

The Freethinker

Volume LXXXI—No. 52

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Sixpence

In *The Sunday Times* of October 3rd, 1961, there appeared an important and instructive article by the eminent astronomer Professor Sir Bernard Lovell, entitled "Is there life in other worlds?". Actually, about the only criticism that can be levelled against this article (or perhaps the editorial staff of *The Sunday Times*) is its title. For Professor Lovell covered a far wider, as well as equally important field in the course of his article. He included not only astronomic, but equally ethical problems in his cosmic survey; he dealt not only with the age-old speculation whether conscious life actually exists in other parts of the universe, but with possible human reactions to those forms of life in a future not perhaps very remote from the present day.

"Life In Other Worlds"

Under this title, the former Astronomer Royal, Sir Harold Spencer-Jones, wrote some years ago an informative book which I, for one, read with great interest at the time at which it appeared. Professor Lovell considers the same intriguing speculation in his recent article. Without presuming to follow him into the technicalities of cosmic speculation (a closed book even to interested laymen) it would probably be accurate to state that Professor Lovell's tentative conclusions are, in general, similar to those put forward by Sir Harold Spencer-Jones. They are, briefly, that the basic conditions for the eventual appearance of organic life are not confined to our planet or to our solar system, but represent a regular recurring feature throughout the universe. Out of the (approximately) 100,000 million stars in our Milky Way galaxy, it is reasonable, Professor Lovell suggests, to assume that "some 1,000 million stars" must have planets in the appropriate condition to support long-term organic evolution. For our authority had previously argued it is only in connection with stars (similar in this respect to our own) capable of emitting light and heat for a stable period of several thousand million years (Professor Lovell suggests three thousand millions of years) that the slow process of organic evolution can eventually produce the more developed forms of intelligent life, from less developed forms of living matter. From which one may conclude that human and animal life is not some isolated "sport" of nature, or still less, that miraculous gift of God uniquely confined to our own planet, that the geocentric theology of the Book of Genesis had for so long taught our ancestors to believe. Life, in brief, is a product of natural evolution, not a supernatural "gift from God".

Celestial Inter-Communication

Our astronomer however, is also a philosopher; for not content with merely recording the ascertained results of recent astronomic research, he goes on to speculate boldly upon the basis of the known data revealed by modern astronomic research. If it is *ipso facto* probable that sentient life exists upon other worlds, would it not be possible to establish some kind of physical communi-

cation with them? Professor Lovell answers this intriguing question in the affirmative; it would, he thinks, be possible actually to do so, in fact, he tells us, tentative attempts are already being made to do so in America and, no doubt, in Russia also. He tells us: "The idea of this experiment is simple: if communities of intelligent beings live in other planetary systems, then some will be technologically in advance of ourselves". He deduces from

this probable assumption that "inter-stellar communication is possible through the use of giant radio-telescopes" (similar to his own one at Jodrell Bank). He adds the rather startling information that there is "a unique standard of fre-

quency which would be known to every observer in the universe". Shall we call it inter-planetary (or inter-stellar) celestial morse code? It is a very different kind of celestial communication from those with which our psychic friends have familiarised us. And incidentally it seems clear from the general conclusions arrived at by contemporary astronomic research, that it is unlikely that men exist elsewhere in our solar system. If conscious life is, as it appears to be, an intermittent phase in the universe, it would surely be unlikely that similar forms of life would appear twice (or more often) in the same planetary system. *Pace* science fiction, "human" races similar to our own will, if only on the "law of averages", probably only be found in some fairly remote part of the universe—say a few thousand light years away.

Cosmic Ethics

In the final section of his most comprehensive survey, Professor Lovell advances boldly, not into unknown physical, but into unknown ethical territory. Indeed it may well be that future historians of ethics will rank him amongst the pioneers of a new and vastly important and significant branch of ethical philosophy, what we can perhaps term as "cosmic ethics": human ethics as they appear in relation to other worlds and to non-human communities. Mankind, and along with mankind, the human civilisation which he has created, are nowadays in deadly peril of collective suicide on account of the unprecedented rapid advance of technology in the present century which has now culminated in the nuclear bomb and in its hitherto unknown destructive potentialities. Professor Lovell thinks that a similar crisis may well have previously confronted other civilisations on other planets, some of which may well have failed to survive it; an interesting, if pessimistic suggestion. The experiences of those planetary races which have, should make their future radio-communications especially valuable. However, Professor Lovell appears on the whole, to be optimistic. (In my experience, Australians usually are!). He thinks that our present nuclear crisis may prove to be short-lived, and that it will eventually be solved by transferring human techniques upon a colossal scale from—shall we say—the current arms race to the future space race. The Russians

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

Ethics and The Cosmos

— By F. A. RIDLEY —

have already shown the way with their Luniks and Sputniks; now the Americans have even more ambitious projects. At this point however, Sir Bernard Lovell reminds us in what is perhaps the most important section of his undoubtedly important article. We enter a new chapter in human annals, that of inter-planetary (perhaps inter-cosmic) exploration, and for the adequate performance of this, a new ethic, a cosmic ethic is required. For, asserts Professor Lovell, the summary contact of human beings or even of their terrestrially-contaminated equipment with what may well be totally divergent organic processes upon other planets, create both physical and ethical problems of appalling magnitude. Before rashly tampering with the quite possibly radically different biological life-processes upon other planets, man must first conquer himself, and the frequently sinister record of "man's inhumanity to man" surely signifies that this may well prove to an even more difficult task than reaching

our planetary neighbours in space—as surely will actually be done before long.

"New Worlds for Old"

The above title of a book by H. G. Wells, that intrepid pioneer of science fiction dealing with other planets, is surely very apposite at the present day. For there does not seem to be much doubt that we are upon the threshold of inter-planetary exploration. We shall find whatever we do find! But it can hardly be doubted that the effect of this on human thinking will be not less but more dynamic even than was the discovery of the then "New World", America, nearly five centuries ago. When one now considers in retrospect what were some of the subsequent effects of that discovery from the standpoint of inter-human ethics, one concurs with Professor Lovell in hoping that mankind has improved in the meanwhile before setting foot upon alien planets possibly inhabited by sentient, but materially defenceless beings.

My Search for Spirits

By WILLIAM KENT

MY FRIEND Herbert Cutner's account of the *Sunday Pictorial's* search for spirits has prompted me to record my failure to find them.

In June 1923 I lost my only brother. After three days' illness he died, at the age of 32, from meningitis at Vancouver. I was deeply distressed. Perhaps too much so, inasmuch as we had not met for four and a half years. There were, though, two reasons for the depression his death caused me. I had just finished a month's sick leave from the London County Council owing to a nervous breakdown. Moreover there had been talk of my brother, who was a journeyman printer, returning to England to take a higher position in my father's long established printing works. I cherished the idea of making my brother a confidante. When my neurosis had almost been cured I had a bad relapse.

An office colleague suggested I might get comfort from spiritualism. It had never occurred to me that spiritualistic churches were as open to the general public as any others. I wish it had, for it is unwise to investigate spiritualism when under an emotional compulsion. Then wishful thinking can carry one too far.

On a Thursday evening I went to a spiritualist meeting at Brixton. (I had then been a member of the Rationalist Press Association for nearly ten years.) There was a medium there. She did not address me. On Sunday morning the attendance was smaller. The medium stood by me and said she was seeing a figure in khaki. My brother had been so attired when I last saw him as a soldier in the Canadian RAUC. He was surprised at my being here. This was true enough, but it might be said it was a safe stroke to play as it meant that the medium had not seen me before. However, the next remark was much more startling. She said I had been going for something like a bull at a gate, and had given it up in consequence of the loss of my brother. This, of course, would not apply to anyone. For four years I had been studying for a diploma in English literature from London University. I had passed the four annual examinations (two with distinction) and had only to take, the final. I withdrew because of my neurotic condition.

I was very excited about this revelation. As soon as dinner was over I went round to tell my father and sister, both Methodists, about it. They wanted me to toe the

religious line, but not by the spiritualist route. They were not impressed. I told my friend Barnes, a great admirer of Thomas Hardy and an agnostic from the age of seventeen. He told me it would never happen again. He was to prove quite right. I went week after week and came away miserably disappointed. It was as if my brother had gone to Australia, had written one letter, and then ceased to correspond.

Once my wife, who had lost her mother the previous year, came with me. The medium stood by us and said she was getting the names of Walter and Elizabeth. Who were they? My wife answered that these were the names of her father and mother. The medium then said that Elizabeth wanted to tell Walter that he should carefully wrap up this winter. My wife felt obliged to pass this on to her father. He was no more impressed than my father had been by my experience. However, my wife thought he did take an unusual care about his winter attire.

I may mention here that neither at Brixton nor anywhere else did I hear a *surname* given. Also I was surprised that so many of the celestial guides were Red Indians.

What finished me with spiritualism was psychometry. I went to a display somewhere in the West End. A tray was passed round and we were invited to place on it something that had belonged to somebody who had "passed over". I offered a purse which had been sent to me by my brother's widow. It was then announced that there would be a charge of two shillings. I called out that I had not enough on me and offered to withdraw the purse. I was told to leave it. It was long before it was reached, and I thought perhaps "time" would be called before it was dealt with. However, it was the last item to be taken. I was asked if I had lost anybody. This shocked me. I thought the manifesting spirit would know all about it.

When I said I had lost a brother in Vancouver it was coolly suggested there was trouble about his estate, and that I should go there to adjust matters! Then came a tit-bit. Some smart spirit was supposed to say that I must not be too parsimonious in investigating spiritualism! It was obvious the medium thought that I had the two shillings and would not part up. This was quite wrong. It was the day before pay day and I had little more than my return fare on me. As to the absurd suggestion that I should travel thousands of miles, spend at least a hundred pounds and more than three weeks of time to go to Vancouver, I never heard of any trouble about my brother's estate or indeed that he had left anything that could be called an estate. Psychometry, then, finished me with spiritualism.

The Foster Father of The Son of God

By EVA EBURY

LIBERALITY WITH HIS OPPONENTS was hardly a strong point with Jesus; his offers of reward are strictly limited to those who believe in him. It was therefore with astonishment that I read of his all-embracing promise, given to anyone who could tell the tale of his foster father, Joseph; and considering the advantages that might accrue to our paper, I searched the annals of history eagerly, and now write this treatise to merit the promised blessing. The circumstances are given in the History of Joseph the Carpenter and the Death of Joseph, an apocryphal gospel in use in the Church in the 4th century. The facts were related by Jesus to the Apostles on Mount Olivet and were written down by them and laid up in the library at Jerusalem. He told the disciples the story of his father's life and death, how he sat by his bedside and bade Death enter. How Michael and Gabriel put Joseph's soul in a precious silken napkin and angels carried it away, and more arrived to shroud the body. How, overcome with grief, he, Jesus, blessed the body from all corruption and pronounced blessings on all who would celebrate Joseph's memory by good deeds, or write the story of his death.

The facts of Joseph's life are meagre but concise as given by Jesus, and one would feel that these should be accounted as reliable. Apparently the Church didn't think so; the figure of a querulous, doubting, dreamy old dodderer, who was virgin of necessity rather than by choice, was a stumbling block. The Church needed a grander and nobler Joseph for the task she proposed for him. So by edict and encyclical, councils and popes, titivated and rejuvenated the chaste spouse of Mary the Virgin. But a certain amount of confusion arises from these accounts. There is one other source of relevant information which comes from St. Bridget of Sweden, by revelation from the Virgin herself. Although Jesus mentions only one of Joseph's fathers, Jacob, near whom Joseph was buried, there were, of course, two according to the canonical Gospels. As a balance of nature, presumably, Joseph had a son without a father!

According to Jesus, Joseph married at 40, had four sons and two daughters, became a widower at 89, was 90 when espoused to Mary and died at 111. Not only are these ages in dispute, but despite his previous marriage and his children, Joseph had to be a virgin. Two virginal marriages and six extra children would need a lot of explanation. Some authorities give his age as 200 years when called on to marry the Virgin, but others claim him to have been in his prime and full of animal vitality at this epoch of his career, for a withered, senile, tottery man would hardly deserve a sainthood for preserving his wife's virginity!

The Council of Constance gave earnest consideration to this problem. It was argued that Joseph was "sanctified in his mother's womb by a baptism of desire"; that "he was freed from concupiscence by reason of his liberation from original sin", and his virginity was a logical consequence. But despite general credulity on matters miraculous, the older authorities found the figure of a lusty wedded male remaining forever virgin too unrealistic, and accepted the theory that concupiscence had already been extinguished in Joseph's body before his espousal. The Virgin also, adheres to this story; at least her story to St. Bridget was that Joseph "was dead to the flesh and to the world".

Passing away from the awkward question of his age, Joseph was, by all authorities, appointed to the great task of fostering the Son of God. He was chosen from all the men of Israel by the miracle of a flowering rod. Of old,

he was always depicted with a rod in his hand, but latterly this has been replaced by a lily. However, Joseph did not seem to be aware of the mission assigned to him by heaven, for he told Jesus of the doubts he had felt about the virgin story and the reassurances he had received from Gabriel. Early Christians sometimes wondered whether Joseph was not rather an encumbrance to a virgin birth story, but the Fathers of the Church discerned in it only God's care to safeguard Mary's honour both as a virgin and a mother. In the words of St. Ambrose, "The Lord preferred that some people should doubt his own origin rather than his mother's honour". "He knew the delicate modesty of the Virgin as well as the insecure reputation of virginal honour". Thus Joseph was to become the unimpeachable witness to certify the virgin birth. Or, as one eloquent Father put it, "O inestimable tribute to Mary! Joseph believed in her chastity more than in her womb, in grace more than in nature! He plainly saw the conception and he was incapable of suspecting fornication. He believed that it was more possible for a woman to conceive without a man than for Mary to be able to sin". And St. Jerome adduced that Joseph "concealed in silence the mystery he did not fathom".

The peculiar circumstances of the marriage also evoked concern in the Church. Could a marriage be a true marriage in all senses when one or both partners entered into it with the sworn intention to remain virgin? The question was decided with the authority of St. Thomas Aquinas in favour of the genuineness of the marriage.

That Joseph worked as a carpenter seems to be a generally accepted fact of his career, and despite later attempts to represent him as a model workman, he appears to have been decidedly poor at his craft. Jesus, though practically a delinquent as a child, grew up to become a tolerably loyal son to his poor old foster dad and constantly used his supernatural powers to get the old fellow out of his difficulties. Eyesight and concentration failing, no doubt, Joseph could not get his measurements correct; beds, thrones and doors would not fit, but a little pull by Jesus and the thing would right itself. Perhaps it was these efforts on the part of Jesus which caused Leo XIII to write: "The Word of God was modestly obedient to Joseph, was attentive to his commands and paid to him every honour that children should render their parents". This is not exactly what Joseph had thought of his Divine Son, for on one awkward occasion when Jesus had killed his schoolmaster, Joseph complained bitterly to Mary, "Know verily that my soul is sorrowful even unto death because of this boy. It may chance that anyone may smite him in malice and he may die".

However, time heals all, and Joseph has since been selected as the Protector of Carpenters and Cabinet-makers and Patron of Unions of Woodworkers. Leo XIII said of such honours that "Joseph bore with calm and dignified spirit the straitened circumstances connected with his meagre means of livelihood. Considerations such as these will serve to encourage and tranquillise the poor". But Joseph now has many honours apart from his patronage of workmen; he is the Patron of Families, the poor, the dying, and significantly today, he is to be our Patron in the struggle against Atheistic Communism. All who recite his prayer shall receive singly, an indulgence of 7 years and 7 quarantines for each recitation.

The final resting-place of Joseph's incorruptible body is
(Concluded on next page)

This Believing World

The Roman Catholic "Tablet" reports that the Bible is to be translated into Bahasa, the official language of Indonesia, and 250,000 copies, when printed, are going to be distributed to Catholics who have been converted from Islam, the religion of about 80,000,000 of the people in Indonesia. If the Bible is so difficult to translate into English that dozens of translations have been attempted this century, we wonder what it will be like in Bahasa?

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Of course this new translation will have one advantage—it will have to be made either from what is called the Latin Vulgate, or from its English translation, and if passed by the Catholic authorities, it *must* be God's Precious Word. We wonder how many of the Vatican cardinals know Bahasa, and can guarantee a perfect translation? Could any of them guarantee a perfect translation in *Italian*?

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In general, however necessary for the editorial and the advertising staffs of newspapers and journals to work harmoniously together, advertisers find it almost impossible to dictate policy to the editorial staff. In America, the Knights of Columbus have spent quite large sums of money advertising the Roman Church, and they thought this gave them the right to dictate to *Harper's Magazine* as to what should or should not be the editorial policy. The virtuous Knights recently strongly objected to a review of a book which attacked the late Joe McCarthy, the great anti-Communist slayer who was Roman Catholic to the core.

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By publishing the Supreme Knight's letter in its columns together with his reply, the editor of *Harper's* was doing immense service to all who value freedom of speech. But we hope it will cause in addition an inquiry to be made into the activities of the Roman Church "behind the scenes" in some of the history-books used in our schools, and particularly the part it plays in "vetting" important encyclopedias. The late Joseph McCabe published a scathing indictment of the way in which it has managed to hide the truth in some of the articles vetted by Romanists on the Encyclopedia Britannica. But of course Roman Catholics manage to get into all sorts of positions where their dangerous activities almost go without even a comment, and what is worse, succeed in carrying out the Church's orders.

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At last we can congratulate the Roman and the English Churches for a delightful proof of their earnest desire for "unity". A large chapel at Northfield, according to the *Daily Express* (November 27th), was divided to provide "a church for Roman Catholics as well", though preserving their separate identities. This is called "an example of practical co-operation" for both are "working to spread the Christian message". But the real point at issue is, which is the *true* Christian message? There is only one Church that has it, as Dr. John Heenan is ready to proclaim from the house tops. The other Church is a hotbed of heresy.

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Of course what happens at an Assembly of the World Council of Churches when thousands of Christians meet in what they call "fellowship" is quite a different matter. In these days, they can't start squabbling as to what Jesus or God really meant by "true" Christianity, so we get Christians of widely different beliefs "welcoming" each other just as the Archbishop of York "welcomed" the entry of the Russian Church at New Delhi the other day. But what a farce it all really is!

THEATRE

The Cherry Orchard was Anton Chekhov's last play, written when he was dying at Yalta. It tells of a house that is dying, a world that is dying: the world of Madame Ranevsky and her brother Gaev, and the world of the aged servant, Firs, who looks back at the freeing of the serfs as a calamity and considers the present topsyturvy. But through the characters of the student, Trofimov, and Madame Ranevsky's 17-year-old daughter, Anya, Chekhov presages a new and better world. Will they get there? Yes, says Trofimov—or if not, he will show others the way.

Maxim Gorky, who visited Chekhov and took with him the youthful hope of that new world, described the Chekhovian characters and said: "In front of that dreary, grey crowd of helpless people there passed a great, wise, and observant man: he looked at all these dreary inhabitants of his country, and, with a sad smile, with a tone of gentle but deep reproach, with anguish in his face and in his heart, in a beautiful and sincere voice, he said to them: 'You live badly, my friends. It is shameful to live like that!'"

For Madame Ranevsky, "All Russia is our orchard". But for Trofimov, it is 200 years behind the times and "Before we can live in the present we must redeem the past; have done with it". And when she was in Paris, Anya went up in a balloon. "It doesn't matter whether the estate is sold today or not; it's all over", says Trofimov. "You must try to be more generous in your judgments. Try to be more understanding", Madame Ranevsky pleads. But it doesn't matter to her daughter whether the house and cherry orchard are sold or not. And she tells her, mother: "You still have your life before you".

Varya, Madame Ranevsky's adopted daughter is an banal as her foster mother, and Chekhov is again merciless. "If only God would help us", she exclaims twice. "Now don't start swivelling", and "Varya you must stop caterwauling" are Gaev's caustic comments. "I'd go away. I'd go into a convent", she says again, to which Trofimov ironically retorts, "What happiness!"

The conflicting attitudes persist to those tender final moments. "Life in this house has come to an end", says Trofimov. "Good bye old house. Good bye old life", says Anya. "Welcome new life", adds Trofimov. Then Madame and her brother say their farewells to the house as the cherry trees are being felled, and when the doors are shut the old servant Firs is locked in. "They've gone, they've forgotten me", he says. "Well never mind. Just sit down. Life has passed me by as if I'd never lived". And Gorky's words ring in our ears: "It is shameful to live like that".

This deeply moving play is most sensitively presented by the Royal Shakespeare Theatre Company at the Aldwych Theatre, London, under the direction of Michel Saint-Denis, and with a distinguished cast headed by John Gielgud. Sir John has also adapted this play by the humanistic materialist, Anton Chekhov, the man who said, "Outside matter, there is neither knowledge nor experience, and consequently there is no truth . . ."; Gorky's "great, wise, and observant man", who spoke "in a beautiful and sincere voice". *The Cherry Orchard* is an unforgettable experience.

COLIN MCCALL.

THE FOSTER FATHER OF THE SON OF GOD

(Concluded from page 411)

also in doubt. He may, the Church considers, have been one of the saints who arose from the grave at the Crucifixion, perhaps to console Mary, and then ascended to Christ to heaven and be there in body and soul. Time and the popes will no doubt settle this matter. Meanwhile a modern authority on Joseph and his trials, F. L. Filas, S.J., sings his praises thus: "Jesus must have prayed often for his self-effacing and generous guardian . . . here was a man wearing himself out in the personal service of Christ himself . . . No man but one thoroughly schooled in the virtues of faith, obedience, chastity, and humility, could have carried out the exacting duties of the head of the Holy Family. We know particularly of his instant uncomplaining obedience at all times". Poor Joseph! He carried his cross with fortitude in life. But he has had his moments since. Virgin saints and abbesses have proclaimed their love for Mary's spouse, and his relics have been venerated: his girdle, buckle, staff, swaddling clothes, fragments of his body and numerous epousal rings. Today he has the especial charge of Mexico and Canada, while his ever chaste spouse guards their sister-nation, the USA. And above and beyond all, Joseph claims as his most precious title, the Foster Father of the Son of God.

THE FREETHINKER

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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 Branches—Kingston, Marble Arch, North London: (Marble Arch), Sundays, from 4 p.m. MESSRS. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER, C. E. WOOD, D. H. TRIBE, J. P. MURACCIOLE. (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.
- 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: L. EBURY.
- Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square, Nottingham).—Every Friday, 1 p.m., Every Sunday, 6.30 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

INDOOR

- Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Tuesday, January 2nd, 1962: MISS GLADYS FARNELL, "Egypt's Glory", with colour slides.
- Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, December 31st, 6.30 p.m.: New Year Party.
- Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Education Centre, Broad Street), Sunday, December 31st, 2.30 p.m.: FRANCIS LEMMAN, B.A., "Berlin, East and West".
- South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, December 31st, 11 a.m.: F. H. AMPHLETT MICKLEWRIGHT, M.A., "1861-1961—Retrospect and Forecast".

Notes and News

WELL, IT LOOKS as though the world will make it to the end of the year without a holocaust: a frightening and horrible year at times, and at best an uneasy one. Yet, optimists that we are, we think we can detect a few hopeful signs. The United States was not provoked into retaliating when the Soviet Union exploded her nuclear bombs, and the leaders of both countries are revealing a more responsible attitude than at certain times in the past. It would be foolish to regard the danger of nuclear war as passed, but there does seem to be more awareness of its consequences. And that is something.

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A GOOD DEAL of credit for bringing about this awareness must go, we think, to the new and generally neutral nations that are playing increasing parts in world affairs. And we salute the men and women in many countries who have argued, pleaded, demonstrated, and gone to prison in the cause of nuclear disarmament and peace. Despite his age, the great Freethinker, Bertrand Russell has set a splendid example to the young. And, among those young people, we are proud that another Freethinker, Barnaby Martin took part in the peace march to

Moscow and in the discussion at the university there. But we are proud, above all, that so many supporters of this paper and members of the National Secular Society work strenuously for a peaceful and better world. They have earned our gratitude and the gratitude of generations to come. For, if nuclear war is avoided, the better world will surely come: the trend towards Secularism is irresistible.

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OF COURSE there are stupendous problems facing us in addition to the nuclear peril: population and hunger among the most urgent. Not only do Freethinkers support every move to tackle them, they lead the way in fighting the greatest obstacle to the tackling of them: religious opposition, notably opposition to birth control and sterilisation on the part of the Roman Catholic Church.

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THE GUEST OF HONOUR at the National Secular Society's Annual Dinner on Saturday, March 3rd will be Mr. T. M. Mosley of Nottingham. We shall have more to say about this very happy choice nearer the time. Meanwhile, many of Tom Mosley's friends will want to make a note of the date to pay fitting tribute to one of Freethought's best loved advocates.

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WE HAVE REMARKED in the past on the versatility of our contributor Oswell Blakeston, and we note that he has two drawings in the Taurus Artists' Christmas Show at the Chiltern Art Gallery, 10 Chiltern Street, London, W.1 (closes January 12th, 1962). But Mr. Blakeston knows his limitations and this year as a Christmas greeting sent us an 8-page booklet entitled "All That I Know of Relativity". The inside pages were all blank.

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"I WAS beginning to be worried", said Dominic Behan. "I thought that if the Irish authorities were letting my book be sold it must be a bad one" (*The Guardian*, 18/12/61). Now he feels better. His autobiography, *Teems of Time and Happy Returns* has been seized by the Irish Customs after being on sale in Ireland for a month. Dominic quoted playwright brother Brendan's song, "We're the best banned in the land", and said: "The book is selling well and going into a second impression. This should improve sales still further". The book, he added, printed some home truths about de Valera and the Church.

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REX NORTH of the *Daily Mirror* described (19/12/61) a flight in a private plane piloted by the 69-year-old "Mad Major", Christopher Draper, who in 1953 flew under fifteen Thames bridges. And Mr. North referred to Major Draper's autobiography, *The Mad Major* due to be published in April. Major Draper is, of course, a Freethinker, and former member of the Executive Committee of the National Secular Society. We expect his book to be as startling as some of his exploits.

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"LORD GOD ALMIGHTY", chanted a West Indian in Smethwick (Birmingham) Magistrates' Court on December 11th. "Look upon me, Lord. Don't let 'em kill me". he went on at the top of his voice (*Birmingham Mail*, 11/12/61). He was accused of assaulting a policeman, and he had chanted in the cells before he entered the court. "You are not in church at the moment. You are in court, so there is no point in praying", said the Clerk, but it was no good. The chanting continued. A medical examination was ordered.

A Pertinent Question Unanswered

By H. CUTNER

IF THERE IS ONE THING on which the Churches, however they differ on points of theology, were almost always agreed, it was that in the Gospels we had the teachings of "our Lord" literally and exactly as they were delivered. Even an unbeliever like John Stuart Mill was moved to ask, how could a number of ignorant and unlettered fishermen possibly have written these divine and sublime truths? How could they possibly have invented them?

Naturally, when faced with some of the absurdities of the "ethics" of Jesus, Christians would hastily agree that either the Gospel writers misunderstood Jesus, or something must have gone wrong in the reporting, or perhaps these parts of God's "revelation" had not been properly translated. But such excuses could only come after the power of the Church, that is, the power to burn, torture, imprison anybody who criticised the Church and its Gospel traditions, had gone for ever. Nowadays, anyone can say almost what he likes in the way of criticism of the Bible and Jesus, so long as the language used does not degenerate into libellous "blasphemy".

So even a former Bishop of London can write a pamphlet which can be published by such an ultra-orthodox body like the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge under a title like, *Were the Teachings of Jesus Distorted by the Early Church?* and get away with it. Surely, even to suggest that the teachings of "our Lord" were "distorted", and distorted by the "early Church" (a Church, never forget, of the most angelic beings who ever trod this earth always trying to make themselves martyrs for Christ's sake) seems very near blasphemy.

The author of this pamphlet (which was sent to me by my friend William Kent), the Right Reverend J. W. C. Wand, KCVO, DD, admits in his very first sentence that before we can answer the question, "we must know what the original teachings were". And he answers his own question with "Whether it is possible to attain such knowledge has been doubted by some modern scholars". He himself nowhere tells us what the "original" teachings were.

Why is this? Why do "some scholars fight shy of any assertion about the original teachings of Christ"? Simply because "the New Testament records bear a very different aspect today than that which they bore a couple of generations ago". You would think that such "heresy" as implied in these utterances would bring Dr. Wand to appreciate the fact that the "records" are completely suspect from any point of view. Nothing of the kind. Dr. Wand claims that "it is commonly believed" that "the farthest fragments—those nearest to the time of Christ—are the stories told orally by the apostles to their followers. But it is more likely that some of them, such as the Temptation narrative for instance go back further still and are reminiscences of the stories told originally by Christ himself".

As believers in "oral tradition" admit, the Temptation narrative must have come from some "oral" source, and the only ones we know are either the Devil himself, or Jesus; and it is good to see that Dr. Wand sturdily believes in the Devil as he should indeed do. And with the Devil, he must believe in the Devil's home town or country—Hell as a place.

But even Dr. Wand is feign to confess that "legends accumulate round any place, and it would indeed be mar-

vellous if the story of Jesus had remained unaffected in all its original, stark simplicity".

"In all its original, stark simplicity!"

Here we have the emotional Fundamentalist appearing with all the credulity and lack of genuine criticism which still mark the all-believing Christian.

No one has ever seen a line anywhere which can be designated as the "original" of the story of Jesus whether stark or simple or both. No one can say for a certainty whether there ever was a Jesus, or if there was, can tell us what language he spoke, who it was that took down his story in its original, stark simplicity, or who translated it into Greek—that is, if it really was first put down in Greek and not in Latin.

Dr. Wand is forced to admit,

It is certainly true that, as the stories have developed from their oral to their written form and then been collected into documents and finally edited to constitute our present gospels, it is possible to trace a gradual heightening of the miraculous, a certain deepening of the theological element. But the remarkable thing is that, carry the investigation far back as we may, we can find no stage in which there is no miracle and no theology. The figure of the Christ is essentially the same throughout.

Dr. Wand is here absolutely right. The figure of "the Christ" is that of a God, a God who performs and performed miracles, never of a man. The people who believe in a man Jesus do so by accepting exactly the same evidence the Gospels give for a God and his miracles. The "essential" part of the Gospels reveal—as Dr. Wand clearly sees—a God, and there can be no logical grounds whatever to separate the "historical" figure of Jesus of Nazareth from "the figure of the supernatural and theological Christ".

Naturally, Dr. Wand is forced to drag in the Epistles of Paul which, in his opinion, are earlier documents than the Gospels; and naturally also, Dr. Wand follows Christian "authorities" in maintaining that Mark was the earliest Gospel only a little later than, say, 60 AD, and John, "before the end of first century". There is not and never has been a scrap of evidence for saying that Mark was the earliest Gospel, or that John was the latest, or that Paul was earlier than the Gospels. It is all sheer speculation. For myself, without being an "authority". I can only say that Mark has always seemed to me the latest Gospel, and John the first; while the Epistles, as we have them now, are second-century documents heavily edited and interpolated. (This accounts for so much of their obscurity.)

But the question of dating the New Testament documents is an enormous one which certainly can never be settled in a short article or pamphlet. Dr. Wand has perforce to drag in the way the Church "framed an official list of the books that were regarded as Holy Scripture"—but he takes good care not to give us any date for this "framing". The reason is of course that nobody knows when the list of "genuine books" was compiled, or who were the people who compiled them. Many of the stories about the Canon of the New Testament are pure speculation.

As the various sects of early Christians were always at loggerheads as to what Christianity really meant or was—the row about the "Creeds" is a typical example—Dr. Wand actually cites them as a proof of "the care

taken by the early Church to ensure the purity of its teaching". Moreover, Dr. Wand insists that "the picture of himself as Messiah which is presented by the Jesus of the Gospels is quite unlike anything that his contemporaries had in their minds before he began to teach". Now, how does Dr. Wand know this? We have no particulars of any picture of himself as Messiah, or indeed any picture of Jesus as anything at all, for he was entirely unknown to his "contemporaries" during his lifetime—that is, if he ever had a lifetime. In fact, Dr. Wand is forced to admit something like this when he tells us that the picture of "the simple Galilean peasant is quite a suppositious figure". But does that matter? Certainly not. Jesus was always "a mysterious and numinous figure". At the same time, if you really want to know what Jesus said or taught, it is quite in order to quote the Gospels. He must have said what they say he said. Even in Greek.

In any case, Dr. Wand resolutely refuses to believe that "the Christian sacraments" were borrowed from Pagan rites; though he can well believe that "simple Jewish rites were re-interpreted in the light of ideas borrowed from those cults". Just as simple as that.

Dr. Wand flits from one aspect of the Gospels to another, making it extremely difficult to learn at any time what it is he believes on "faith", or on "historical" evidence, or on speculation. But there is one thing he never talks about, except in such vague and general terms that it would be quite hopeless to argue with him.

I went carefully through the 16 pages of his pamphlet to find out what exactly were the teachings of Jesus "distorted" or not by the early Church, and when did the early Church begin to distort them if they really were distorted. But Dr. Wand was not out to prove anything of the kind. He is, at times, as near a Fundamentalist as one can find in the Church of England today, and he could never have been anything else. His conclusion is—never mind the evidence—almost, if not quite, the conclusion of the Tractarians headed by John Henry Newman some 130 years ago. It is:

As far as the apostolic tradition is concerned we are convinced that it faithfully preserved Jesus's teaching about himself, his sacraments, and his Church. That is the tradition that was mirrored in the New Testament and reflected in the early Church.

Did any one expect any other result? It will be gratefully swallowed by all good Christians. The immense labours of all biblical critics throughout the ages which contest such a travesty of what we know are hastily thrown aside, and the beautiful picture of (let us admit) not a simple Galilean peasant, but of a working carpenter God who was also the King of Kings exactly as envisaged by the early Church (about which we know nothing) stands as if it had never been assailed at any time.

BREVITIES

"God will provide",
Said dear Papa,
Then died.
God did provide:
Hard work, poor pay
And many a weary day.
No one could say
Papa had lied.

—R.W.H

Waste no breath
On death.
It's certain.
Enjoy the play
Each day,
Until the curtain.

—R.W.H.

Points from New Books

By OSWELL BLAKESTON

WHAT A YEAR WE'VE HAD! In America a Catholic priest, the Rev. L. C. McHugh, told readers of a Jesuit magazine that it was permissible to protect one's own interests by refusing to allow a neighbour to share one's nuclear bomb shelter. Then there was the affair of "Our Lady's Jewel Box", a Catholic repository in Kentish Town Road, North London, which was simply a front for crime run by "Holy Joe". From Italy came the headlines of two friars accused of plundering nearly £600,000 worth of State-owned art treasures from a church and selling them to an antique dealer. The friars, the police asserted, had been robbing the church since 1954, and the holy men had even managed to dispose of the church organ. And then there was that business of the nuns at Lakewood who put up a notice saying: "No Trespassing. Violators will be prosecuted. Signed—Sisters of Mercy".

It would certainly be hard for fiction writers to compete; but there are some good factual jokes in F. C. Sillar's and R. M. Meyler's *The Symbolic Pig* (Oliver & Boyd, 63s.). The authors have made a superb collection of ecclesiastical pigs, the pigs which turn up on misericords and in stained glass windows. On the Norman tympanum of the church of Parwich in Derbyshire there is a carving of "A Pig Rejecting Christianity", while a church at Hognaston in the same county has a carving of "A Pig accepting Christianity". Well, well, well. . . . and surely some medieval craftsmen were having a laugh when they introduced into our cathedrals and churches pictures of pigs playing harps and pigs drawing on their trousers!

The compilers of this amusing miscellany mention a point which I believe is not so well known. It seems that Henry VIII had his writing paper watermarked with a hog wearing a tiara to show his contempt of the Pope.

The publication of the autobiography of the film actor, Sessue Hayakawa, under the title of *Zen Showed Me The Way* (Allen & Unwin, 21s), starts an odd train of thought. Men, it seems, are ready to discipline themselves under some such exacting system as Zen in order to suppress crude emotions of resentment, envy, hate, etc. How good good men can be, and what poor inspiration they get from the created world with its pageantry of beast preying on beast, its jungle law for every tooth and claw. "Is it possible", Max Chapman has asked in an aphorism, "that one day men may convert God?" Anyway, all admirers of the art of the film will want to read Mr. Hayakawa's memoirs of Hollywood in the early days, of the French studios when that great personality Eric von Stroheim

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was acting in them, and of *The Bridge On The River Kwai*.

When men take the name of their god to go to war, there seems to be no limit to atrocity. Ernle Bradford, in *The Great Siege* (Hodder & Stoughton, 25s.), tells us how Solyman the Magnificent despatched a fleet in 1565 to wipe out the Knights of St. John on Malta. The Christian Knights were living on "organised piracy", and Allah's Deputy on Earth was infuriated by their plundering of Levantine ships. His soldiers were told that in the Holy War between True Believers and Christians all who fell with their face towards the enemy would inherit that perfect world promised by the Prophet where the climax of love will last a full ten thousand years. The Christian Knights, of course, were told that all who died fighting the infidel would receive a plenary indulgence for their sins.

Firm in their faith, the Christians were happy to attack a Turkish hospital camp and put all the wounded to the sword. La Valette, the Grand Master of The Order of St. John, who is often described as the perfect Christian warrior, was prepared to cut off the heads of his Turkish prisoners and use them as cannon balls. Then, firm in their faith, the infidels were eager to nail their beheaded prisoners to derisory crosses.

The final obscenity was that the Turks rushed into bloody battles yelling "Allah!" with salivaed lips; and the Maltese, who served the Knights, shouted "Alla!", which was the Maltese name for the Christian god. Both sides were fervently urged on to murder and mayhem by their priests and mullahs and dervishes.

CORRESPONDENCE

SECULARISM

Mr. W. E. Huxley's objection to "secular" and its derivatives is quite unacceptable. Chambers's Twentieth Century Dictionary gives a number of definitions, including "pertaining to the present world, or to things not spiritual: civil, not ecclesiastical: lay: not concerned with religion", before it comes to "not bound by monastic rules" and this is specifically noted as "opp. to regular". Moreover, it defines "secularism" as "the belief that the state, morals, education, etc., should be independent of religion: G. J. Holyoake's (1817-1906) system of social ethics". That will certainly do for me and I am sure for many others.

And it is nonsense to talk of the "followers of 'Gentle Jesus' by whom avowed atheists were in real danger of being hanged, drawn and quartered", "nearly a century ago". Bradlaugh openly avowed himself an atheist and, though often disgracefully treated, was never in danger of hanging, drawing and quartering. Nothing is achieved by exaggeration like this. COLIN MCCALL.

ATHEISM IN USSR

Apropos the Russian League of the Godless. In a recent speech Mr. Krushchev said that among the most important educational tasks facing the USSR were the spread of the materialist conception of history and the combatting of supernaturalism in all its forms. They should also be among the most important tasks before the World Union of Freethinkers, especially in the present state of the world, with the awakening of so many new countries. G. AND J. H. MATSON.

[*The World Union of Freethinkers does combat supernaturalism "in all its forms": it does not spread the materialist conception of history.*—ED.]

THE "INDEX"

May I say a few words about Emmett McLoughlin's very fine article on the Catholic *Index*. As a reader from early youth I realise the indispensable power of books in freeing the mind from ignorance. To submit to censorship is to sell one's mind into slavery. Mr. McLoughlin's article deals widely with the type of books on the Index, but he does not name any specific book such as Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* for instance. What are the actual works on the Index? It is this information which is of importance to Freethinkers. Off hand could any Secularist

state if Paine's *Age of Reason* is on the Index for instance. A volume could be written on this, but could the writer supply us with some further information? E. MARKLEY.

[*To answer Mr. Markley's specific questions, Gibbon's Decline and Fall is on the Index by name; The Age of Reason is not. But the whole point of Mr. McLoughlin's article was that the Index simply can't be kept up to date and books are therefore banned by category as well as title. However, if Mr. Markley wants a copy of the Index he may get one from Foyle's Catholic section, Charing Cross Road, London. The price is, we believe 7s. 6d.*—ED.]

DANGER TO FREEDOM

Whether one is a Secularist, an Agnostic, or a Christian, there is in this country a deep-seated love of freedom (both political and religious), and a tolerance of other people's beliefs, but inherent in this is a danger which the vast majority of English folk do not realise. The "climate" is favourable for the propagation of Romanism, and so long as we remain apathetic and indifferent this organisation will continue to make progress.

I do not know a single member of the House of Commons who has protested about the murders in Colombia, or the persecution of Protestants in Spain, and Lord Alexander of Hillsborough seems to be the only member of the House of Lords who attacks Romanism. This is surely indicative of how we regard our precious heritage of freedom which was only won at the expense of suffering and blood.

The remark of the Archbishop of Canterbury that he would love to visit the Pope, and the statement by the previous Archbishop (Dr. Fisher) that Rome is no longer an enemy but an ally are not only fatuous and asinine, but do great disservice to the cause of religious freedom. (REV.) B.C.S.

The success of the movement for Christian unity carries with it the definite possibility of the civil government being under the domination of the Christian Churches (except in non-Christian countries). N. E. S. WEST.

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