

The Freethinker

Volume LXXXI—No. 36

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Sixpence

AN ENGLISH TRANSLATION appeared in 1958 of selected writings on the specific subject of religion by those famous ideological pioneers of modern Socialism, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. Naturally, anything coming from the pens of two such eminent men would have an interest of its own, and here, whilst neither Marx nor Engels was a specialist in either the field of comparative religion or in the history of Christianity, yet writing as they did from a sociological rather than any special theological angle, their contributions were often stimulating and sometimes still possess an interest that is more than a merely historical one. Of these famous co-workers in the sociological sphere,

Engels seems to have been more interested, as also more widely read, in the specifically religious sphere, and an essay by him reprinted on the Apocalypse of John (the final book in the New Testament) under the title of "The Book of Revelation" is perhaps the most interesting single item in this composite collection of miscellaneous writings on religion by these two authors so much more famous in other more secular fields and subjects. (Actually the leading Marxist specialist on Christian origins was Engels's erudite pupil, Karl Kautsky, whose book, *The Foundations of Christianity*, is perhaps still the best sociological, as distinct from theological, account ever given of Christian origins.)

The Book of Revelation

The Apocalypse, or Revelation of St. John, is the last book in the now universally accepted Canon of the New Testament. As everyone knows, it is highly allegorical in character and symbolic in language, so much so in fact that some modern wag (was it Bernard Shaw?), has derisively styled the book "John's nightmare"! However, this is not the view of Engels, who contrarily makes the categorical assertion that "instead of being the darkest and most mysterious, it is the simplest and clearest book of the whole New Testament". Engels goes on to state, "that it was written in the year of our era 68 or January 69 and that it is therefore not only the only book of the New Testament the date of which is really fixed, but also the oldest book". He adds the pointed comment, "how Christianity looked in (AD) 68 we can here see as in a mirror". So much for "John's nightmare".

The Number of the Beast

How did Engels arrive at this, at first sight, rather remarkable simplification of this indubitably nightmarish book, the contents of which consist principally of a series of bizarre visions each conducing to a fantastic picture of a strange, and to Western readers, at least, unintelligible world? According to our "higher critic" of this culminating Biblical narrative, the key to these startling "Revelations" (derived according to Engels from Old Testament eschatology, is to be found in one revealing passage. Mysterious in appearance, it proves upon a closer inspection, to give the key to the whole book and enables us to give the almost exact date at which John

sat down on the island of Palmos (in the Aegean Sea), to record one of the strangest "Revelations" that surely it has ever fallen to the lot of even the wildest religious mystic to receive. This key to the whole strange narrative, says Engels, was first effectively turned by a German scholar, Professor Ferdinand Benary, in a course of lectures given at Berlin University in 1841, and it is to be found in the famous passage concerning the Number of the Beast, which at first sight might well appear to the uninitiated reader, to be the most mysterious passage in this so apparently mysterious book.

This passage in chapter 17 verses 8, 9, 10, 11 and 18, runs as follows:—"The

beast that thou sawest was, and is not . . . The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman [i.e. the famous Scarlet Woman—F.A.R.] sitteth. And there are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space. And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven . . . And the woman which thou sawest is the great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth". John says (13, 18) that the number of the beast is 666 and, presumably for the benefit of his readers, that "it is the number of a man". Upon which seemingly enigmatic angelic declaration Engels comments:—"Here then, we have two clear statements: (1) The scarlet lady is Rome, the great city which reigneth over the kings of the earth; (2) At the time the book is written, the sixth Roman Emperor reigns; after him another will come to reign for a short time and then comes the return of one who 'is of the seven, who was wounded but healed', and whose name is contained in that mysterious number and whom Irenaeus [2nd century Christian writer already referred to by Engels—F.A.R.], still knew to be Nero". (It must be recalled that Nero, as the first persecutor of the Church, was a name of dread to the early Christians). Our author adds:—"Counting from Augustus, we have Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero the fifth. The sixth, who is Galba, whose ascension to the throne was the signal for an insurrection of the legions, especially in Gaul, led by Otho, Galba's successor". Thus, concludes Engels:—"Our book must have been written under Galba who reigned from June 9th, 68, to January 15th, 69. And it predicts the return of Nero as imminent".

Engels then demonstrates, again following the learned researches in this recondite field of Professor Benary, that in the then current Jewish numerology in which each letter had a numerical equivalent value attached to it, the name of Nero Caesar in Hebrew=666, i.e. the number of the Beast. Whilst spelt in Greek it gives 616, the number given by the text which Irenaeus (c 180) had before him. So, triumphantly concludes Engels, "The mysterious book is now perfectly clear. John predicts the return of Nero for about (AD) 70 and a reign of terror under him which is to last forty-two months or 1260 days. After that term,

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

John's Nightmare Through Socialist Eyes

By F. A. RIDLEY

God arises, vanquishes Nero, the Anti-Christ, destroys the great city by fire, and finds the Devil for a thousand years. The millenium begins, and so forth". Such, as seen through the Socialist eyes of Engels is "John's nightmare" when interpreted scientifically. Contemporary secular writers record that a belief was widely held at this time that Nero had fled to the East and was about to return with a Parthian army, and a false Nero actually appeared about the time Revelation was written.

The Oldest Christian Book

Writing in 1883, Engels describes Revelation as the oldest (as well as the simplest) book in the New Testament. As an authentic picture of early Christianity, he concludes "drawn by one of themselves, the book is worth more than all the rest of the New Testament put together". Whoever John was, and obviously he was a man of authority in the early Christian sect, if not the Apostle

John himself, the Jewish author of this book in the worst Greek in the New Testament, records a primitive "revivalist" Christianity purely Jewish in character. This was no doubt the original form taken by primitive Christianity as a Jewish heresy long before any distinctive Christian Church or religion had made its appearance. As such, "John's nightmare" has been responsible for some of the strangest aberrations of the human intelligence ever recorded; amongst its commentators being Sir Isaac Newton and General Gordon. John's ferocious attack on the Roman Empire (the Scarlet Woman), was later to make it a kind of "Revolutionaries' handbook" for many heretical sects in the Middle Ages, from the Donatists (4th century) to the "Fifth Monarchy Men" of the time of Cromwell, an aspect which no doubt excited the interest of Engels. John and the Emperor Nero, between them, have much to answer for!

South African Discussion on Clairvoyance

(Reprinted from *The Rationalist*, South Africa, July, 1961)

In a five-page circular issued by the South African Society for Psychical Research, Professor Arthur Bleksley reacts to the article on "Parapsychology" which appeared in the February issue of *The (South African) Rationalist*, as well as to a shortened version of C. E. M. Hansel's report on the Pratt-Woodruff experiment which we had given to certain members of the SPR.

We would dearly love to print Arthur Bleksley's article in full, but it would occupy the whole of this number of *The Rationalist*. Readers will therefore have to content themselves with the following shortened version, which we hope gives a fair summary of its main points. Those who would like to have copies of the unabridged version should apply to Professor M. Valkhoff, University of the Witwatersrand.

After describing how Hansel, who is lecturer in psychology at Manchester University, had visited Duke University where he was shown the records of the Pratt-Woodruff experiment, and how he had then made a critical analysis of the data, Professor Bleksley says that his first criticism of Hansel and Roux is "that they ignore the common courtesies of civilised debate in their eagerness to strike a blow against parapsychology and the men who work in that field. To attack the integrity of a scientist is no small matter; to do so without allowing those attacked the opportunity of reply is doubly reprehensible".

After quoting an extract from *The Rationalist* of February, 1961, Professor Bleksley goes on: "In this extract from Roux's paper are several words and phrases which merit attention. One notices the slow shift of emphasis from possibility of fraud to conviction. Initially Hansel is said to have 'produced a theory of how the trick was done'. The evidence later 'seems to be' that one of the experimenters 'wangled' the results. But by the time we get to the end we find that this trick was 'sufficient' to produce the result.

"Now this is a well-known technique, particularly in political polemics, but it is unworthy of a scientist . . . Hansel has put forward a theory of how certain results could have been obtained by fraud on the part of the experimenter. This theory, like any other in science, must be judged by its capacity to fit the facts, and not by acceptability . . . Hansel has put forward a theory—no more. He has not proved fraud . . . All that he can hope to do after 20 years is to give reasons for accepting the theory that fraud was possible, and this I believe he has not done . . .

"Hansel is claiming that one of the two experimenters (whose identity is abundantly clear from the context) cheated. This is not trickery, not wangling, but crude fraud, blatant dishonesty on the part of a scientist".

Professor Bleksley objects to Hansel's view that the results claimed for scientific experiments must always be subject to confirmation through repetition by other investigators. He refers to the Taungs skull and asks whether Roux thinks that Dart's "Taungs' man" was a fake because no one has found another skull at Taungs. Also, he says, why believe the Russian claim that Gagarin travelled round the earth in a rocket? Roux and Hansel oppose parapsychology for emotional and philosophical reasons, not on scientific grounds.

Referring at last to the Pratt-Woodruff experiment, Professor Bleksley says that he has no space to discuss in detail. Hansel suggests that the key cards were not shuffled but replaced in such a way that Woodruff was able to locate where a particular card was placed and thus in a position to influence the results. "That this possibility was overlooked by the experimenters I find it difficult to believe. They state quite clearly that 'Pratt took the key cards from the pegs and handed them to the subject who changed their order and replaced them without giving Woodruff any indication of the new arrangement'. It is obvious therefore that the possibility suggested by Hansel was clearly seen by the experimenters, and that they took the obvious step of making this particular form of fraud impossible".

Bleksley then issues a challenge: "I would be happy to set up a repetition of the P-W experiment, complete in every detail and invite Dr. Roux to take the part which Hansel claims for Woodruff, while I play the part of Pratt. If Roux can then reproduce Woodruff's results, I am prepared to acknowledge publicly that Hansel's theory meets the facts. If he finds himself unable to do so, one would expect him to acknowledge the fact with the same degree of publicity as he extended to Hansel's theory in the first place".

Hansel obtained from statistical analysis of the data evidence which he thought substantiated his theory. The interesting fact was revealed that taking the case of the highest scoring subject and investigating those runs in which he scored well, "hits" were found to occur more often than would normally be expected on key cards which had occupied positions 1 and 5 in the previous runs. In terms of Hansel's theory these would be precisely the

key cards about which Woodruff would in certain cases be able to obtain knowledge.

Bleksley's comment here is that this would be accepted in a preliminary study, but that it is scientifically unacceptable to select one's data, in choosing only one of the 32 subjects who participated, and again in selecting only the part of the data which confirmed the theory. It is certain, he says, "that no statistician would accept so arbitrary a delimitation of the material used".

Dr. Edward Roux, Editor of The Rationalist, replies:

I would like to reply to Professor Bleksley under three main headings (1) fraud, and courtesy between scientists; (2) experimental verification; and (3) Hansel's analysis of the P-W experiment.

In general scientists do not hurl charges of dishonesty against their colleagues with whose theories they disagree. It is difficult however, in the case of reported experiments on extra-sensory perception, to ignore the possibility of fraud on the part of one or other of the participators. This arises from the peculiar nature of these experiments. Let us consider what is involved in the present case.

The P-W experiment is claimed by parapsychologists as evidence for clairvoyance. The cards were dealt face downwards; the subjects had no known means of telling what they were. The vague possibility of telepathy does not enter here at all. Nevertheless, five of the 32 subjects scored more hits than could reasonably be expected from pure chance. Either these persons possessed an uncanny ability to "see" what their eyes could not see, or there was some slip-up somewhere which could very well be a trick. Hansel has attempted to investigate this latter hypothesis.

A striking feature of this experiment was the set of elaborate precautions presumably designed to prevent any of the participators, including the two experimenters, from cheating. It was so arranged that Pratt and Woodruff would each act as a check on the other. If then it can be shown that, under the conditions of the experiment as described, Woodruff *could* have cheated without Pratt being aware of it, surely this is a relevant criticism. If further evidence seems to point to the probability that Woodruff did in fact cheat, surely he must grin and bear it. If Pratt, Woodruff and Bleksley are not prepared to accept this sort of situation with good grace, they should not meddle in parapsychology.

Professor Bleksley's attempt to find parallels in the Taungs skull and Gagarin's flight is sadly out of place. Accepting the fossil as genuine does not involve us in a view of the world contrary to all known experience, nor does a belief in Gagarin's achievement. I have handled the Taungs skull: it is there in our Medical School for all to see. Furthermore Broom and Robinson have found other specimens of *Australopithecus africanus*. If the Russians are lying about Gagarin, the possibility of putting a man into space remains and is no fantasy. If the Russians said he had been to Alpha Centauri and back I would say they were lying.

A number of students at Duke University in 1939 gave evidence of clairvoyance. Was the sample of 32 students who took part so exceptional? Why has the experiment not been repeated? With a few modifications (suggested by Hansel!) the method could be made, as far as we can see, completely fool-proof. Why has Professor Valkhoff, who is itching to demonstrate clairvoyance, not set up this experiment to convince all the doubting Thomases? I am sure that Wits students are as good as Duke students any day.

Regarding Hansel's "selection" of data, I would argue

as follows: A group of students was tested for their ability to "see" into various packs of Zener cards. The majority of them gave no evidence of ability to do so. We are justified therefore in forgetting about these normals for the time being and concentrating our attention on those "paranormals" who did apparently possess some very unusual ability. If we find, as Hansel found, that a large proportion of their successful "guesses" were on symbols which occupied special places during the manipulation of the key cards this may be taken as evidence that the procedure was not quite as "random" as the Pratt-Woodruff report would have us believe. I can think of numerous biological experiments where Hansel's method could be applied and with complete justification.

As far as Professor Bleksley's challenge is concerned, I must point out that Pratt and Woodruff in their original report give no indication that they were aware of the particular objections which would be raised by Hansel over twenty years later. Hansel has assumed, in the absence of reported evidence to the contrary, that they did not take certain precautions such as avoiding shadows and seeing that the cards were shuffled before being put back on the pegs. I think Professor Bleksley is being very naïve when he tells us that "the possibility suggested by Hansel was clearly seen by the experimenters and that they took the obvious step of making this particular form of fraud impossible". Is the experiment which he proposes to set up "complete in every detail" going to be the original experiment or the sort of experiment he would like to set up believing that the loopholes suggested by Hansel's criticism had all been closed?

I have made a set of screens as described by Pratt and Woodruff, and find that I and others, sitting in the place occupied by Woodruff, can determine with fair accuracy the positions in which one or more key cards are replaced—provided the screen is illuminated from above, and the cards are taken off and replaced in a regular sequence. I am prepared to demonstrate this to Professor Bleksley and the members of the Society for Psychical Research. However, I could not undertake to spot any cards if they were shuffled before being replaced.

"CATHOLIC POLAND"

IN JULY the Sejm, the Polish Parliament, passed a law abolishing religious instruction in State schools, and the Edinburgh *Evening Despatch* (10/8/61) reported "different reactions" in Warsaw and "throughout strongly Catholic Poland". It also reported what will, to all but Roman Catholics, seem a disgusting case of self-confessed body snatching. "A devout woman Catholic, the sister of a man who spent the war in Russia and came back a Communist, recalled the day when his party comrades came to bury him. She stared at them and said the funeral would take place with full Catholic rites in hallowed land. They argued all day. Finally, the comrades gave in, and walked behind the priest and behind the hearse. There were no Communist party eulogies—only the words of the Catholic prayers".

OPINION

I'm a Public Poll minion, I canvass opinion,
I'm briefed-up before I begin;
With questions well-phrased, in a way to be praised,
To make pro-and-con seem akin;
But once my chief fainted; I'd secured from the Sainted
A hundred-per-cent Poll for Sin!

—A.E.C.

This Believing World

Although the Constitution of the United States does not mention "God", practically all officials and judges take an oath of office usually ending with "so help me God"—which proves how splendidly the Churches have managed to get into the Constitution. However, the USA Supreme Court has now ruled "that it is unconstitutional for the Federal Government or any state to require a belief in the existence of God as a qualification for a public office". And this ruling makes it also unconstitutional to put on currency bills and coins (as is regularly done) the words "In God we trust". And what about oaths in law courts and elsewhere sworn on the Bible as God's Word—are they also now invalid?

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Of course, some of America's influential journals are horror stricken at all this, and one of them angrily declares that the Supreme Court ruling has made Atheism in the USA a "full-fledged" religion, though almost in the same breath we are told that "Atheism has no formal religious pattern". In any case, the same journal tells us that the ruling "ought to make the Communists in Russia supremely happy". Strange how religious journalists do their best to equate Atheism with Communism, or to smear Atheism with lying, deceit, injustice, and all the other anti-social qualities which, as a matter of fact, have distinguished Christians through the ages. We trust the new ruling now will stand, even though the full might of the Churches be hurled against it.

★

ITV's regular religious programme on Sundays recently featured a particular boring discussion on various portraits of Jesus reverently dealt with by Mr. T. Driberg, MP, and the Rev. A. Bridge. It was entitled "Man's Idea of God"—the "idea" being that God looked (or looks) like Jesus; but as nobody knows what Jesus looked like, we are still wondering what God looks like. One thing did emerge from the "portraits"—Jesus did not at all look like a brown-skinned Israelite but like a white European with a beard except in his early portraits when he looked—without a beard—like Adonis or Apollo.

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As for Mr. Bridge, it was most interesting to learn that before he became a parson, he was an Atheist. This regularly occurring phenomenon in parsonic ranks always intrigues us. Could Mr. Driberg persuade Mr. Bridge to set out for us the arguments which made him an Atheist in the first place, and the arguments which finally decided his now complete belief in Jesus as the Son of God and as God himself, in Miracles, and in a real Devil and a real Hell?

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We wonder whether, rejected by the Church of England, the ex-Rev. W. Bryn Thomas, as reported in the *Daily Mail* (8/7/61) "may become a Roman Catholic". All Catholics believe that safe in the bosom of the Church means also "safe in the arms of Jesus". Anyway, he would rather be a "pagan" than a member of the Church of England after the way it piled on the costs of the case against him, tried in the Consistory Court. But Dr. Thomas wants to write, and his first effort is going to be a philosophical work, *The Problem of Freedom and Modern Thought*. If he does join the Roman Church, this really should be a most intriguing subject.

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Needless to point out, the tragic death of 34 schoolboys and their teachers in an air accident in Norway recently brought the Church in like a shot. The humbug of a

"memorial" service was the object and, according to an article by Monica Furlong in the *Daily Mail*, "the sermon and prayers" in the Parish church at Croydon made it clear that "even grief is a way of approaching God". Also that "a groping muddled sense that life is not futile, and that faith provides the answer to the bitterest kinds of human suffering". If this were not enough, the vicar explained that, the life of these 34 boys is not, as we tend to think, "achieved in this life" but there is also "the Christian proof that God is identified with and shares human suffering". Of course, Jesus came in here with, also, "the life and death of Jesus Christ". We doubt if the parents of the poor boys will be comforted let alone impressed by this example of the utter futility of the Christian faith.

Tolerance

Note by the Editor of *The Open Mind*:

FEW PEOPLE take the time to examine the origin of their beliefs and thoughts. Even freethinkers are sometimes guilty of repeating often quoted statements without questioning their validity.

Take for example the much quoted sentence attributed to Voltaire: "I disagree with every word you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it!" This quotation is even listed in Bartlett's *Familiar Quotations*, which is generally regarded as a reliable source book. The truth of the matter is that Voltaire never actually wrote these words and—even more important—his life was a very contradiction of that sentiment. He lived a long and useful life precisely because he did not die for the right of the first-comer to be wrong. The [American] free-thought writer, Isaac Goldberg, revised this pseudo-Voltairean dictum and wrote what he felt the ideal of tolerance should aim for:

"I seem to disagree with every word you say. It is possible, however, that if I were to consider more carefully, and less captiously, every word you say, I might discover certain details that strike me as true. I might discover that such absolute disagreement as I assume between us is very rare among thinking people. Now, before I defend to the death your right to voice these beliefs with which I disagree, I will defend to the life both your right and mine to clear away merely verbal disagreements and reach to the core of our differences. Those differences may very well be only too real. First, however, we must rid the matter of intellectual pride, of obstructive personalities. I do not say that you and I will never come to war. I do say, however, that the more we examine our contending principles in the light of disinterestedness, the less likely are we to come to war. That, of course, is a statement of extremes. Differences need not eventuate in physical hostilities. Most differences are not so essential as they appear to be in the light of human vanity. A certain amount of difference is even to be preferred. Let us both beware of fighting over beliefs that we have merely accepted without question, like the Oriental groom who never beholds his bride until the ceremony of marriage. Let us, in fact, sharply distinguish between belief and knowledge. You see, there is too much to live for. Don't you die for my right to disagree, and I promise faithfully not to die for yours. Before we leap to disagreement over last principles, let us see how much—and it must really be much indeed—we agree over first principles. And perhaps, if in this all-too-human world there is fighting to be done—perhaps there is a greater enemy of us both against whom we should unite our scattered forces."

[Reprinted from *The Open Mind*, New Jersey, USA.]

THE FREETHINKER

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

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THE FREETHINKER can be obtained through any newsagent or will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates: One year, £1 17s. 6d.; half-year 19s.; three months, 9s. 6d. (In U.S.A. and Canada: One year, \$5.00; half-year, \$2.50; three months, \$1.25). These rates to take effect from October 1st, 1961.

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INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Midland Institute, Paradise Street), Sunday, September 10th, 6.45 p.m.: G. BRIDGEN, "Between Life and Death".

World Union of Freethinkers (Beatrice Webb House, Holmbury St. Mary, near Dorking, Surrey), September 8th, 9th and 10th. Conference, various international speakers.

Notes and News

FREETHINKERS who holiday in Ayrshire should make a point of visiting the North Ayrshire Museum, Kirkgate, Saltcoats, where they will get an interesting picture of local life, history and industry. The Honorary Curator, Owen Kelly, is a member of the National Secular Society, as was the late W. D. Kerr, ex-Provost and Honorary President of the Museum Association.

VISITORS TO AYR, of course, cannot miss the Burns "industry", for Burns is as much an industry as Shakespeare. Pretty little portraits and pretty little tartan-backed copies of his (expurgated) poems are sold by the thousand, and the great Scottish poet who died in poverty is immortalised in a quite false and maudlin manner. Nobody has exposed the Burns legend more effectively than Cyril Pearl, and his book, *Bawdy Burns*, deserves to be wider known than it is. So, too, for that matter, does *The Girl with the Swansdown Seat*, but that is another, though equally fascinating story.

FROM AYRSHIRE, to the east, where the Edinburgh Festival is in full swing as we write these notes. Among the "official" plays was *Sappho* by Lawrence Durrell, author of the best-selling *Alexandria Quartet*. Like the *Quartet*, *Sappho* is more notable for language than for plot, though it provides some remarkable acting opportunities. (Miss Margaret Rawlings plays the name part magnificently.)

"A king is the mob's work of art," was an epigram that appealed to us, while, referring to the oracle, one character asks, "Do you believe a god could speak through a golden mask, supposing there were a god?"

TWO OTHER plays have special interest for Freethinkers, Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* and John Osborne's *Martin Luther*. The latter is surely one of the great plays of our time and must be dealt with in detail in a later issue. (It was lightheartedly referred to in a late night revue as, "I was a teenage Catholic".) But much of the attraction of the Edinburgh Festival is found on the "fringe", and an unusual feature this year was provided by "The Sceptics", who gave *David Hume on God and Evil* in costume. This was the second part of Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. Hume was born two hundred and fifty years ago.

WE DON'T know whether everybody else in the audience for *Dr. Faustus* was Presbyterian (certainly it was in the Assembly Hall of the Church of Scotland); if so, they were of many nationalities. But they derived great pleasure from the enormous discomfort of the Papal court, when Faustus, aided by Mephistophilis, plagues the Pope and his attendants. The Old Vic Company plays the scene with great gusto, and the final collapse of His Holiness beneath his robes and canopy brought a roar of laughter.

AS FOR Edinburgh itself, illuminated and beflagged, not to say besieged, at least the Festival has done one thing that Burns would have approved: broken the Sabbath. One may get coffee on Sunday morning on the Royal Mile only a few minutes' walk from St. Giles' Cathedral.

AT THE MOUND, Edinburgh's "Speakers' Corner": the Gospel singers as always tried to drown the speakers, even their fellow Christians. Not that this mattered terribly in the case of the latter: they had scarcely an idea between them. What were interesting were their audiences, particularly the young women supporters, who were well-dressed and wore fashionable hats but not a semblance of make-up. Pretty girls, in fact, well on the way to becoming frumps, all for the love of Jesus.

WE LEARN FROM *Time* (11/8/61) of a film, *The Life of Buddha*, at present being made in Japan. Buddha, we are told, "will only appear in the flesh during the first segment of the film. After that, he becomes a ray of light, a murmur of thunder". The general adviser on the film is Hideo Kimura, Professor of Primitive Indian Culture at the Buddhist Ryukoku University, and he thinks it is a "good picture" that "will not offend devout Buddhists". This, despite "human sacrifices, torture, man-trampling elephants, death plunges, demons, ghosts andimps", "sensual maidens" and the rape of Buddha's wife. As for the mass of Japanese people, Professor Kimura admits quite frankly, "they are not devout enough to be offended".

OUR BOOBY PRIZE for the silliest letter of the year (so far) to a serious newspaper goes to Mrs. Willow Ventris Jenkins, of Sevenoaks, Kent, who reported to the *Daily Telegraph* (24/8/61) that she recently saw a group of girls aged 12-13, sucking iced lollies while touring Canterbury Cathedral. "There was also," she wrote, "a teenaged girl combing her hair before the altar". Then, "A few days later, we heard Dr. Hewlett Johnson preach a political sermon at Sunday Evensong; but", said Mrs. Jenkins, "the incidents are doubtless unrelated".

Blasphemy in the 15th Century

By H. GEORGE FARMER

IT WAS IN THE "Year of Our Lord" 1883 that George William Foote, the founder of THE FREETHINKER, was brutally sentenced to twelve months' imprisonment for blasphemy by a Roman Catholic judge—Justice North. At the first trial, despite the earnest pleas of the judge that the jury should find the prisoner guilty, the jury disagreed. North was thus compelled to discharge the jury, but not the defendant Foote. At the second trial, with a fresh—and seemingly packed jury—North went so far as to state that the jury *must* find the defendant guilty. "And it was so", as the book which Carlyle once called "Hebrew old clothes" tells us. There will be many living who knew that brave and noble champion of Freethought, who was not only a steadfast advocate of Secularism, but a writer of virile English prose and an orator of remarkable eloquence. Foote's crime was that he had the audacity to laugh at some of the Bible stories, being in full agreement with old Sir Roger L'Estrange that if you cannot reason a man out of his folly, it is best to laugh him out of it. That, Foote essayed to do in the early years of THE FREETHINKER, especially in that entertaining production of his entitled *Bible Romances*, the chapters of which were originally issued as penny pamphlets. Foote, in the early "eighties", doubled his verbal satire on the Bible by the pictorial angle, and it was his "Comic Cuts" from the Scriptures that brought him within the law of Blasphemy. Yet he did no more than the French had done in *La Bible Amusante*. Unfortunately Gallic frankness is quite alien to the stolid British mind, and it really hurt the Non-conformist conscience, whilst the Romanists were inflamed. We, in the 20th century, only rightly view all that hostility as simply ridiculous. In sorry truth, if one is versed in religious art over the centuries, any reasonably intelligent individual must recognise the latent humour in most examples of religious art. To demonstrate that, I believe that a printed book entitled *Les Grandes Heures*, Paris, 1490, will illustrate my argument even better than the masterpieces which adorn our art galleries; because the latter were only for the eyes of the "upper ten", whereas the former was for the people at large.

This woodcut is supposed to delineate the Garden "eastward of Eden". Out of its soil there grew "every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food", and it included "the tree of knowledge". Alas! it is only the latter that we see in the picture of *Les Grandes Heures*, the remainder of the landscape being devoted to 15th century palaces, towers, and fortifications, *plus* the Lord God, Adam and Eve, the Serpent, and other figures. On the waters of the moat, however, is a "winged fowl", which

turns a knowing look upwards to Adam who is lying on that "herb of the field" vulgarly known as grass. We know precisely why Adam is thus reclining, because *Genesis* (2, 18) tells us authoritatively that the Lord God has considered that "it is not good that man should be alone", and thus created Eve to be his partner. To accomplish that the Lord God "caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam". Under that divine anaesthetic the Lord God surgically extracted one of Adam's ribs, and out of *that bone* he created Eve, the Lord God having *previously* "closed up the flesh". It is precisely at that point that the artist of *Les Grandes Heures* has committed blasphemy, since he has limned Eve in the flesh with the gaping wound of Adam still unclosed! (See *Genesis*, 2, 21-22.)



Equally as interesting are the *personalia* of the drama of "The Fall of Man". The central figure is—of necessity—the Lord God. He is depicted as a bearded full-robed cleric of the 15th century, *plus* the conventional halo, with a bevy of damsels holding his robe as they would the train of a bride at a wedding. He holds his right hand upwards with the two-finger *hocus potius* in the regulation pontifical way *benigno numine*, as a salutation of the appearance of Eve. In the left-hand top corner of the picture is the "Tree of Knowledge" whose fruit was forbidden to Adam and Eve. At the top of the tree trunk sits the "Serpent" who was reputed to be "more subtil than any beast of the field". He has wings and a tail four times the length of his body. What an encumbrance. No wonder Marie Corelli wrote about the "Sorrows of Satan". He is busy handing out the juicy "fruit of knowledge" to Adam and Eve. As a result of that dietary "the eyes of both of them were opened and they knew that they were naked". It was therefore only right that the artist of the woodcut should have made Adam and Eve place their hands over their *pudenda*. In the right-hand top corner we see the *dénouement* of the drama. The Holy Writ avers that "Cherubims"—a plural of plurals—armed with a "flaming sword" drove these horrid transgressors from the Garden of Eden. In their exit each of the latter hold a fig leaf in position so as to cover their nakedness. If one only spent a few moments in laughter over these pictorial puerilities of the 15th century, it would certainly lighten the tedium of the text of *Les Grandes Heures*.

Suppose, on the other hand, that G. W. Foote had published this 15th century woodcut in THE FREETHINKER in the 19th century—in 1883, in fact. There is little doubt that many of his Christian contemporaries would have urged that he should be severely punished for doing so. And Mr. Justice North might well have agreed.

“Man of Reason”

By H. CUTNER

(Concluded from page 279)

THOMAS PAINE is remembered perhaps these days far more for his *Age of Reason* than for his *Rights of Man*, though both are great landmarks—the one in sociology, and the other in religion. Both took enormous courage to write for, with the revolt of the American colonies, and the coming French Revolution, all who supported the Monarchy in England with its “Divine Rights” had reason to fear such an outspoken and mostly unanswerable book like *The Rights of Man*. Death was in their opinion a far too merciful punishment for the author of such a treasonable document. Some of the cartoons published in London at the time show how hated—and feared—was Thomas Paine. Fortunately for him and for posterity, he managed to escape from England with his life, and was naturally welcomed by the French revolutionists who promptly made him a member of the Senate.

Paine, however, was opposed to the Monarchy as an institution, *not* to the monarch as such; and so, later, when he pleaded for the life of Louis XVI, he arraigned against him Robespierre, Marat, and many of the extreme revolutionaries who were ushering in the Reign of Terror, and the bestialities which accompanied it. It was all a dreadful blow to Paine, a great humanitarian, opposed to all this bloodshed and who thus saw his Republican ideas shattered. And it was because of this that he felt the French Revolution was going headlong to perdition—partly through “Atheism”—that he began to write his *Age of Reason* as an antidote, and mainly to bring back the French people to sanity, to the beneficent God of Nature, and therefore to Humanity.

The bibliography of this book is intensely interesting for the two parts—and later a third part—all helped to make it one of the most talked of books of its generation. The reason is not hard to find.

The Age of Reason is perhaps the first book which attacked the Bible—God’s Most Holy and Precious Word—in unequivocal terms. The Second Part in particular had no mercy on what most people in Paine’s day looked upon as *sacred*, the Word of God for Man’s salvation. Wesley and other evangelists had stumped the country with the Divine Message enshrined in what they considered as the greatest of all Books. Unless we understand the “Message” of the Bible in Paine’s day, we shall never understand the horror *The Age of Reason* created among an almost illiterate population. Christians could only see in the book the Devil, and Hell at its worst.

Paine clearly expressed his belief in God, but for the mass of Christian readers, the book with its unashamed attack on the Bible had been vomited from Hell itself. Paine was not really a Deist—he was an Atheist, and to be an Atheist in those days was to be far worse than to be a murderous thug. Christians got away with this kind of lying nonsense because they never read *The Age of Reason*. Its publishers were hunted down and imprisoned, though most Christians would have preferred them to be hanged. We must not blame them altogether, for even in 1883, as Dr. Farmer reminds us in his illustrated article, it was possible to send G. W. Foote to prison for one year for poking fun at silly Bible stories.

Professor Aldridge’s chapter on *The Age of Reason* gives an excellent modern estimate of its power and worth. He points out that Paine had said in *The Rights of Man*, “Every religion is good that teaches man to be good; and I know of none that instructs him to be bad”. Yet, con-

tinues Aldridge, “there is no doubt that a large part of his *Age of Reason* is a savage attack on Christianity, including the practices of its adherents. These two contrary attitudes cannot be completely reconciled”. I must here disagree with Aldridge. As Paine grew older, he saw what he had not seen before, that not only was Christianity *untrue*, but also that it was based on stupid and ignorant myths, and that while constantly professing truth, justice, mercy, and other humane qualities, Christians practised and were still practising slavery, injustice, intolerance, and so on.

Professor Aldridge claims that it was Paine’s association with Condorcet “who was a philosophical foe of all religion, a skeptic, regarding in the universe the existence of matter alone”, which made him write his *Age of Reason* because “Paine was a profound Deist, unequivocally opposed to Atheism”. His book may have been written as an antidote to “the materialistic spirit of Condorcet” as Aldridge contends, but it is also true that, as Conway insists, “its intellectual originality is none the less remarkable”.

During Paine’s lifetime more than thirty answers to *The Age of Reason* were published; but except the one by Bishop Watson, *An Apology for the Bible* (George III grumbled that the Bible had to have an Apology!) all of them are as dead as the proverbial mutton. And even Watson’s is by no means easy to obtain. The fact is that Paine did his work so thoroughly that there can be no real reply—which is one reason why Paine is still alive and kicking hard. Aldridge notes that “as Conway has pointed out, Watson’s defence was actually a capitulation”. Watson “virtually admitted the textual argument . . . Only in regard to the moral argument did Watson put up a determined fight”. Watson took the line raised by Bishop Butler in his *Analogy of Religion* but, says Aldridge, “this reasoning does not apply to Paine at all for he had not condemned God for allowing evil to exist in the world” for the simple reason that his God was not the Bible God, but the God of Nature whom we only know through his works.

The argument is however too long to go into detail here, and both Conway and Aldridge should be read by all who want to learn something about *The Age of Reason* and its tremendous impact on the religious world. The modern Christians who do not like the Old Testament and its God are only following Paine even though they may not know it.

Paine replied to Watson but the part published is “a garbled version”. Like the manuscripts left by Robert Taylor which were destroyed at his death, the reply to Watson may have been similarly destroyed.

It is curious that Conway does not mention Napoleon. Aldridge points out that at first he thought highly of Paine the Republican—but Paine “came to detest and despise Bonaparte and to affirm that he was ‘the complete charlatan that ever existed’”. Walter Savage Landor “confirmed Paine’s hostility toward Napoleon”, and Paine added, “There is not on record one who has committed so many faults and crimes with so little temptation to commit them . . .”.

Paine narrowly escaped the guillotine—but the story that it was due to a mistake in marking his cell, Aldridge claims may not be true. He says there is no evidence for it. But Paine was very bitter towards the American

government—Washington, Morris, and others in charge—who never raised a finger to save him from his long imprisonment. The two accounts by Conway and Aldridge are worth reading for their opinions by no means agree.

In any case Paine received little but the bitterest hostility when he left France to pass his last days in America. His *Age of Reason* was partly responsible of course but not altogether. His services during the Revolution were almost as great as Washington's or Jefferson's, but he was very badly treated all the same except perhaps by Jefferson who always recognised his unique personality.

These last days of Paine's make sad reading though, as Aldridge remarks, his journalistic activity was "more voluminous than at any other time of his life". He lengthily describes Paine's "feud with Cheetham" who was a typical Christian liar; but the years began to tell on the doughty fighter and his last two were those of an invalid. He was alone most of the time, and eagerly welcomed any visitor. Of course, the usual Christians liars began to circulate his "recantation", and this particular lie will probably never be caught up so fast has it run through the years—and is still running. Paine died "in tranquillity" in 1809.

It is interesting to note that Professor Aldridge considers that "Paine's chief enemies were appalled by his political, not his religious views . . . In England, we must remember, Paine was considered a disciple of the devil for writing *The Rights of Man* long before *The Age of Reason* was ever in print". This probably is true but it was *The Age of Reason* which, so to speak, clinched the accusations.

Professor Aldridge deals also with Paine's alleged "intemperance", but of course he drank brandy on occasions like most people drink beer these days. There is no evidence that he was ever "drunk", dead drunk, that is. Besides, as Conway showed, drinking occasionally does not effect Paine's opinion about the myth of the Biblical Creation. Paine never recanted either from his political or his religious beliefs. He held firmly to his principles. "In the political realm" concludes Aldridge, "most of his principles are now considered axiomatic—and for that reason no longer associated with him". They have "endured and triumphed and represent the most effective vindication of his life". High praise indeed. It should be remembered that this is the final judgment of a modern writer in 1960; and we, who follow the lead given to us by many distinguished Freethinkers long before Professor Aldridge was born perhaps, can look back proudly on having championed one of the greatest fighters for liberty Britain has ever produced, in the days when true Christians hated him with savage ferocity.

CORRESPONDENCE

THE MERMAID THEATRE

Since taking and enjoying THE FREETHINKER every week I have also been, by you, introduced to another source of great enjoyment, the theatre. I really write to say how much I appreciate your criticisms of the plays at the Mermaid, subsequently having been held spellbound by *The Andersonville Trial* and *The Bishop's Bonfire*.

It seems to me that the Mermaid is catering very well for the kind of plays enjoyed by Freethinkers. A. G. BROOKER.

OUR OBITUARY NOTICES

I do not know if there is an editorial policy of trying to prove by artful selection of cases that those who love the gods—of God—die younger, and that those who do not love the god(s) die of a ripe old age, but one cannot help but notice that most of the ages given in the Obituary Notices are well advanced.

Actually there is a serious issue behind this matter, there is good reason to suspect that the emancipation of the mind is

associated with healthy and presumably well-fed bodies, that in turn would tend to lead to longer life than would otherwise be the case. Of course we have the antithesis, namely, that religion thrives on poverty and malnutrition.

Possibly our readers could supply some interesting facts on this matter.

I am a Member of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons and therefore prefer to sign myself— "GEORGE TEVIN".

[We assure "Mr. Tevin" that there is no editorial selection of obituary notices on the basis of age.—ED.]

CRIME AND MILLIONAIRES

It is really rather surprising to find a legal expert like Mr. C. H. Norman confusing a cat burglar, who is a manual labourer—using his hands if only to climb onto roofs—with such specialists in financial robbery as millionaires, who, as Mr. Norman correctly indicates, frequently live by mere large-scale robbery. I must admit that I have never heard of a millionaire who was convicted of cat-burglary—which is all that I said.

There have, of course, been any number of financial swindlers. Hilaire Belloc once aptly referred to "The hundred and one forms of fraud that always exist in any system of free competition" whilst adding that the great majority go unpunished by the criminal law.

As to Mr. Robert Dent, the causes of crime, like crime itself, vary from time to time, and from place to place. I would, however, infer that the economic factor is usually the strongest. In support of which contention, I refer Mr. Dent to the *magnum opus* of the Dutch jurist (the late) Dr. Adrian Bongar, *Crime and Economic Conditions*. F. A. RIDLEY.

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