

The Freethinker

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TO STUDENTS of the science of comparative religion, which unlike theology is a genuine, and not a pseudo science, the recent weekend of February 3rd-4th, was of a quite exceptional interest. For in India, and even to a certain extent here, there were reproduced with an extreme fidelity, a recurring phenomenon in the evolution of religion at its more primitive level—of the end of the world. In India particularly, February 4th was visualised

as a veritable Doomsday. Even though it is nowadays a secular state in name, under the enlightened leadership of Mr. Nehru, India lived up to its traditional reputation as the most religious country in the world. The stars

had spoken! The immemorial astrological lore of the Wise Men of the East had predicted the approaching doom of the world! The Indian magi of the twentieth century, like their Oriental predecessors in the first, had seen celestial sights which had filled them with dire foreboding. In 1 BC the Three Kings saw the Star of Bethlehem blazing in the West, with its premonition of human salvation; now in 1962 AD, the more pessimistic Indian astrologers foresaw and foretold only dire disaster to the human species from the ominous conjunction of the planets. Fortunately, the stars misfired in 1962. Might one not even make the perhaps daring deduction that the evangelical Three Kings were equally astray in their predictions? For is there not an apt medieval proverb which states (no doubt as the result of much bitter experience): "The Stars cannot lie, but the astrologers both can and do"? At any rate, it is now evident that *something* went wrong (was it the stars or their readers?) in both India and elsewhere during that first weekend in February. After all, the proof of the pudding is in the eating, and the solar planets (including the earth), all lined up for destruction in a cosmic catastrophe by the Indian astrologers for February 4th, are still here—or so, at least we understand.

Doomsday—Hindu Version

However, it is evident that in the secular state of Bharat, millions of people still take the stars—and the astrologers—seriously. (As they do here if we are to judge from the phenomenal circulation of say, *The News of the World*). By all accounts, India presented all the appearance of Doomsday. The temples were crowded and perhaps even more significantly in such a fast-developing country, the Stock Exchanges were closed. Evidently bears and bulls were both at a discount. How fortunate that the whole scare eventually proved to be "bull" anyway! India resembled a land stricken by an Act of God, while in Christian England even, zealous addicts of starry lore climbed peaks in the Lake District, presumably to make themselves accessible to the stars, and besought them to change their minds and to postpone the Day of Doom. However, Doomsday came and went just like any other and ordinary day. It became evident (presumably in India also) with the chimes of midnight, that

stellar predictions of the proximate destruction of the solar system had proved to be much exaggerated, as Mark Twain once commented on reports of his own death: clearly either the stars or the astrologers had slipped up. Incidentally, it will be interesting to learn whether as a direct result of this unfortunate slip-up on the part of the "exact science" of astrology, the present vogue of "What the Stars Foretell" will suffer any notable diminution.

Speaking personally, I very much doubt it.

The Lord is at Hand

Doomsday is a recurring phenomenon. Most religions can show vivid examples of it, and most theologies contain warnings and anticipations of the

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

The End of All Things is at Hand

By F. A. RIDLEY

Coming End: e.g. the belief in a future Doomsday figures in the cosmopolitan creeds of Islam (where it is to be preceded by terrifying preliminary overtures), Judaism, and possibly most of all in Christianity. Not only do we recall such universal scares as that which transpired throughout Christendom on the eve of the year 1000 AD, when the Second Coming of Christ was universally anticipated, but it would probably be true to say that Christianity actually started as a revivalist movement that expected the end of the world some time during next week or at the very latest, next year. For the whole New Testament is filled with such predictions, all its star characters (whether authentic or fictitious), Jesus Christ, St. Paul (the "Second Founder of Christianity"), St. Peter, the first Pope, St. John the Divine—all these great authorities predict the end in the near future and usually in spectacular form. Indeed, the two greatest authorities of all for Christians, Jesus and Paul, both go out of their way not only to predict, but to describe the end in terrifying details. Jesus actually tells his immediate hearers that, "none of them will taste of death until the Son of Man returns in glory". Evidently from its sequel, this prediction was on the same scientific level as that recent one by Indian astrologers. Similarly, Paul gives his Corinthian converts detailed instructions on how, on the imminent coming of the Lord Jesus, they "will be caught up in the air to meet Him"—another would-be exact prediction exactly falsified by the sequel. Many similar predictions could be quoted on the theme, "The end of all things is at hand": (cf. First Epistle of St. Peter—1-7). One can assume then that the early Christians, including the Master himself, St. Paul and the immediate disciples would have felt entirely at home in the recent tense atmosphere of Doomsday in India.

Primitive Survivals

I repeat, the astrologically inspired panic that filled India (and other places nearer home) on the eve of February 4th, is of extreme interest to all students of comparative religion, and indeed of human evolution in general. It indicates, more clearly than words can, how primitive large sections of mankind still are, even in lands with an ancient culture, and in these opening years of an era of super technology.

Twilight of the Gods

By Dr. J. V. DUHIG

RELIGION, particularly Christianity and most especially Catholicism, is now bankrupt, philosophically, logically and morally. The Vatican has admitted that Atheism is respectable; I hope it will extend its new found tolerance to the length of ceasing to make Atheism synonymous with Communism—a typically mean trick. And a rapid increase in the numbers of those who regard Jesus as mythical and the New Testament as a fake has occurred and is continuing as a result of the dissemination of intense contemporary research in Biblical scholarship. So that as Atheism is certain to replace religion eventually and the Jesus myth dies, the two main bases of Christianity are breaking down fast.

What is the result? In New Delhi recently the World Council of (Protestant) Churches held a congress, and the present Pope is to hold an ecumenical council in the near future. These people do not need augurs to read the omens, and fear is at the bottom of all this. Obviously the Christian sects are feeling the chilly winds of change blowing down their necks and are huddling together for warmth. They see, apparently, what Macaulay referred to in writing of Renaissance Venice, "the ravages of an incurable decay" on their horizon. They see inevitable ruin and security only in numbers. If they do not hang together, they will hang separately. The New Delhi meeting foreshadows Protestant union, the Pope's show will make an empty gesture for union of all Christian religions but it is clearly understood that union will be solely on terms dictated by Catholicism.

In Britain, ministers of the national Church who are willing to surrender to the Pope are numerous and increasing. This is understandable because if you believe Anglican doctrine there is no intellectual or moral harm in swallowing the lot of myths, legends, fables, fakes and swindles. The balance, however, face serious moral dilemmas. It should be clear that an honest person is bound to examine the evidence for his beliefs and to keep up with current research about them. As most Anglican parsons are educated men, the moral dilemma facing them must be strikingly apparent and painful. There is not the remotest evidence for the existence of the Christian or any other god, and the huge mass of minutely accurate data against a historic Jesus is, to me, overwhelming. To such ordained men therefore, the only choice is between infidelity and moral death. As minor items in the bill of imminent Christian bankruptcy, there are the huge shortage of candidates for the sacred ministry, and the menacing mass of defections from it all over the world, both heartening portents to Atheists and Secularists of the impending Christian dissolution.

As tokens of any survival value, what have the religions to offer? Nothing. There is no necessary connection between religion and morality. And what makes strong appeal to the world masses today is the obvious moral superiority of Atheists over Religionists, the criminality of Christians, especially Catholics, and the impudent intrusion of religions into secular life even to the extent of demanding of governments a huge money subsidy to the teaching of their useless superstitions disguised as "education". Roman Catholicism fails to prevent delinquency, crime and prostitution, and at the highest level, conduct is dreadful. The late Cardinal Stepinac planned and approved the murder of tens of thousands of orthodox Serbs, and the highest clergy openly associated with such known assassins

as Trujillo and Franco; and criminals like these ask us to believe their rubbish about ritual cannibalism and transubstantiation. Such a system is a social menace. In the secular field, it forbids divorce and birth control, permitted by the civil secular law, a barefaced and impudent invasion of democratic rights.

Israel is governed by Rabbinical law which, in an alleged democracy, forbids marriage between an Israeli citizen and one who is not of Jewish origin, and rigidly enforces the Sabbath with widespread disruption of civil life. Such savage barbarism is anachronistic; no free people should allow itself to be governed by superstitious ideas thousands of years old. Muhammedanism and other religious sects enforce similar rules and prohibitions derived from primitive folklore.

All this must end, in the modern world. Religion, especially Christianity, is decaying, but not quickly enough. Freethinkers and Secularists should lose no opportunity to spread hostility to the hallowed and hoary old fakes about gods, spirits, angels and all the religious rubbish which not only does no moral good but does active harm. While I do not advocate persecution of individuals I think every precaution should be taken to prevent them imposing their wretched superstitions on authority as the Catholics did on the lamentably feeble London Transport Board. Religion and Christianity merit only contempt and destruction; they are of no use to mankind.

Happily the signs of death of such impediments to progress and human happiness are already high above the horizon.

QUESTION AND ANSWER

In the March, 1962, number of the *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, there is reported the full text of the paper presented by Sir John Hunt, its Director, on *The Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme*, and the following discussion, which we reprint as a delightful example of evasive answering.

Mr. David H. Tribe: "I am extremely interested in youth work, and I think that by and large the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme represents a notable step forward and has been amply justified by the findings of the Albemarle Report; but I was a little disturbed by something which Sir John said early in his paper, which would seem to imply that prayer and worship were an integral feature of the schemes. I hope that does not mean that in some way the Scheme is an agent for Christian indoctrination.

"I think that scientific and sociological thought agree to-day that the intellectual credentials of prayer and worship are highly suspect, and statistics would show that the relationship between religion and morality is not an encouraging one. Indeed, among the more authoritarian religious groups there seems to be the greater delinquency, particularly of the juvenile sort, and it would seem to be generally agreed that a sense of individual responsibility and a personal commitment to society, rather than religious precepts, are calculated to make young people socially conscious and good moral citizens."

The Lecturer: "If I have understood you rightly, what you have just said in your last words is precisely what the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme specifically sets out to achieve. On the originating committee there was a Bishop of the Church of England, and we discussed with him and with members of other denominations whether there should be some examination of spiritual life, and moral aspirations, ideals and attainments. It was nearly unanimously concluded that it would be quite wrong and impracticably to assess a boy on that basis at all. What is written into the leaders' handbook is the obvious point, that no scheme of this sort can attain its full value unless it is handed by adults who themselves have spiritual convictions, and it is a hope that adults having that kind of persuasion are helping boys and girls along."

N.S.S. Annual Dinner

MR. AND MRS. T. M. MOSLEY left a cold and snowy Nottingham on Saturday, March 3rd, to receive the warmest of welcomes at the 56th Annual Dinner of the National Secular Society in the Mecca Restaurant, Blomfield Street, London.

This was, the Chairman, F. A. Ridley, said, the second year in succession that the Society had chosen to honour one of its veterans. Last year it was Herbert Cutner, "a gladiator of the written word"; this year it was Tom Mosley, "a gladiator of the spoken word". The two men were old friends and had a number of interests in common, apart from their Freethought. Boxing, for instance. Tom Mosley had been a boxing champion, while Herbert Cutner had been a boxing correspondent. Both knew how to deliver blows at an opponent.

Mr. Ridley referred to Mr. Mosley's many years of lecturing for the NSS (with his special study of Determinism and Freewill) and his frequent debates at Nottingham and other universities and colleges. The Chairman then called the toast, "T. M. Mosley and Mrs. Mosley".

Responding, Mr. Mosley told how he had left school at 12 to go down the pit, which was only a few yards from his home, and how he had been 57 years a miner. He had, then, spent many of his years in darkness but not, he hoped, in mental darkness. And he had come to see, like Thomas Hobbes, whose grave was in his local churchyard, that religion was simply the superstition in fashion at the moment. Robert Blatchford's *God and My Neighbour*, the Rationalist Press Association reprints, and the works of Ingersoll and G. W. Foote had particularly influenced him. The Secular position had never been better put than by Foote in *The Philosophy of Secularism*. And that philosophy, said Mr. Mosley, "has been the inspiration of my life". In debates with Christian clergymen, Mr. Mosley had often asked them what was the meaning of "the fellowship of the Holy Ghost". It was quite meaningless. Men didn't want the fellowship of a ghost, holy or otherwise, they wanted the fellowship of their fellow men and women.

Moving the toast, "Freethought at Home and Abroad", D. H. Tribe drew up a balance sheet of debits and credits. The decline of Stalinism had made possible the emergence of Freethought behind the Iron Curtain; in South America the Roman Catholic Church was in decline; in French Canada laicism was spreading; Afro-Asian nations were becoming aware that missionary associates were in the forefront of imperialism, and so on. On the debit side there was the emergence of right-wing dictatorships in France, Turkey, and—a couple of days ago—Burma. Catholicism was powerfully active in places like Australia and Malta. We couldn't afford to be complacent.

At home the spread of scientific knowledge was having its effect. Nowadays, when the Archbishop of Canterbury chose to make an utterance in the House of Lords it attracted little or no attention. As for organised Freethought, THE FREETHINKER'S influence had spread to new places; and recently *The Guardian* had printed an article advocating disestablishment [written by Mr. Tribe]. The NSS's public protest at the banning of the Family Planning Association's poster had brought a good deal of publicity. In addition, men like Len Ebury and Tom

Mosley had earned bouquets for their outdoor propaganda. Mr. Tribe also referred to the work of the Humanist Council and apologised for his serious speech (he had been told to be funny). He asked the members to drink to the day when, on entering the witness box in a court of law, a man was asked to affirm and, if he said he wanted to swear on the Bible, a copy had to be sent for to the British Museum.



Mr. and Mrs. T. M. Mosley

F. A. Hornibrook (another boxing expert, as Mr. Ridley reminded us) recalled that after proposing a toast on another occasion he had been told it was the best speech ever made because it was the shortest. He intended to be brief this time too—and he was. But he managed to refer to the acquisition of premises, the activity of the Branches, and especially the enthusiasm of the West Indies Branches, the steady rise in membership, and the high place of THE FREETHINKER among Freethought journals, before touching on the overseas societies, with special emphasis on the success of the New Zealand Rationalist Association, with which he had special ties.

The speeches concluded, the audience was then, as Mr. Ridley remarked, handed over to the tender mercies of K.H. Sparks and W. Griffiths. Mr. Sparks entertained us with his puppets and marionettes, presenting a delightful parsonic sketch on "Beyond the Fringe" lines and a

(Concluded on next page)

This Believing World

We wonder what the devout readers of "Radio Times" think of the portrait of Jesus given in its issue for March 2nd? It is a reproduction of a Byzantine representation in a convent in Greece, and looks exactly like an Arab thug — though few people will dare to say so. It is given to introduce a discussion on TV between Norah Phillips and Tom Driberg and others on what would happen "if Christ came back"? The two people named believe that if he did, he would be a negro, and one of the other speakers, G. W. Target, claims that "If Christ came today, they wouldn't bother to crucify him. They would certify him as quietly as possible".

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In any case a French medical man, Dr. Binet-Sanglé many years ago published an exhaustive study of Jesus in four volumes proving, in his opinion, that Jesus was insane. Perhaps Mr. Target has read this brilliant analysis of the Gospels and the sayings of "Our Lord", and agrees with the thesis? Hallucinations about Devils and Angels are part of an insane outlook, and would get short shrift in our hospitals these days.

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One of the great attractions the Salvation Army used to offer delighted crowds in its early days of evangelising was the number of old lags, wife-beaters, and confirmed drunkards, who were converted by its big drum and tambourines, and who were always given the chance of saying so in public. Whether they ever lapsed back into their former un-Christian ways, we never found out; but many of them had certainly the "gift of the gab" and could make pious phrases roll round their mouths better even than the bonnetted Army lassies. We are reminded of those happy meetings when reading in *The People* (February 18th) the story of Tommy Munson, top line thief, safe-breaker supreme, who spent 16 years in gaol.

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After ranting against the chaplain for years during his last conviction, Mr. Munson suddenly asked him to pray and thus found Jesus. On his release, he is going to do a two year stretch "in a Bible college", and soon hopes to preach in Welsh from the pulpits he once despised. We cannot help wondering what became of the £100,000 Mr. Munson managed to collect during his "life of crime"? After all, Mr. Munson couldn't have got through all this swag if he spent 16 of his 37 years in gaol. Will all of it or what remains, now be used in the service of Almighty God?

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The engaging theologian who writes the "Saturday Reflection" in the *London Evening News* has discovered that Christianity is "not the natural outcome of ages of human thought and experience". It is "a revelation from God" — as if we didn't know! It must be said in fairness though that God is also responsible for at least two other revelations — the Old Testament, and the Koran. Whether God also wrote Ruth and Esther may be a bone of contention between Rabbis, but there is no doubt whatever that God wrote every word (in pure Arabic) found in the Koran. Muhammed stoutly maintained this, as do all his followers, and they ought to know. What a pity we cannot get a Saturday Reflection on the only point that matters for our salvation—which is the genuine revelation? Perhaps even God himself doesn't know.

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So there is after all a Ghost in the famous White House in Washington — the ghost of Abraham Lincoln. He is however not the only one, as Mr. Truman and Mrs.

Roosevelt testify. In addition to the ghost or ghosts, some of the rooms give one an eerie feeling, especially if used as a bedroom. Perhaps Mr. Kennedy and his family are specially protected by the Vatican, for we are told, "to date present tenants have no ghostly visitors" — which proves how being good Roman Catholics can shoo away all ghosts.

Conjurer Challenges Spiritualists

A LANCASHIRE conjurer, Derek Lever, recently challenged spiritualists in Bolton to demonstrate their powers under test conditions. He guaranteed either to "duplicate their feats or alternatively explain the methods used to the satisfaction of an independent referee" (*Bolton Evening News*, 18/1/62), and the manager of the Bolton Casino Club offered to make his hall available free from hire charge on any Monday night, so that the test could be made. Mr. Lever readily accepted the offer. "I am available on any date that the local spiritualists may suggest", he wrote (29/1/62), "but I have a feeling that there will not be a medium there because although my challenge was published in 'Readers' Views' a fortnight ago, not one spiritualist has taken me up on it". He left the people of Bolton "to draw their own conclusions from this".

Mr. Lever did, however, accept an invitation to visit the National Spiritualist Church at Horwich to witness a demonstration of clairvoyance by Mr. Walter Brooks. He was not impressed. "No doubt", he wrote, "the old ladies who made up 90 per cent of the audience were delighted with 'having their fortunes told', but I doubt if Mr. Brooks could repeat his performance with an audience of young people who were not members of his church". And from a correspondent who said "some years ago, a spiritualist offered £100 to any conjurer who could produce phenomena in the same test conditions as a medium had been subjected to", Mr. Lever requested name and address, "because myself and about 50 other members of the Magic Circle would only be too pleased to relieve him of his money".

NSS ANNUAL DINNER

(Continued from page 83)

most "lifelike" skeleton dance. As MC, Mr. Griffiths was his usual friendly self, responsible in no small part for the happy atmosphere that persisted to the end of the day. Mention should also be made of the workers behind the scenes, notably Mrs. R. E. Seibert, and thanks expressed to Mr. H. S. Michael who generously provided bumper Easter eggs for raffling. But final thoughts quite rightly turned to Mr. and Mrs. Mosley, who were so deservedly honoured at this 56th Annual Dinner of the National Secular Society. The good wishes of all present, and of many who unfortunately couldn't be present, went with them on their trip back to the Midlands.

THE YEAR'S FREETHOUGHT

The Freethinker for 1961

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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

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Empress Hotel, Tyrrel Street), Saturday, March 17th, 7 p.m.: SOCIAL EVENING.

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Tuesday, March 20th, 7.30 p.m.: DR. DOUGLAS GIBSON, "Nature: Doornat, Mystical Mother or What?"

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, March 18th, 6.30 p.m.: MISS GILLIAN ROMNEY, B.A., B.Phil.: A LECTURE.

Marble Arch Branch N.S.S. (The Carpenter's Arms, Seymour Place, London, W.1), Sunday, March 18th, 7.15.: H. McCORMACK, "Persuasion Techniques in Conversion".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, March 18th, 11 a.m.: DR. JOHN LEWIS, M.A., "Youth Without a Faith".

Sussex Branch N.S.S. (Co-operative Hall, London Road, Brighton), Sunday, March 18th, 2.30 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, "Pope John and the Cold War".

Tyneside Humanist Society (100 Pilgrim Street, Newcastle, 1), Wednesday, March 21st, 7.30 p.m.: K. MORRISON, "The Stars and Their Future".

Young Secularists (University of London Union, Malet Street), Monday, March 19th, 7.30 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, "Pope John and the Cold War".

Notes and News

MUCH HAS BEEN MADE of the religious faith of John Glenn—and his parents—no doubt partly in response to Mr. Khrushchev's impish announcement that neither of the Russian astronauts had seen anything of God or Heaven out in space. Colonel Glenn told a Congressional Committee in Washington that people had tried to put words in his mouth on the subject (*Daily Mirror*, 1/3/62). "Just because I have ridden above the atmosphere", he said, "I don't know the nature of God any more than anyone else". He couldn't say that he prayed while he was in orbit ("I was pretty busy") but he felt that "every man should live his life as though every day might be his last". We don't quite know what Mr. Glenn means by this, but we suggest that man must definitely live for

tomorrow as well as today. Even an astronaut, who knows he might not get safely back to earth must try to do so. Man must plan and work—for himself and for those who are to follow. And in fact, Mr. Glenn does, both as an astronaut and a father.

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THE HEAD OFFICE of the Co-operative Guild revealed that Moral Re-Armament "has been making a series of attempts to gain support for its cause by approaching local Guild branch secretaries" (*Co-operative News*, 24/2/62). It was stated that "two grey-haired women" had been "going from branch to branch and gaining entrance to secretaries' homes by giving the impression that they were Guildswomen . . .". "But the most amazing factor in these MRA propagandists' behaviour is their brazenness", said the *Co-operative News*. "Even after their webb of half-truths, name-droppings and cover stories has been seen through, they have the impertinence to involve their unwilling victims in protracted arguments". Mrs. Mabel Ridealgh, General Secretary of the Guild, said that members of MRA had been to the head office, too, but she had "told them quite firmly that both she and the Guild wanted nothing whatever to do with their organisation".

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"THINGS GO 'bump in the night' after ten-year-old Johnny Bonham goes to bed" in Walsall, Staffordshire, reported the *Daily Sketch* (1/3/62). And of course, his parents, the neighbours and a psychic researcher are puzzled. Housing committee experts are even going to try to "lay the ghost". We suggest to these puzzled people that it shouldn't be very difficult for, as Johnny's mother has significantly said: "When Johnny sleeps in my room nothing happens but when he goes to bed in his own room we get this banging noise which sounds like a pneumatic drill".

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NO DOUBT you will want to pray to St. Patrick on March 17th. Here, then, is St. Patrick's "very own prayer": "Christ be with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ at my right, Christ at my left, Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me, Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks to me, Christ in every eye that sees me, Christ in every ear that hears me". A modest little piece we think you will agree.

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LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY reported a full house for their 81st Anniversary celebrations on Sunday, March 4th, when the guest speaker was F. A. Ridley. President of the National Secular Society. "Mr. Ridley gave us half an hour of wit and wisdom, which was followed by half-an-hour's discussion", said Secretary C. H. Hammersley. The celebrations ended with dancing to the music of "The Overtones".

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THE ETHICAL UNION is to hold an informal dance at the Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1, on Saturday, March 31st, from 7.30 to 11 p.m. There will be a band and a buffet, and admission (not confined to members) will be 4s. 6d., payable at the door.

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AS A REALLY down-to-earth experiment, Hampstead rationalist artists are holding exhibitions in a Hampstead butcher's shop, Sam Barrett's of 8 South Hill Park. The first exhibitor is Oswald Blakeston, who is showing a small collection of "butterfly papers", collages of butterflies and beetles on tinted canvases.

"The Rationalist Annual, 1962"

By JACK GORDON

PROFESSOR J. B. S. Haldane, whose essays are a regular feature of *The Rationalist Annual* (Barrie and Rockliff, cloth 7s. 6d., paper 5s.), writes this year on "Beyond Agnosticism", in which he gives four reasons for disagreeing with the agnostic position. These are: 1. The Nature of Knowledge; 2. The Results of Modern Logic; 3. The Possibilities of Scientific Enquiry; 4. The Time Scale. They may be briefly summarised as follows:

1. The old assumption that underlay a great deal of traditional philosophy was that knowledge, in the sense of certainty, was possible. "It may be," says Haldane, "but I do not believe it". All our knowledge can be graded between the two extremes "certainly true" and "certainly false" on a scale of varying probabilities. There is no sharp dividing line between certainty and uncertainty, but to any given piece of knowledge can be assigned a relative probability. At one end of the scale we find Haldane's assessment of his own existence being so probable that he would bet on it whatever he valued most. Haldane, who lives in India, is less certain that London "now" exists. It could have been destroyed by a nuclear explosion in the last hour. The existence of the smallpox virus is still less certain, although the evidence for its existence cannot be explained away. "For two thousand years able men believed in the existence of rigid transparent spheres in the sky carrying the planets". Still less certain is the reality of the cloud of electrons round an atomic nucleus, while, coming now to the other end of the scale, are giant sea serpents, mediums controlled by the spirits of the dead and various fancies of Christian mythology.

2. Haldane believes that modern logic has shown some of the Agnostic's unanswerable questions to be unanswerable because they are nonsense.

3. The impressive array of scientific knowledge acquired in such a relatively short time span—a mere twelve generations—leads Haldane to believe that Agnostics took too narrow a view of scientific possibilities. Some questions may not even be answered by the united efforts of humanity in thirty million years but that does not mean that they are unanswerable.

4. Haldane's "strongest argument against Agnosticism is that science has just begun". There follows an account of the exciting discoveries possible some day in the study of the brain, in the study of social groups and ultimately, perhaps, in the structure and organisation of the Universe. Haldane concludes that if we believe something to be sufficiently highly probable, "we must bet our lives and souls on its truth, if necessary". Atheism and man's mortality are working hypotheses. The dogmas of religion may not all be capable of certain disproof; on the other hand, ignoring those theological statements which can be shown to be nonsense, those which remain have never succeeded in falsifying the predictions of science "in such a way as to make us suspect that these dogmas might be true. Educated people believe in gravitation, the existence of atomic particles and evolution without feeling obliged to accord these entities the status of 'absolute certainties'".

In conclusion, Haldane hints at the possible future of religion. One discerns the shadow of Santayana in the remark that not everything can be described in words and that poetry and music and some sort of preserved mythology may succeed in giving us an inkling of the meaning

of some aspects of human experience. According to this view, religion and art would *express* certain aspects of experience but would *assert* nothing verifiable about it.

Dealing with "Abstraction in Science and Art", E. H. Hutten begins with physics and traces the development of ideas from the turn of the century to the present time. He shows how success in framing new theories was brought about by departing more and more from mechanical models and familiar terms and ideas. Today, modern physics is almost wholly abstract on its theoretical side. To quote the author, "Modern physics is non-representational".

In the world of art, the trend has been in the same direction. Painting, sculpture and music have all undergone changes in form and structure, have become less representational of familiar ideas. In Hutten's view this parallel growth of abstractionism in so many creative fields cannot have been accidental. He goes on to explain that progress depends on creativity and that abstractionism is a necessary part of creativity. Merely to imitate the works of creative artists of the past would be shoddy mimicry. We see the world in a different way. Our world is different from the world of Rembrandt or Mozart. Our world would appear strange to them. Yet "what is abstract and strange today, may be 'concrete' and familiar tomorrow. There is no *absolute* standard".

The second of Haldane's reasons for going "Beyond Agnosticism" is taken up at greater length in R. F. Atkinson's article, "Linguistic Philosophy and Social and Political Problems". This is an altogether delightful description of modern logical analysis in practice. The charge has been levelled sometimes against linguistic philosophers that they have concerned themselves too much with philosophers' problems in the technical sense and not enough with urgent social and political topics. Atkinson believes that linguistic philosophy has an important indirect bearing upon modern social problems and he substantiates his claim by analysing one or two typical cases. The result is the clearing away of much mental fog and prejudice and the presentation of the heart of a problem with enhanced clarity and precision.

On a somewhat different plane, Kathleen Nott invites us to do some "Thinking about Thinking", which may seem a limited or even self-defeating activity like trying to pull oneself up with one's own bootstraps. It is believed that nobody, for example, would prove the truth or consistency of a deductive system by means of arguments drawn from within that system. Some sort of "meta-language" is needed to scan and evaluate the concepts of the system under review. Miss Nott takes a different line. "All thinking can be described as a process of trial and error", she says, and she believes that philosophers should pay more attention to the process of thinking. Just how is not quite clear. Introspection is mentioned briefly. We are told: "Yet it is essential to develop our power of introspection if we are to arrive at self-knowledge and therefore indeed if we are to think validly at all. For it is surely a necessary preliminary, or anyway a necessary psychological background to all forms of thinking, including the severely scientific, that we should be able to detect and correct our leanings towards dishonesty, our natural preference for our own opinions, and therefore the makeweight we put in the scales on their behalf". But just *how* and with *what* are we to detect

Time—The Great Highbrow

By OSWELL BLAKESTON

GIDEON AND HIS WIFE CLAUDELIA were shaken when their daughter, Ethelinda, sat down at the breakfast table and said, "mummy and daddy, how old must one be when one dies?"

Gideon toyed moodily with the idea of sending his daughter for a nice little rest cure, but Claudelia wouldn't hear of it.

"An asylum is a House of Freedom", she snapped. "Most unsuitable".

"Then we might", Gideon suggested mildly, "send the girl to a nunnery?"

But there was only one convent which would consider taking Ethelinda into its sanctuary, and this was a crank institution.

"There's an automatic prayer wheel", Claudelia admitted sadly, "and that does seem to be commitment".

"Indeed", her husband had to agree, "a dirty word".

So there was only one thing to do—to build a convent round Ethelinda.

"Just a wee little convent at the bottom of the garden", Claudelia explained to her Surbiton confidant. "We'll light it with glow-worms, and give them a pig to serve as a septic tank. We don't want to be ostentatious".

"Life begins in close company", said the confidant, remembering how ill she'd felt when she was carrying the twins, "but even so one may not want to die alone".

"No, no", Claudelia put in earnestly, "I am not a monster. Gideon and I will give death its botany. Ethelinda will have nuns with faces like water lilies. Very comforting".

Dear Claudelia, the other thought affectionately, she is an addict to the winged poetry of possibility. For strangely enough, Claudelia's confidant was a kindly woman.

"Couldn't you", she proposed, "find one of those unfrocked priests one is always reading about in best-sellers? It would be quite economical to dress him, I imagine".

But even clever Claudelia couldn't do as much as she would have wished for her daughter. She could only enlist two very old dames, who didn't look a bit like floral vermin, to renounce the world and live at the bottom of the garden. It never occurred to Claudelia that these two ancient crones might die before her daughter. She was a mother, and she did her best.

Sister Patience and Sister Drucilla also tried to live up to the occasion.

"We ought", said Sister Patience who had verdigris breath, "to make Ethelinda our abbess, don't you think? It would be fair, in a way, to let her scratch up her own earth box?"

Sister Drucilla, who had a deluge drop at the end of her nose, couldn't answer.

So Ethelinda was elected.

The girl merely shrugged in her stupid way. She gently looped back a cardboard curtain the colour of bronze velvet, and said, "A thing may be worth doing so that we don't have to do it again. Very well, I'll be the abbess".

But as far as Gideon and Claudelia were concerned, the whole business of the convent was most successful. They were able to forget about Ethelinda's scorpion chatter for years and years; and Gideon became quite spritely and congratulated his doctor on the best injection he'd ever had.

"They use new needles nowadays", he told his wife.

and correct our leanings towards dishonesty, etc.? So far as I know the human brain has no built-in, self-checking mechanisms which automatically correct any errors in its thinking. The brain cannot even protect itself against certain subtle environmental changes which can occur without its knowledge and completely deceive it about what is actually going on *outside* the head.

Apart from the question of the reliability of our thinking, however, there are many interesting angles on other aspects of thinking. Miss Nott puts forward her view that "all genuine thinking is of the same kind, whether it is scientific, artistic, or philosophical or practical". She succeeds in showing that all thinking has motives and purposes as well as certain other basic common aspects. If not all her conclusions are acceptable, there is at least enough in "Thinking about Thinking" to set the reader thinking.

Space permits but brief mention of the remainder of the *Annual*. J. Maynard Smith has a very fine article called "Men of Iron and Men of Gold" in which he takes issue with Professor C. D. Darlington over the latter's claim that genetics holds the key to an understanding of history, of politics, and of ethics. Readers who possess a copy of last year's *Annual* containing Professor Darlington's essay on "Instincts and Morals", would do well to read Darlington's arguments on the influence of genetical factors before proceeding to Maynard Smith's criticism.

"Prehistoric Men—What Can We Know of Them?" is the title of an entertaining essay by the anthropologist, Lord Raglan. The reader may be surprised to learn that not all so-called primitive people are quite so primitive as they have been made out to be. Lord Raglan's thesis is that many modern savage cultures are degenerate, rather than merely primitive or backward.

Professor A. G. N. Flew contributes a review of Professor E. H. Carr's Trevelyan lectures at Cambridge in 1960/61, and discusses historical determinism and moral responsibility. A. K. Bhattacharyya writes on "Ashay Butt, Pioneer of Indian Rationalism", and Naomi Mitchison rounds off the *Annual* with a neat little story, with tragi-comic overtones, about a virgin birth. It is appropriately titled "Mary and Joe"!

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It was a shock, therefore, when, one morning, Sister Patience and Sister Drucilla, who was dropping pools of sky-coloured water, called at the big house. Gideon had just been about to sample some rose-geranium jam for his breakfast, and now he felt caught in Time's jelly.

"Oh dear", he said, "I won't want to lose my teeth".

"Especially nowadays," his wife said smugly.

Then Sister Patience told the sadly bereaved parents that their daughter was dead. She invited Claudelia to become the new abbess for the convent.

For once Sister Drucilla found that her nose cleared at a critical moment and that she was able to speak.

"If you postpone your choice", she said haughtily, "you have already chosen".

"But I couldn't leave Gideon", Claudelia wailed, "and surely it would not be seemly for my husband to live in a convent?"

"The good man could walk about on our little roof to escape the traffic", Sister Drucilla said firmly. "Haven't you heard that the roads are a positive death trap?"

Sister Patience wanted to cry because she thought that the future suddenly looked so rosy for the convent and the hallowed place's dear patrons, but she found she had no mechanism for tears. The muscles had been eaten away by the years.

CORRESPONDENCE

THE TRUTH OF THE BIBLE

Mr. H. Cutner may be interested to learn that Mr. Neville Randall, author of the *Daily Sketch* articles, "Proof that the Bible is True", has stated in a letter to me: "You will be surprised to know that I do not believe in the Garden of Eden either. I do not consider the Virgin Birth an essential part of the Nativity story. Heaven and Hell as described by moralists are of course pure inventions. And the descriptions of Christ after the resurrection, suggests that he was doing no more than materialising in the same way as is done on occasions at seances. We like to give space to all shades of opinion in the *Daily Sketch*, and I hope that we shall soon do a publication of an article by Robert Furneaux, which will criticise most of the points in my series".

T. C. OWEN.

YOGI

Mr. J. C. Sutherland does not deal with true Yogi, but with the fraud attracted to it. Yogi is a system of developing the control of the mind over impulsive actions. All that Mr. Sutherland talks about are the tricks practised by frauds in the name of Yogi. All the tricks mentioned by him, and which he accepts to be true, have been practised for generations in this country. Anybody can eliminate pain by taking drugs, but only for a limited time. And with regard to feats of endurance, certain half famished nations in South America carry heavy loads over mountains. White men wondered how they did it. They did it by chewing the kola nut, the base of cocaine, but their lives are short. "Yogis" can endure anything but work. In regard to drinking fatal doses of nitric acid, sulphuric acid, etc. I can do it. Mr. Sutherland can do it. Anyone can do it. If they know the trick. Major F. Yeats Brown, Dr. Julian Huxley, Madame Galli Curci, etc., are brilliant in their way, but paradoxical though it may seem, it is often very easy to mystify brilliant people. Eastern people are no greater than western people in the art of deception and of the five senses, the eye is very slow.

I once knew a Yogi who contended that the stomach was an unnecessary organ. He reduced his intake of food down to four ounces a day, then to two ounces and then to nothing a day. He went on fine for a few days, but unfortunately, he died, and the experiment failed.

PAUL VARNEY.

ETHICAL RELIGION

I cannot expect you to continue to find space for a bandying of words between Mr. Bennett and myself and this must be my last comment upon the subject. I chided him upon his many-headed approach to the problems of freethought and his accommodation of himself to the apparently contrasting fields of secularism and "ethical religion". I am quite content that readers of *THE FREETHINKER* should judge the matter in the light of our respective contributions.

I am quite entitled to refer to the "so-called" Golden Rule.

In so doing, I am following a tradition set by Sir James Frazer, Professor Kirsopp Lake and Joseph McCabe by suggesting that it is not so much a codified rule as an ethical tradition floating down the centuries in pre-Christian and variant form. Mr. Bennett's misuse of the qualifying adjective is illustrative of his lack of academic description and his readiness to impugn unworthy motives to anybody who dares criticise his dogmatism.

With regard to sex, may I point out once again that I maintain the position that the humanist approach to an important motivation within social life is empirical and utilitarian? If this be non-moral, as Bennett suggests, the views of *inter alia* Jeremy Bentham and Mr. Justice Stephen were also lacking in morality within this field. Further comment is needless but I may be permitted to say that the traditional Christian view which shaped Western Europe in this regard has withered because the theology which justified it has withered. Historically, it can be shown that it made for misery and repressiveness. Mr. Bennett meets such points with a tirade of wild abuse and misrepresentation. I do not wish to pursue the subject in discussion with him if only because his behaviour shows him to be quite unqualified to discuss the matter whether in the sense of academic qualification and knowledge or reasonable balance of decision.

F. H. AMPHLETT MICKLEWRIGHT.

INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE

Why do people who call themselves thinkers still hope that Esperanto (or Ido) can ever be of practical use? An artificial language may be easy to learn but judging by the way English has spread in countries hitherto considered uncivilised and illiterate it cannot be difficult and it seems to have a better prospect of becoming the World Language than any other. Genuine Humanists will help it. Its atrocious spelling is a major defect that can be easily cured—as *Britic* has proved.

In spite of 70 years propaganda Esperanto has been a complete failure. It is no use closing ones eyes to the facts.

R. W. BROWNE (Ph.D.).

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