated Mormon of last century, who left (we believe) nearly 100 children to carry on the great work, made that very religious Christian heartily disliked by most other Christians, even if envy had nothing to do with it. We note that at least one modern Hot Gospeller, Mr. Eric Smith, who has had a half page in the *News of the World* (May 7th), devoted to publicising his latest spiritual and amorous activities, has still a long way to go before emulating Brigham for, so far, he has only four “wives” and the first babe is yet to come. Mr. Smith's brand of Christianity is called the Full Revival and Healing Crusade, one of the principles of which is Polygamy, though he claims that “sex plays only a small part in our community life”.

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What Mr. Smith firmly believes is that “the man must be head of the household”, and that God “was right in many instances in giving more than one woman to one man”. Here is proof then that the Almighty has made at least one convert in this Hot Gospeller whose four wives heartily agree with him. Needless to add, Mr. Smith's “legal” wife is “estranged” from him, and has difficulty in getting her maintenance allowance. This was one of the difficulties the Lord did not reckon about when he advocated or supported polygamy.

—NEXT WEEK—

THE NEW ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY

By F. A. RIDLEY

## ALSO 80

THE FREETHINKER is not alone in celebrating its 80th Birthday this month. So too does the President of Glasgow Secular Society, Robert M. Hamilton. Still active in the Freethought and Co-operative movements. Bob Hamilton is a survivor of the Siege of Ladysmith. He was a drummer in the Gordon Highlanders at the time of the siege, which lasted 119 days, and the regiment existed on quarter rations—one biscuit per day, and soup made from horseflesh. Mr. Hamilton was wounded at the Battle of Elandsлагте and, after recovering from his wound and surviving the siege, he was given only 10 years to live. In his latest letter to us he characteristically says he “ain't done livin' yet”, and we are sure he is right.

## NEW SOUTH AFRICAN CONSTITUTION

THE FOLLOWING LETTER was addressed by the Chairman on behalf of the Rationalist Association of South Africa to a number of leading South African newspapers:

“Religious intolerance is shown in the revised Constitution Bill. Section 52 amends section 54 of the original Bill where the oath of allegiance which new MPs must take is set out. The original Bill followed the existing Constitution, which provides for an affirmation by a member who, not believing in God, cannot conscientiously say ‘So help me God’. This alternative has now been deleted by the Select Committee.

“We hope that some MP whatever his own religious faith, will ask why this has been done.

“For the past century, ever since Charles Bradlaugh's struggle with the House of Commons, the right of an atheist or agnostic to sit in Parliament has never been challenged. It has never been contested in our country since Union, and we suppose that it must have existed in the old Cape legislature.

“Why is this right about to be abolished now? We suspect that this is a petty attempt to encourage intolerance in the sphere of religious belief.

“Oddly enough, both the original and the revised Bills expressly allow the President of the Republic, on taking office, to make a solemn affirmation if he objects on religious grounds to the taking of the oath. Are we to assume that the President may be an atheist but that freethinkers will be excluded from Parliament?”

## THE WAYS OF GOD

(Concluded from page 163)

our “charge against the negligence or malignity of the Creator has been confirmed”. It is in the fact that we are “immortal souls, destined for endless mental, moral and spiritual life and progress” that we “get the clue to solve the mysteries of Pain, Death, and Sin”. Thus it is evident that Mr. Voysey's theology is as much an “act of faith” as that of the ordinary Protestant or the most superstitious Roman Catholic.

It is always a case of “wait till the clouds roll by”. But they never do roll by. The problem of evil is still just what it was in the dawn of human thought. Once it was said that the millennium would come upon earth, that the golden age would be renewed, or that the Saviour would return to inaugurate the reign of peace, justice, and happiness. But these are now recognised as dreams. Yet faith bids us wait on; there is still to be a sweet by-and-by, if not in this world, then in the world to come. The unknown is to explain the known; the future is to explain the present. Ah, but the answer lies in the words of poor Ophelia—“We know what we are, we know not what we may be”.

# 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.

### 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. (Platt Fields), Sundays, 3 p.m.: Messrs. C. SMITH and G. A. WOODCOCK.

Marble Arch N.S.S. (Marble Arch), Sundays, 12 noon: MESSRS. F. A. RIDLEY, D. H. TRIBE, C. H. CLEAVER and G. F. BOND. Sundays, from 4 p.m.: MESSRS. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER, C. E. WOOD and D. H. TRIBE.

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

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1), Sunday, May 28th, 11 a.m.: ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON, M.A., "Is there a Philosophy of History?"

## Notes and News

THIS WEEK we celebrate the eightieth birthday of our paper, and it is fitting that Herbert Cutner who, as all our readers know, is also 80 years of age, should contribute Views and Opinions on this occasion of which we are justly proud. It is equally fitting that newcomers to THE FREETHINKER should have the opportunity to become acquainted with the writing of its founder, George William Foote. In this issue we are reprinting "The Ways of God" from February 14th, 1904, and next week "Capital Letters" from February 21st, 1904 (the dating then was on the Sunday). We thus have two successive front-page articles (chosen virtually at random) appearing without alteration in two successive issues over half-a-century later, and it is a tribute to Foote that only contemporary references date them: their points are, we maintain, as valid today as when they were written. Anyway, we are prepared to take our stand alongside Foote and challenge any Theist to answer "The Ways of God".

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BECAUSE IT HAS a few coloured Bishops and because it accepts integration where it is the accepted practice, there is a tendency to regard the Roman Catholic Church as a fearless pioneer in the field of race relationships, a tendency that may be fostered by selected quotations from the more advanced clergy. This is a mistake to which progressive papers are prone and it was a change to find Anthony Howard saying in the *New Statesman* (12/5/61) that "the most important religious denomination in the

State of Louisiana, the Roman Catholic Church, incongruously behaved here with a craven cowardice—altering its position from an original statement that it would begin parochial schools desegregation 'no later than' the public schools, through 'only when public school integration has been effectively carried out', to its latest quiescent cry that it would move in its own good time 'when it is deemed prudent and advisable'."

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EVEN MR. HOWARD inserted that quite unjustified "incongruously", and he ended his article on "The Battle of New Orleans" with some remarks by a "pro-integrationist priest", albeit a beleaguered, isolated" one; but he helped to correct the popular view. We go a little further and ask: would it not be a wonderful example if the "most important religious denomination in the State of Louisiana" led the way in integration? The answer is obvious, but we know from past experience that the hope is vain. Somehow or other though, if only by quoting the "beleaguered, isolated" Jesuit, the Roman Church will contrive to take the credit for integration afterwards.

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CHRISTIAN ACTION, whose Chairman is Canon L. J. Collins, has principally been concerned with the fight against racial intolerance and the colour bar, and in these it has always had our support. We must dissent from it, however, when it asks the Board of Film Censors not to grant a "certificate of any kind" to the film version of *Lolita* (*The Guardian*, 13/5/61). We were not over impressed by the book we shall probably not go to see the film (even if it gets a certificate); but we not only object to banning in principle, we consider it almost invariably bad in practice. The present attempt seems particularly so because—as the film's director, Mr. Stanley Kubrick pointed out—Canon Collins has not seen the film. Not that we suspect the Canon's motives: he sincerely believes that the film will have "deleterious effects upon our society" and instances more than 20 cases of rape and assault involving young girls. These, mind you, have occurred already when the film is not yet released. We seem to recall a man murdering several women after seeing *The Ten Commandments*, a film to which no one (as far as we know) raised any objections, but the fact remains that we cannot censor films to suit the behaviour of madmen. We must devise other means of trying to control the latter.

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THE APRIL 1961 issue of the *New Generation* (published by the ILP Young Socialist League) contained a quotation from the last annual report of the New York Civil Defence Commission on what would happen in case of a nuclear attack. "Since there is no way of guaranteeing what our civilian population will do in this emergency", it said, "therefore this problem had better be left in the hands of Almighty God who alone can solve the problems that men create". Trust in God: that is the ultimate logic—or absurdity—of nuclear "strategy".

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CHURCH AUTHORITIES in Britain were "shocked" said the *Sunday Dispatch* (14/5/61) because Ghana has cut religious broadcasting time from one hour and three-quarters to 45 minutes a week. Indeed, a Lambeth Palace spokesman said it was "quite startling" that President Nkrumah, who had received his first education at Roman Catholic missions, should have allowed the cuts. The effect is that, apart from five-minute morning prayers, listeners will hear a 15-minute service in English only once a month. We hope other Commonwealth countries will follow Ghana's "shocking" example.

# Space Travel—Religious and Scientific

By F. A. RIDLEY

AT THE TIME when these lines were written, the Christian World was supposed to make a special point of turning its eyes heavenwards, in order to commemorate that miraculous event, the Ascension of Jesus Christ to heaven as narrated in the Canonical Gospels. Nor does that pious institution, the BBC fail to remind its vast public of its religious duty on this auspicious anniversary. For on Ascension Day, the morning news bulletin in pursuance of its so rarely neglected duty of reminding us that this is indeed a Christian country, usually starts off with a hymn that begins with the arresting affirmation "Thou art gone up on high". For do not the most solemn and authoritative of the Christian Churches all unanimously affirm that Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity, ascended visibly and corporeally in the azure sky (at a date approximately about 30 AD), and then sat down on the throne of Heaven at the right hand of God the Father?

By a rather ironical coincidence, the thoughts of millions, both religious and irreligious, have been turned heavenwards—or at least skywards for several weeks prior to Ascension Day in this year of grace, 1961. For this year will probably go down to history primarily and pre-eminently, as the first year of the Space Age; the first year in which men passed beyond our circumscribed atmosphere into the great open spaces of cosmic magnitude. However, "new times, new manners"; our modern astronauts, Major Gagarin and Commander Shepard, did not continue their flight until they reached "Heaven", but conversely returned safely to earth. In other words, both went "up on high", but not for long. Consequently, the period in 1961 which the Christian Calendar commemorates as the Feast of the Ascension of Jesus Christ is henceforth likely to be recorded in modern scientific calendars as that red-letter date in scientific annals when mankind first burst into outer space. Let us say that with the ascension and safe return of those intrepid pioneer astronauts, Major Yuri Gagarin and Commander Alan Shepard, the "Conflict of Religion with Science" is now extended to space.

So far, it appears indisputable that only these two celestial explorers have safely returned to earth, but long before these gentlemen were ever heard of, religious history records for our instruction the names (and even approximate dates) of several eminent space-men who "shuffled off this mortal coil" and triumphantly completed their journey to a place called "Heaven"; evidently a material place somewhere in the Universe. It appears that all our recorded space-travellers in religious annals, ascended corporeally, i.e. complete with body, parts, and presumably passions, and the list is an impressive one. It began, or so Genesis records, soon after the Creation, with the Hebrew Patriarch, Enoch, "who was not, for God took him". Then come a string of famous names: Elijah, Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, St. Paul, and the Prophet Muhammed. From which imposing list, one may surely reverently deduce that Providence in its ineffable wisdom, wished to keep constantly before mankind the possibility and concurrent desirability of space-travel! For, starting with Enoch, there has been an apostolic succession of space-voyagers throughout the ages; a succession which for the time being at any rate, appears to have culminated in the also corporeal descent of the Virgin Mary to Fatima in the Autumn of 1917. Since that already fairly distant date, no more celestial arrivals from outer space have been recorded, and Gagarin and Shepard do not appear

to have sighted any in the course of their admittedly brief trips into the extra-terrestrial cosmos. Would it be safe to draw the conclusion that as earth moves up, Heaven will henceforth cease to move down?

In the evolution of space-travel (at least in modern times), technique has played a most important part, a fact already emphasised in the columns of THE FREETHINKER by Mr. Jack Gordon. But it has sorrowfully to be confessed that the techniques recorded in the Bible and the Koran appear to be extremely primitive, which, of course, from a certain point of view, only enhances the miraculous nature of the achievement which they record; e.g. Elijah went up in a fiery chariot (which must have soon lost its "fiery" character in the extreme cold of outer space); whereas Muhammed ascended to Paradise on a magnificent Arab stallion, Al-Borah. The noble animal lived up to the reliable reputation of his species for he brought the Prophet back safely to die subsequently in his bed; a feat not so far, accomplished by any of his Christian and Jewish competitors in celestial space travel. Religious history does not, unfortunately, record what, if any, were the technical aids afforded to Enoch, Paul (when that great Saint was "caught up into the Third Heaven") or even the Blessed Virgin Mary in the course of her, by now, fairly numerous ascents to and from Heaven to Lourdes, Fatima, etc. Presumably all the above ascended under their own steam, perhaps with the aid of angelic wings. As for the most illustrious aeronaut of them all, in his divine capacity as the Second Person of the Trinity, and being as such already everywhere, the problem of transport can hardly have been serious. However, one is driven to the profane conclusion that technical evolution played a surprisingly small part in these ever-memorable pioneer flights, which was probably inevitable in a pre-industrial era. As Anatole France has so notably demonstrated, the rate of technical progress in Heaven usually lags some distance behind that of earth. (c.f. Anatole France: *The Revolt of the Angels*, with special reference to military technique.)

We recently learned from the press that a Roman Catholic priest (who I seem to recall hails from Buxton in Derbyshire), has already bought, cash down apparently, a piece of land on the moon with fishing rights included. "The early bird catches the worm", but the reverend purchaser is hardly likely to land his fish on the waterless lunar landscape; at least if he does so, it is likely to be a queer fish! Evidently the race for the lunar stakes is on. However, our modern astronauts, Gagarin and Shepard, have many technical adjuncts denied to Elijah and his celestial colleagues. On the whole, we think that under extra-terrestrial as well as terrestrial, conditions, science is yet again destined to demonstrate its superiority to religion. For while Faith may remove mountains, it has so far failed to do the same with rockets. Since the first balloon went up in the 18th century, mankind has steadily marched—or rather flown—towards the eventual conquest of space. We do not yet know whether Russia or America, Gagarin or Shepard will eventually win the space stakes. But anyway, we are reasonably confident that either would leave Elijah and his "fiery chariot" at the starting post. And the same goes for Enoch, Paul, Muhammed, the BVM and even Jesus Christ. If we do not add old Uncle Tom Cobleigh to this notable list, it is solely because we live in what is still a Christian country

# Unity of Christian Spirit

(Concluded from page 162)

Lord Macdonald followed by saying that the Congregationalists were showing the spirit of Christian unity, but "The trouble is that the Roman Catholic Church is not responding . . . the Non-conformist Churches of the World Council of Churches have done their best to co-operate with the Roman Catholic Church, but it has refused. No amount of spirit is going to get over that difficulty. Before sitting down, Lord Macdonald reminded the Lords that

"Our danger is that we are anxious to Christianise the whole world, but not always so anxious as we might be to Christianise our individual selves."

The Earl of Longford, an ardent convert to Catholicism, told Lord Alexander that

" . . . the great majority of my co-religionists are always supposed to support him and other colleagues in the Labour Party,"

An interesting admission.

" . . . so that the thought of some great social and political gulf yawning between my co-religionists and other citizens of this country is, to me, bunkum."

Lord Longford then proceeded to make fun of Lord Alexander in his wordy and Lordly way. He, too is "clever" in verbal replies, and he reminded the Lords,

" . . . that my Church contains in the whole world something like 500 million people, a good many more than all the other Christian Churches put together . . ."

Who was it that used to speak of God marching with the big battalions? Then Lord Longford said,

"I come here simply as an individual Catholic without any special message from anywhere."

But, despite being without any message from anywhere, Lord Longford declared in the very next sentence:

"His Holiness the Pope is urging us, the Catholic Communion, to fix our gaze with new eagerness on the holy goal of Christian unity . . ."

"But" [he said] "we look upon this process of re-union as the gathering once more of the separated parts into the never-failing unity of the mystical Body of Christ, which has its earthly Head and divinely appointed centre in the Holy See."

Which seems a rather one-sided idea of unity! However,

"I shall not seek to justify that view this afternoon,"

he added immediately, for:

"The position, of course, is well understood by the leaders outside our Communion. They are well aware that it will not, in essentials, be altered."

The Catholic champion then took a side swipe at the critics—and gave a Pioneer Press publication mention in Hansard:

" . . . if you visit the Protestant Truth Society Bookshop in Fleet Street you will be confronted by some virulent anti-Catholic propaganda, or what I would call anti-Catholic propaganda—such titles as *Freedom's Foe—The Vatican*, and so on."

However, Lord Longford, no believer in Prayer and mortification, unlike Lord Alexander, did not rule out a miracle solving the problem. A "miracle—that must not be ruled out—" he hold his Christian hearers.

Viscount Mackintosh, probably unintentionally, capped Lord Alexander's complaint about clever verbal replies by quoting the question put to John Wesley:

"What have we then been disputing about for these 30 years?"

and Wesley's reply,

"I am afraid, about words."

Two other Lords and a Bishop made ordinary speeches and there was a speech from Lord Brabazon, a British Israelite, about the early British Church, which, although interesting, was outside the theme of Christian unity.

Viscount Brentford thought, like Lord Longford, that

unity . . . may well come, sooner or later, by way of a miracle. It may, quite conceivably, come by some united opposition

by the Churches to the materialism of Communism." Which moves me to ask, can it be that Brentford is moving away from the clever verbal work and the miracles to a practical, genuine reason for the present moves towards Christian unity?

The next speaker, Lord Birdwood,

" . . . would only suggest that if an ideology which is based on atheistic materialism is to be answered and overcome, then the Christian Church must reflect that same unity of purpose that, alas! the political state still has to find in terms of social and political problems."

The Bishop of Leicester, in an amusing story, revealed the interesting fact that the Archbishop of Canterbury's visits were not only missions of good will, but involved the handing out of liberal "baksheesh".

" . . . I took a party of people from my diocese to the Holy Land a few weeks after [the Archbishop's visit]: and wherever I went . . . I was always told of the amazing effect of stimulus and friendship that the Archbishop's visit had brought. I had one rather unfortunate experience. I visited a particular community—not a Christian community, but a very ancient religious sect who were telling my party that they badly needed money for a certain object. They said: 'When Archbishop Fisher was here he gave a great sum for this collection, and now that we have the Bishop of Leicester, we are sure that he will give a great sum, too.'"

I agree that it may not be fair to hold this against the Archbishop. After all, when the religious beggars (and none are more insistent than the religious variety) got started, it would have been hard for him to refuse. So that instead of imputing a policy of largesse, perhaps I should commiserate with him as a victim of clerical rapacity.

However, it then came the Archbishop's time to speak, and he declared himself, like the Catholic Lord Longford, to be doing so "without any special message from anywhere".

"I constantly have to tell people" [he said] "especially outside this country, that I am a free agent and can say what I like." The Archbishop, apparently, is free of the Government, of the Pope and of the Church Assembly, of Creeds and of Royal Oaths. His whole speech, which was in fact his valedictory oration as Primate of the Church of England, was designed to show him as a simple, honest Christian, without any conception of political wangling, theological disputation or denominational animosity—as a sort of Christ-like figure who was going about the world simply doing good and feeling good about it.

In reality, the only result that the Archbishop could claim for all his labours was that the Roman Catholic Church was going to send "official observers" to the next meeting of the World Council of Churches. Mind you:

"If it has taken 50 years to get that right, it is, after all, healing a situation which is 400 years old."

Why worry, anyway, the Churches have all eternity in which to work for unity.

Coming to the famous interview with Pope John, the Archbishop said with simplicity:

" . . . I am happy to believe that by my visit to the Pope I helped to create a new friendship between him and myself, and one widely welcomed as inviting far-reaching and fruitful expansion. My visit asked no questions and begged no questions. It was a visit of courtesy, having no purpose but to show forth and to extend those courtesies which properly belong to the Kingdom of God."

And I am irresistibly reminded of Vicky's cartoon in the *New Statesman*, showing the Archbishop and Pope sitting together, relaxed in armchairs, with the caption: "Read any good books lately?"

The rest of the Archbishop's speech was really a sermon

about the efficacy of prayer. All differences will disappear, the Archbishop believes, if we learn to pray together, though how he is going to get the Roman Catholics to pray with Protestants he did not try to explain. Most of his speech must, in fact, be described as a collection of pious platitudes, which concluded with:

"All these barriers which are there are not unbridgeable and are visibly, in this our day, being bridged. It has been going on all my lifetime. It is gathering speed; and unless faith fails us, nothing can stop it."

It would seem that Lord Alexander and Lord Longford are somewhat closer to reality. And the Archbishop, who is so particular about the use of words like "Protestant" and "Catholic", quite forgets that the "faith" which must not fail us and in which he completely depends requires a great deal of explanation. I am sure that "the faith" to the Pope is different from the faith of those "honest and self-respecting Churchman", whom the Archbishop finds "learning how to forget cultural, political, social, ceremonial embarrassments from the past". Yes, the Archbishop of Canterbury is indeed a man of simple faith, if he is not just a simple man.

Winding up the debate, Viscount Hailsham, the Minister of Science, seemed glad to remind the Lords

"... that the affairs of the Church, or the Churches, are not matters for which in modern times Governments have been held responsible to Parliament."

One supposes that the battle for disestablishment has been won. Anyway, Lord Hailsham was not called upon to pontificate on the question of Christian unity or even to sum up the debate. The Lords, therefore, were spared an overdose of clever verbal replies.

So ended the debate on Christian unity.

## THEATRE BEYOND THE FRINGE

I SAW PART of the run-through of the 1960 Edinburgh Festival sensation, *Beyond the Fringe*, before it opened at the Fortune Theatre, London, on May 10th.

How, I wondered, would this semi-academic, satirical entertainment, without scenery, orchestra, dancers, or girls, fare in the West End? Four men, Peter Cook, Jonathan Miller, Alan Bennett, and Dudley Moore, using their own material, one piano, a few props, fewer costumes, and brilliant lighting by John Wyckham, made cracks at Mr. Macmillan, Mr. Cousins, the Third Programme, Royal scalp-hunters, Civil Defence, linguistic philosophers, BBC "Looking Back" programmes, club bores, the "Age of Kings" Shakespearean cycle, hanging, African nationalism, Nelson's last words, cricket, and—horror!—TV vicars.

I shall not easily forget Peter Cook giving a report to the nation by Supermac "just back". Or Dudley Moore moaning a dreadful, high-brow *chanson*. Or Jonathan Miller as a philosopher writhing like a parturient camel while unclarifying the most obvious statements. Or again as a Dockland "Meeting Point" vicar ("Call me Dick, I'm that sort of vicar"), who held rock 'n' roll services every night of the week except Sunday, when the Lord's Day Observance Society closed his doors, and spent the rest of his time jazzing up the lives of the saints and "taking the Divinity out of God".

But my favourite skit was that of an "Epilogue" vicar, played in beautiful dead-pan by Alan Bennett. Clothing the naked text "Esau my brother is a hairy man, but I am a smooth man", with threadbare clichés, greasy home-spun philosophy, and ragged reminiscences, he gave five minutes of the most diverting drivel I've heard in a long time.

And the fashionable First Night audience? Did they gnash their teeth with rage...? They roared their satisfaction!

No mythology seems safe any more.

D. H. TRIBE.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### JOMO KENYATTA

In your Notes and News you state that Mr. A. Fenner Brockway, MP, informed the House of Commons on May 2nd that "there is no evidence whatsoever that Jomo Kenyatta was responsible for the obscene and indecent oaths" in the document this newspaper circulated to Members of Parliament and others.

If Kenyatta was not associated with the oaths it appears somewhat curious that he does not issue a writ for libel against us,

as we have clearly said for some months that he always has been associated with them. That he knows how to issue writs is proved by the fact that he has recently issued one against *The Daily Express* and a noted QC is known to be looking after his interests in this country.

DUNCAN KEITH-SHAW,

Managing Editor, *The New Daily*.

*We can't, of course, answer Mr. Keith-Shaw's point about the libel, but we hold the same view as Mr. Fenner Brockway and Lord Altrincham (The Guardian, 18/5/61) that "there is no proof at all that Kenyatta was responsible for Mau Mau in the sense that Hitler, for instance, was responsible for the concentration camps... and he was in no position to control it when it was reaching its height because he was then a prisoner". We notice that Mr. Keith-Shaw has avoided our point about insufficient documentation and lack of information regarding diffusion.—Ed.*

"OLD NICK"

As Messrs. Roy and Hoddes suggest, there appears to be some etymological obscurity in the origin of the proper (or improper) name "Old Nick", a fact which is incidentally reflected in the conflicting interpretations advanced by your correspondents themselves. However, I do not think that there is much doubt that the popularity of the expression "Old Nick", was due to its association real or alleged, with that Florentine Arch-apostle of the cult of the amoral in political ethics, Niccolò Macchiavelli (1469-1527), author of *The Prince*, etc. In his book, *Macchiavelli and the Elizabethan Drama* (Weimar, 1897), German author. Edward Meyer has traced 395 references to Macchiavelli in Elizabethan drama, mostly in Macchiavelli's supposed capacity as sorcerer and practitioner of Black Magic. The diabolical antecedents of the Florentine amoralist were, so to speak, in the air. I suggest accordingly, that the supposed derivation of "Old Nick" from Macchiavelli is, in his own language, *benvenuto*, even if not rigorously accurate.

F. A. RIDLEY.

## OBITUARY

We regret to report the death of Charles Attfield, for many years—like his wife and son who survive him—a member of North London Branch of the National Secular Society, and a staunch and fearless Freethinker. A Secular Service was conducted by the N.S.S. President, Mr. F. A. Ridley, at St. Mary's-bone Crematorium on May 19th.

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