

The Freethinker

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IN A RECENT ISSUE of the outspoken Labour weekly, *Tribune*, there appeared an account of a visit paid to Belfast by the Home Secretary, Mr. R. A. Butler, that able, but unfortunate Tory politician who seems nowadays cast for the role of permanent runner-up for the Premiership. Amongst the multifarious duties at present assigned to this versatile political figure, is the important one of directing the complex negotiations designed to secure Britain's entry into the Common Market. And to judge from our contemporary's references, Mr. Butler's visit to Belfast was concerned with this aspect of his varied duties which presently appear to range from relieving (or failing to relieve) murderers to providing current "winds of change" in Africa with appropriate constitutional facilities.

Church or Treaty?

But it was apparently in connection with that particular "wind of change" at present blowing towards Europe that Mr. Butler visited Northern Ireland. Now it is quite well known that the famous economic Federation of the Six, was initially constituted by the Treaty of Rome, drawn up in that famous city in 1958. It is even better known, at least to students of past and present religious controversy, that in Belfast, as throughout Northern Ireland in general, the name "Rome", produces much the same results upon good (Northern) Irish Protestants, as the proverbial red rag does to a bull. For ever since that well-nigh fabulous hero, King "Billy" (of the Battle of the Boyne fame—1690), Ulster and its inhabitants have held the Church and See of Rome in quite peculiar (shall we say?) lack of esteem. Apparently that present day pillar of the Church of England "by Law Established" (which has even been described as politically, "the Tory Party at prayer") Mr. Butler, was soon confronted with pertinent inquiries as to what was likely to be the impact of the Vatican upon Great Britain (and particularly, Northern Ireland) as a direct result of her now probable eventual association with the six European lands which are largely Catholic in both popular belief as well as traditional culture. Mr. Butler, who does not boast "theologian" amongst his many apparent qualifications, seems to have been rather taken aback by these Protestant queries, as also, *Tribune* appears to have been. Rather surprisingly this latter case, because the paper at present has one of the best-known Protestant clergymen in Britain, the Reverend Dr. Donald Soper, amongst its contributors, and not so long ago published an article by a Roman Catholic contributor who boasted that he had once confessed to the late Pope's confessor. However, despite these impressive theological associations in both the Protestant and Catholic camps, *Tribune* thought that to associate the Church of Rome with the Treaty of Rome was irrelevant and even a subject for light-hearted banter at the still existing and unaccountable bigotry of the Ulster Protestants who took Mr. Butler to task upon

this new variation of what used to be called "the Roman question".

The Two Romes

I shall not—or so at least, I hope—be accused of any undue leanings towards Protestant fundamentalism, or even of any undue glorification of King Billy (the Protestant hero), if I remark that in my submission, there was nothing in any way flippant, or calling for ridicule

in any queries that Ulster Protestants may have addressed to Mr. Butler about the present and prospective relations of the two Romes, the Church of Rome, with her headquarters at the Vatican, and the Treaty of Rome which

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

Rome and the Treaty of Rome

By F. A. RIDLEY

officially constituted the Common Market to which (at least if Mr. Butler's own party and government gets its way) Britain will shortly belong. It is, of course, obvious, so obvious that it really hardly requires demonstrating, that in form, the Church of Rome represents an institution of an ostensibly religious kind, whereas the Treaty of Rome professed to be, and in appearance actually is, an international agreement upon at least primarily economic matters. In appearance about the only thing that Church and Treaty have in common is that the one was traditionally founded by a fisherman, whereas the other includes *inter alia* price agreements upon the sale of fish within the Market. However, here as elsewhere, appearances are deceptive, for the Church of Rome has never been solely and simply a religious organisation, and one can relevantly add that it was never less so than at this present time. Whilst the lands comprising the Common Market into which Britain is at present seeking entry are not, again simply and solely economic entities any more than is, for that matter Great Britain herself.

Overwhelmingly Catholic

It would be to fly in the face of both past history and the present facts to describe say, the three major members of the Market, West Germany, France and Italy as merely economic units *per se*. This would indeed be "the Economic Interpretation of History", or rather a travesty of it to the point of complete *reductio ad absurdum*. In point of fact, all six members of the present Market constituted by the Treaty of Rome have long national and cultural traditions, traditions in which the prevailing religious one is not only overwhelmingly Catholic, but also in which the cultural, political and even economic influence of the Roman Catholic Church has been profound and far-reaching. It would also be probably true to add that this was not only so in the past but is so at this present time, for as even that veteran critic of the Church of Rome, the late Joseph McCabe, was reluctantly compelled to admit in his last years, the influence of the Vatican upon European politics is actually far greater in recent years than it was at the turn of this century when McCabe started out upon his iconoclastic career. Indeed, if Mr. Butler had only travelled a little farther South during the course of his recent visit to Belfast, he could



Humanist and National Secular Society banners in the Easter Aldermaston march organised by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament

and would have seen at first hand a spectacular example of Home Rule being transformed during the past generation into Rome Rule. The Irish Republic too, incidentally, is a candidate for the Common Market. Are things so very different in the present day Six? And since when has the Vatican deserved the reputation of being a purely religious body, to whom politics are alien and which is indifferent to economics? The Vatican in 1962 is probably the most powerful *political* force in Western Europe and the richest capitalist in the entire world.

Rome and Britain

I have never disguised my opinion that, whatever its merits or demerits in other directions, the proximate entry of Britain into the Common Market will, *inter alia* represent a definite victory for the Vatican, and even perhaps ultimately, a decisive one. If this paper had only drawn attention to this menacing probability, it would have thereby rendered a most useful service both to Freethought and to Britain. For the adhesion of a still officially Protestant Britain to an international organisation, as yet nominally economic only, but one which is overwhelmingly Catholic in religion besides being politically largely controlled by parties professing allegiance to Catholic Action (the Christian Democrats in Germany and Italy, in particular), constitutes a step fraught with the gravest danger to the future of both religious and civil liberty in Britain. Whilst Freethinkers and Protestants differ sharply on religious issues, we are agreed upon the primary necessity of those civil and religious principles asserted and eventually won at and as a result of, the Reformation. Hence one can

only congratulate those Ulster Protestants who drew the attention of Mr. Butler and Her Majesty's Government to the most neglected but far from the least important aspect of any future adhesion of a still Protestant and democratic Britain to a European Federation at present largely dominated by the Catholic religion and by the perennially totalitarian Church of Rome.

MY CREED

(Sent to my executor after reading of the priestly interference at the graveside of Swinburne and Meredith.)

When "Doctor" death takes me away
I bid you come
And stay the priest that dares, to pray—
Now that I'm dumb—
For the "glorious resurrection" of this clay:
Smite the scum.

Remember that I lived my life
In Freethought's cause,
Warring religion: sacred strife,
And sought no pause
But fought incessantly "to the knife"
In spite of laws.

Know once for all, that I profess
I'm without God:
Without Christ too: and make no guess
Beyond the sod.
So hearken well, I've no distress
About the "Land of Nod".

—GERALD BARRY.

The Incomparable Voltaire

By H. CUTNER

ONE OF THE TRIBUTES in France to Voltaire on the centenary of his death in 1878 was the publication of a volume of 1000 pages containing a very fine selection from his famous writings—from his verse, his novels, his satires, his polemics, his histories, his plays, his contributions to ethics and philosophy, and particularly his attacks on religion. It would have made a wonderful volume even if religion had been left out, for Voltaire was one of the most prolific writers who ever lived—and perhaps an English editor would have left out Voltaire's scathing attacks on religion. Not so the French editor, and it says something for the honour, in which the French people regard Voltaire that ten editions of this volume were called for.

The standard edition of Voltaire is that published by Kehl in 1784-7 and edited by Beaumarchais. It is in 70 volumes, but there are complete later editions by other editors; and of course, numerous reprints and translations of separate works. Whether the whole 70 volumes of the Kehl edition has ever been translated into English I do not know, but I doubt it. It would be a formidable task anyway merely to read the 70 volumes, let alone to translate them.

In any case, there have also been published nearly 8,000 letters to and from Voltaire, incomparable letters these, from the great writer whose marvellous power over the French language has been the admiration—and despair—of so many of his fellow authors. His limpid, easy, style, so easy to write and understand, is very difficult to catch in translation.

Whatever fame Voltaire once had has now become a legend. As Richard Aldington pointed out in his interesting and admirable monograph on Voltaire (1925),

There was indeed a time when the word "Voltaire" was the intellectual battle cry of half Europe, when the philosophy of M. de Voltaire, the wit, the charm, the enlightenment, the glory of M. de Voltaire, were the delight and guiding power of innumerable people in twenty countries, when on the other hand, "the detestable opinions of the ignoble Voltaire" caused deep concern to the orthodox defenders of Christianity and privilege . . .

Perhaps that time was when readers could sit down to the 70 volumes and enjoy the brilliant satire which filled many of them—a time unhampered by the hurry and scurry of our world of 1962 with its radios, TVs, and motor cars, to say nothing of "nuclear weapons" used or unused. At all events, what have we now left of Voltaire? "A few echoes," says Mr. Aldington, "a few vague memories, remain in the public mind; a few of Voltaire's numerous books are still commonly read. But the Europe of 1925 does not know and love or hate Voltaire as he was known and loved and hated by the Europe of 1825 or 1775". And this judgment, nearly forty years later, still stands.

This is a great pity, for the mind of Voltaire a kind of universal mind, tremendous in its scope, is a very rare phenomenon indeed. And the only word I can find to fit is "incomparable".

Voltaire was probably the first historian to understand history in the modern sense, and Mr. Aldington claims Gibbon as one of his "pupils"—a rare honour for both. Mr. Aldington contrasts Voltaire's *Essai* with Bossuet's *Discours sur l'Histoire Universelle* which was at one time so greatly admired for its "vast learning and wonderful prose". But, "as a historian he is negligible. The *Discours* is not history, it is an eloquent Roman Catholic

tract". It is full of "Providence" and "God". Voltaire banished the supernatural from history, and while "Bossuet's *Discours* is a pious fairy tale for children and women, Voltaire's *Essai* is history".

Voltaire's championship of the "oppressed", his scathing denunciation of the Church of Rome in the terrible—"horrible" would be a better word—cases of young de la Barre and Calas in his own day, made him not merely a free thinker, but one of the most feared men in Europe. He made the Roman Church look as if it were filled with brutal bestial thugs—as in truth it was. No one can read his numerous *Défences des Opprimés* without horror at what men can do in the name of religion; and for Voltaire henceforth it was "écrasez l'infâme" without mercy. Roman Catholicism has never lived down that terrific battle cry.

It is true that Voltaire refused to call himself an Atheist and insisted that he believed in God. Like Thomas Paine, he was a Deist—but the God of most Deists was a very nebulous affair. From neither Paine nor Voltaire can one find exactly of what use God was for mankind—except perhaps as a kind of policeman to keep erring man in order; though *how*, is never clear. It is true that Voltaire insisted that "if there were no God, it would be necessary to invent him"—which is exactly what he himself did. Voltaire despised the Jewish Deity far too much to mean by God, Jehovah. The Christian Churches were really not wrong in regarding Voltaire as virtually an Atheist.

Although Voltaire's literary output was enormous, he always found time to attack religion; and from his famous mansion at Ferney he poured out pamphlet after pamphlet, lashing religion in general and Christianity in particular with all the raillery, irony, and wit he could muster. Aldington points out that he repeated himself very often, which is of course quite true. But Voltaire was not always writing for the converted. He did his best to get new readers, and even if his ideas were not always new he put them again and again in a fresh and witty guise.

Very few of these pamphlets appear to be known to English readers though one of them, *Lord Bolingbroke's Important Examination* is certainly one of his best as well as one of the longest. Bolingbroke, we are told in the Centenary volume, "was a mask under which Voltaire hid to escape being prosecuted. It is true that the attack on religion he made in the pamphlet was that of Bolingbroke himself, but he had been dead for some years when the work appeared. The critical notes added throughout were a 'war stratagem' to ward off suspicion". An edition was published in English—I believe by Foote but am not sure—and it shows how wide was Voltaire's reading not merely on the Bible but on Church history. If we have advanced a great deal in our knowledge of both, I doubt whether the case against them could be better put even these days.

Voltaire indeed owed a great deal to the English Deists of the early eighteenth century notably to Anthony Collins but he appears to have read them all as far as possible. He spent some years in England and had met many notables, among them Walpole, Pope, Gay, Congreve, and Berkeley. (Incidentally he tried to reply to Berkeley's Idealism, a reply which Aldington thinks is a very poor one.)

Voltaire's *Philosophical Dictionary* appeared in four

This Believing World

One of the reasons why Jews have never ventured to depict God pictorially is that they haven't the ghost of an idea what he is like. And one has only to see the many varied portraits of Jesus to see how difficult Christians find it to depict him—as a Saxon, or an Arab, with or without a beard, and so on. But though Jesus is represented in the Gospels as a dark-skinned Jew, wild horses won't make a pious Christian artist paint him as one of the Chosen Race. Or for that matter as dark-skinned.

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However, our contemporary "Today" devoted two pages (April 21st) showing us exactly what colour is God. Mr. Mickey Callan insists that, as *he* loves green, God must be green. Miss Carolyn Jones thinks his "beauty" must be purple and rose. Miss Ann Blyth always thinks of God as "golden", so she plumps for "the soft gold of evening"; while Mr. F. Avalon, who used to imagine God in a red robe, is almost sure that God is red. We fancy it would be easier to plump for a rainbow as being God and thus get all the primary colours at one fell swoop. Or get a modern abstract artist to pour a few tins of paint on a canvas, scramble the colours together with a slipper—and there is God!

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The chronic shortage of pious people to teach "divinity" has become very serious. It is—according to the *Daily Express*—"limiting the amount of religious instruction" in some London schools which is a horrible thought. Of course, most teachers can give "religious" lessons, but it is the trained specialists in theology who are scarce. Only such people can answer some of the inconvenient questions of which Christianity appears to be so full and which puzzle the uninitiated.

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An Italian film producer, Mr. de Laurentis, who thinks that the late Cecil B. de Mille's ventures into Bible stories were too limited, wants to film the whole Bible story in three huge parts which he thinks can be done at a cost of £14,000,000. The only people who must be allowed to help him (he insists) are those who believe in the *whole* Bible. No Atheists or Agnostics are wanted. His plan is "to film straight", and we heartily agree with him. We don't want a comic Devil tempting poor Eve but a genuine Serpent speaking perfect Hebrew. This Temptation was a very serious matter for it condemned the whole human race to eternal damnation until Jesus came and died for everybody.

★

Then we do not want a comic Noah's Ark either. As there really was an enormous flood, and the Ark was necessary to save the animal world as well as eight humans, what we want is a real Ark packed with real animals. And the flood should not be limited to a few watering cans in front of the cameras. It should be the real thing. There's no end to the enormous possibilities which the three films could give in converting blatant infidels and unbelievers.

★

We should be grateful for the crushing reply the Archbishop of Canterbury made to Mr. Kenneth Harris on the truth of the Resurrection on ITV's "About Religion" on Easter Sunday. If the Resurrection had not taken place, Dr. Ramsey would not have been the Archbishop of Canterbury, and there would have been no Christian religion. Moreover, the Archbishop assured Mr. Harris that Jesus was still alive as a Person, and he inhabited the bodies of all good Christians always and for ever. Yet Mr. Harris appeared quite unimpressed!

It is a pity he did not point out that Dr. Ramsey's argument could easily have been extended. The Resurrection must be true, otherwise we would not have enjoyed the supreme blessings bestowed on us by the Dark Ages when Christian Europe was plunged into an abysmal ignorance for nearly 1000 years; or the Heavenly benefits of the Roman Catholic Inquisition with its bestial record of murder and torture; or the burning at the stake of hundreds of thousands of men, women and children as "witches". All the same, Mr. Harris did quite well in forcing Dr. Ramsey to utter pious twaddle.

THE INCOMPARABLE VOLTAIRE

(Concluded from page 139)

volumes in 1765 and can take its place with Bayle's and Dom Calmet's *Dictionaries* as a masterpiece of learning—and of typical Voltairean wit. An English translation was published by Truelove last century, and no reader of ours should miss buying the two volumes if he is lucky enough to come across them. Truelove also published a translation of the romances and novels which helped to increase the reputation of Voltaire—*Candide* in particular—and Aldington declares that "the consummate art of these pieces has kept them young and fresh for a century and a half". He thinks that *Jeannot and Colin* "is even more concentrated and amusingly malicious" than the more famous and better known *Candide*—a romance which stands almost unique in literature.

It is a pity that some of the *Dialogues* in which the art of Voltaire has never been surpassed (not even by Walter Savage Landor) are not better known. In them Voltaire showed his immensely wide reading, but with what grace and lightheartedness does he wear his learning!

There is a chapter in the *Memoires* of Casanova where that famous adventurer meets Voltaire and which is all the more interesting because it is a contemporary account, and because Casanova himself is one of the most remarkable men of his period, by no means so different from Voltaire himself in some respects. It should be better known.

I have said nothing about the private life of Voltaire, nor referred to his character which has been always so hotly discussed by his pious enemies. Many of the accusations against him may well be true, and yet the glory of his immense literary work is in no sense lessened. As John M. Robertson said of him, in the final analysis—"He was the greatest mental fighter of his age, perhaps of any age; in that aspect he is a 'powerhouse' not to be matched in human history". Of whom else can as much be said?

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Lecture Notices, Etc.**OUTDOOR**

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Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Platt Fields), Sunday afternoons. (Car Park, Victoria Street), Sunday evenings.

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

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Midland Institute, Paradise Street), Sunday, May 6th, 6.45 p.m.: A. R. WILLIAMS, "Angels and Ministers of Grace".

Nottingham (Nurses' Christian Movement, Saxondale Hospital, Radcliffe-on-Trent), Monday, May 7th, 8.30 p.m.: DEBATE, "God does not Exist". For, T. M. MOSLEY (N.S.S.); Against

REV. W. PETER STEVENS, M.A.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, May 6th, 11 a.m.: MAURICE CRANSTON, M.A., "Locke on Liberty and Toleration".

Tyneside Humanist Society (100 Pilgrim Street, Newcastle, 1), Wednesday, May 9th, 7.30 p.m.: EVE MANNING, Book Review.

Notes and News

THE PRESIDENT of the National Secular Society, F. A. Ridley, was the guest of the Combined Overseas Rehabilitation and Refugee Appeal Aid Group at Abbey Road, Hampstead, London, on Saturday, April 28th, when he spoke on "Church and State, Past, Present and Future". Then, on Tuesday, April 30th, Mr. Ridley addressed the Oxford University Humanist Group on "Pope John and the Cold War", the subject of his recently-published and well-received book.

Earlier in the month he had spoken at the first meeting of the re-formed Manchester Branch of the NSS in the Wheatsheaf Hotel. The Branch's second indoor meeting was held in the Left Wing Coffee House, Brazenose Street, and the General Secretary, Colin McCall, spoke on "Scientific Materialism". Several new members were also enrolled.

FOR A LONG time the Manchester Branch NSS and the National Council for Civil Liberties in conjunction with other local societies has been pressing for a central open-air speaking site in the city. These efforts have at last achieved their object. Manchester Corporation has approved the use of the street-level roof of an underground car park for Sunday meetings. Manchester Branch speakers will be on the site on Sunday evenings, following the Platt Fields meetings in the afternoons, and we hope they will be well supported.

THE SECRETARY of the National Secular Society reminds members that the Annual Conference will be held in the Secular Hall, Leicester, by kind permission of Leicester Secular Society, on Whit Sunday, June 10th, to be preceded by a reception in the same hall on the Saturday evening and followed by an open air meeting on the Sunday evening. Those wishing to attend are asked to state their hotel accommodation requirements as soon as possible.

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A REQUEST for animal ghost stories brought a rich harvest for *Reveille* (12th-18th April). Dead dogs and ginger cats (has the colour some psychic significance?) seem to have topped the list, but there were also monkeys, rabbits and a black stallion. The colour is important in the last case, reported by Mrs. Kim Mzyk of Stoke-on-Trent. He was called Satan, and his ghost attacked a man who had snatched Mrs. Mzyk's handbag. The man fell to the ground calling for help and the following conversation ensued: "Take him away", he cried. "His hooves are killing me". "What hooves?" Mrs. Mzyk asked. "His", he answered. "The black devil's". Note that last Satanic reference and think what the story would have lost had the horse been a mere bay called Dobbin.

★

IN HIS recollections of the Spanish Civil War in the *New Statesman* (20/4/62), Kingsley Martin said: "Today I believe as firmly as ever that the world would have been a better place if the Spanish Left had won", an opinion we echo. And Mr. Martin ended his article as follows: "Nor did Franco or the Spanish Church protest when at Guernica German bombers, for the first time in history, wiped out a defenceless city—and its inhabitants. Fittingly it was Goering who explained that Guernica was a 'testing ground' for his pilots. The tragedy of Spain is unalloyed with any comfort that I can find. On this issue I write, not with hindsight but with assurance that in this uniquely symbolic struggle of ideologies, the Left was on the side of liberty and progress and that Franco stood, and still stands, for greed, tyranny and black reaction".

★

BY A COINCIDENCE, the same day that we read Mr. Martin's words, we belatedly received the November 1961 issue of *Secular Subjects*, published by the Rationalist Society of St. Louis. It was almost entirely devoted to Senor Gabriel Coca's account of life in a Spanish prison, "Under the Roman Catholic Church", and it was reprinted from THE FREETHINKER.

★

THE "conspiracy against Bertrand Russell" continues—now in the pages of *The Gramophone* (April 1962). "I find Lord Russell's oversimplifications frightening, his contradictions extraordinary and his arrogance simply ill-mannered", says the reviewer of the Pye Nonesuch record "Extracts from 'Speaking Personally'". "The holier-than-thou attitude adopted by latter-day infidels can also be deeply wounding", continues "R.W.", "and Lord Russell retails some intimacies which to any sensitive person must be both hurtful and shocking". Well, some people need to be shocked a bit, and whether one agrees with Lord Russell or not, he is invariably stimulating. To speak of "the whistle of the train on the Cardigan branch, bringing a message of warm humanity to this arid talk", is simply silly. Whatever Bertrand Russell's faults, aridity has never been one of them.

“History Begins at Sumer”

By P. G. ROY

(Concluded from page 135)

THE BEST KNOWN Biblican plagiarism is the Flood story from the 11th tablet of the Epic of Gilgamesh—the first of all later poetical cycles of 12 cantos or songs, composed in Babylon in the 17-18th century BC but based on older popular narratives of Sumer. “Gilgamesh” had been translated into Hurrian as well as the Indo-European Hittite language and had been studied and imitated in intellectual circles of the Ancient Near East. For the first time we meet a hero who is a mortal of great strength, and Gilgamesh, King of Erech, held the interest of wide circles just as later on the fables of Heracles or Samson enthralled the masses. Aruru, the Mother Goddess of Babylon, creates Enkidu—another long-haired mortal of great strength who, like John the Baptist, lives with the wild beasts. The two giants meet in combat which is inconclusive but results in their undying friendship. Enkidu becomes civilised, leaves Gilgamesh the leadership and all further exploits are undertaken together.

When they dare maiming the heavenly Bull, Enkidu must die as a punishment and Gilgamesh, stunned with grief, roams the Netherworld for him, and in search of the Herb of Eternal Life. He comes across Utnapishtim and hears from him the report of the Great Deluge (forming the greater part of the 11th tablet of the cycle). This is a version of the Sumerian story of Ziusudra who, following the advice of a deity, built a huge boat and survived the flood:

After seven days and seven nights,
The flood had swept over the land
And the huge boat had been tossed about
By the windstorms on the great waters.

(Published 1914 by Arnold Poebel). At last Utu (Sun) reappeared and Ziusudra opened the window of the great boat. In the end he, like Utnapishtim, was taken to Dilmun, home of the immortals and given, by En-Ki, god of wisdom, the “Food of Life” and the “Water of Life”. From Utnapishtim Gilgamesh learns that the Herb of Eternal Life is to be found at the bottom of the sea. He ventures down and succeeds in getting the invaluable plant, but while he sleeps a snake carries it off.

The Babylonian version was already known in the first half of the 2nd millenium. In Sumer the early literary stage begins approximately about -2700. Four hundred years later flourished Sargon the Great of Akkad, the king who claimed he had been a poor foundling, exposed in a basket or cyste, whose fable was borrowed for the Moses story. Five and a half centuries later came Hammurabi, the great lawgiver, after whose code most of the “Mosaic Laws” were modelled.

Professor Kramer tells us that:

At present, the oldest known law-collection is that of Ur-Nammu who, about -2050, founded the well-known 3. Dynasty of Ur, some three hundred years before the Babylonian king Hammurabi. The text (kept in the Museum of the Ancient Orient in Istanbul) relates how, after the world had been created, An and En-lil, the two leading gods in Sumer, appointed the moongod, Nannar, to be king of Ur. The moongod thereupon delegated his reign on earth to Ur-Nammu. His laws show that even before -2000 the lex talionis, still prevalent to a large extent in the biblical codex of a far later day, had already given way to a far more humane approach in which a money fine was substituted as a punishment.

Once a year, according to Sumerian belief, it was the sacred duty of the ruler to marry a priestess and votary of Inanna,

the goddess of love and procreation in order to assure fertility to the soil and fecundity to the womb. The time-honoured ceremony was celebrated on New Year's day and was preceded by feasts and banquets accompanied by music.

And on this occasion, a love song was recited and performed, traditionally connected with Shu-Sin, a king of high antiquity.

The Biblical Song of Songs (Shir-ha-shîrîm), traditionally connected with King Solomon served exactly the same purpose. This erotic dialogue between the king and the “Miss Judah” of the year was sung and danced in Jerusalem on the day of the Spring New Year in the month of Nisan.

The peak of scriptural poetry was reached in the didactic poem of Job, and it must be said that in it and in the Song, the Judaic poets excelled by far in beauty and refinement their ancient models. This is from Chapter 7 of the Song.

How beautiful are thy feet with shoes, O prince's daughter!
The joints of thy thighs are like jewels,
The work of the hands of a cunning workman:
Thy navel is like a round goblet, which wanted not liquor;
Thy belly is like an heap of wheat set about with lilies.
Thy two breasts are like two roes that are twins . . .
I am my beloved's, and his desire is towards me,
Come my beloved, let us go forth into the field . . .

The rulers of Sumerian city states could not expand their influences very much. The most successful among them was a Semite, Sargon of Agade (-2350) with whom the Early Dynastic period ends; his realm endured for about a century and was eventually destroyed by the Guti, barbaric hordes who swarmed down the mountains. This catastrophe was bemoaned in a tablet, kept in the Friedrich Schiller University of Jena (East Germany) and it represents the first “prophecy”, written down *post festum* like those of the Bible, and putting the blame for the calamity on the wickedness of man.

In this case, it was argued that Sargon's nephew, Naram-Sin, fourth ruler of Agade, had sacked Nippur and committed all sorts of desecrating blasphemies against the E-kur, En-Lil's sanctuary. Therefore the gods cursed him and all the inhabitants of Agade; they turned to the Guti as their tool of destruction:

The gates of Agade, how they lay prostrate . . .
Its canal-boat towpaths grew nothing but weeds.

Just as versions of the Indian collections of tales (down to the Buddhist Jatakams) “wandered” and reappeared much later as the *Arabian Nights*, so the poetical output of the Sumerians, the first literate people in history, was widely imitated. The rabbinical redactors, however, went out of their way to reduce a set of gods to one Yahveh and represent the others just as mortal heroes. The much-vaunted “uniqueness” of the Bible shrinks, therefore, just to this. And in Ecclesiastes, 1, 10, it is even denied that there could be anything new which has not been done or said before. Or as the Vulgate put it, *Nihil sub sole novum*.

There is nothing new under the sun.

POPE JOHN AND THE COLD WAR

Will the Vatican's “crusade” against Communism bring nuclear war? Published by Frank Maitland. 5s. 4d. post paid, from the
PIONEER PRESS.

Racial and Religious Prejudice

EDITOR'S NOTE: *This is the third of a series of simple, yet factual statements on topical problems, prepared by the National Secular Society in response to requests. It is intended that each one should be issued as a leaflet.*

RACIAL PREJUDICE is much in the news these days. Religious prejudice is always with us. Every liberal person condemns both of them: but still they go on.

Most people look for the cause of racial prejudice in economic conditions. They say it stems from a fear that people from another race will lower the general standard of living. Where it can be shown that the prosperity of the intolerant group—as in South Africa—actually depends on the low wages of labourers from another group in the community then a different economic motive—greed—is blamed.

Of course, there is a lot of truth in this. But racial prejudice seems to be a very deep-seated superstition that may have little to do with economics.

It is an interesting fact that at an early stage of human history it got tied up with religious prejudice. The dangerous Chosen People idea, for example, found in the Old Testament, is connected with both race and religion.

We are often told that slavery was a pagan institution that was swept away by Christianity. The simple truth is that in the old pagan world slaves had some chance of buying or being given their freedom. Christianity took over the practice of slavery, and by teaching that everyone had a place to which God had called him made the freeing of slaves practically impossible.

Sir John Hawkins's slave ship was called the "Jesus". In the eighteenth century the Catholic Bishop of Luanda, in notorious Angola, used to sit on the quayside in an ivory chair, and perform mass baptism of slaves as they were whisked off to America. Up till the nineteenth century missions of all the major Christian denominations used to keep slaves themselves.

We are told that slavery in the British Empire was abolished through the labours of a Christian MP, William Wilberforce. We are not told that he was following the example of freeing slaves set by the French revolutionary atheists and deists, and English freethinking deists like Thomas Paine: and that he got only three bishops to support his bill in the House of Lords.

In South Africa today there is the degrading policy of apartheid. This is noisily supported by the official Church, the Dutch Reformed (supposedly "reformed" in a theological way), which points out that the policy is based on the Old Testament. They mean the ridiculous story of Noah's curse on the descendants of his son Ham, supposed to be the ancestor of the negroid peoples, for looking at the naked body of his drunken father. So religion justifies any prejudice you care to mention.

Some of you may say that apartheid is being opposed by the Anglican Church in South Africa. Certainly some of its clergy have spoken out against it, and we pay tribute to them. But these men are acting as individuals. In South Africa the Anglican Church, like the Dutch Reformed and the Roman Catholic, practises apartheid in its own churches and schools.

The presence in the world of different races is something we can do nothing about. We must try to educate people out of racial prejudice.

But the National Secular Society has an infallible way of getting rid of religious prejudice. Nobody is born with a religion. It is something he is taught. Everyone starts life

as an atheist. If no one is indoctrinated with religion, there can be no religious prejudice.

Break Down

By OSWELL BLAKESTON

THE CAR SKIDDED from the track and the jungle spear grass cut savagely at the tyres.

"Bust!" said the missionary. He turned to his passenger, a young anthropologist. "We're not giving you much of a lift, are we? Three break-downs, and this one's for keeps until a real mechanic gets to work on it. I couldn't patch it together again after the liberties I took last time."

"Oh well," said the young man, "it was very nice of you to want to help me."

"And look how we've helped!" muttered the missionary's wife bitterly. "We're stranded in the middle of nowhere. How often do you think a car comes this way? Once a day? once a week? once a fortnight? once a month? once a year?"

The missionary sighed. "I can take a cut through the bush," he pointed out, "and be at the next mission in about six hours. I'll leave our young friend to look after you, my dear, until I can bring back a van to give us a tow."

"I don't mind doing the walk to the mission," the passenger volunteered quietly.

"You don't?" the missionary exploded in a burst of temper. "But could you find your way through the bush? I happen to be able to get around. I also happen to be a good shot. It may be necessary. So please try to remember that you haven't much experience. Be a good boy and keep cool and try to entertain my wife."

But as the missionary hacked and slashed his way through the undergrowth, he felt the fever rise in him. What a fool he'd been to leave his wife with that handsome young man! Oh hell and bust; and it was sheer hell, physical and mental. But he'd know if they'd done it. He always knew when his wife had been unfaithful. She couldn't hide her satisfaction—from him.

By the time he was jolting back to his broken-down car in the mission van, he was ready for rough justice. But then, when he saw his wife's face, he knew that nothing had happened. Her mouth was screwed up into her usual petulant ferocity of denial and frustration. How she'd nag him for the dreary hours of waiting! As if it were his fault that the beastly car had collapsed, as if he hadn't sacrificed himself by going to get help at risk of life and limb!

Angry spots of red danced before his eyes. Then he turned to the young anthropologist and cried, "So she wasn't good enough for you, eh?" Then he fired straight between the young man's eyes. At least he could always boast that he kept a steady hand. Yes, never once, never once in the whole of his life had he spilt a drop, not one precious drop of communion wine. After all, there were some things a man could be proud of!

MUSICAL TRIBUTE TO BERTRAND RUSSELL

Friends of Bertrand Russell have organised a musical tribute to celebrate his 90th birthday. Colin Davis will conduct the London Symphony Orchestra in a Stravinsky and Mozart programme at the Royal Festival Hall, London, on Saturday, May 19th, with Lili Kraus as the soloist in Mozart's Piano Concerto in D minor. All the proceeds are to be presented to Lord Russell to use as he wishes.

CORRESPONDENCE

ALDERMASTON MARCH

The CND Easter march has unwittingly become an annual event, since politicians are so slow in catching up with informed public opinion; and it has made the name of Aldermaston a symbol, throughout the world, of the struggle for life against death. The age-old conception of Easter as the festival of new life and hope has acquired fresh significance for the thousands of young and not-so-young people who spend the four-day holiday on the march—expressing their hopes and their demands with their feet, their banners, and their singing. How musty and meaningless the Easter celebrations of the Churches seem in comparison with this!

BARBARA SMOKER.

[A photograph of the Humanist and Secularist contingents in the Aldermaston march was supplied by Miss Smoker and is reproduced on page 138.—ED.]

PROFITABLE SYMBOL

Is it not fortunate for Christianity that it taught that Jesus was crucified and not hanged by the neck until he was dead? The crucifix proved a popular and profitable symbol, whereas the gibbet would have been too gruesome to hang over the bed or the mantelpiece.

PAUL VARNEY.

JESUS, MYTH OR HISTORY?

Support for disbelievers in the historical existence of Jesus comes from Trypho the Jew in his famous dialogue with Justin, which was written about 150 AD. In it he makes it quite clear that Christians had made for themselves "an imaginary Christ" and that if he ever came, he "is unknown".

S. C. MERRIFIELD.

F. A. Ridley surely concedes the whole case for a historical Jesus when he pronounces "the Jesus of history to have been himself a composite character". This puts Jesus into the fictional category. Nevertheless, I do not hold that a mythological view of Jesus is important to our case. It may provide a basis for interesting discussion among ourselves, but in controversy with a Christian it can prove a great waste of time (going over the old arguments about interpolations and so on). In this connection the problem is, as Mr. Ridley says, largely futile. And, all in all, Chapman Cohen was right: it matters little whether there was a man called Jesus, the question is, was there a virgin-born, miracle-working saviour?

ROBERT DENT.

While I agree with Mr. Ridley in regretting the death of Archibald Robertson and in considering *Jesus, Myth or History?* an interesting book, I suggest that readers would be well advised to check Mr. Robertson's statements regarding early Christian documents and regarding writers like J. M. Robertson who could not accept a historical Jesus. There are several misstatements.

I cannot agree with Mr. Ridley that origins of the initial Christian movement are easier to explain if one assumes that an actual man, Jesus, was mixed up with it. On such an assumption there must have been actual persons named Chrishna and Mithra, and even a Jewish Jehovah (the creator of the Universe) to account for their respective religions. It is, of course, conceded that the Christian religion is actually older than the Gospels (St. Augustine [4th Century] states that it was in existence from the beginning of the human race) but if this is so, how does Mr. Ridley suggest that the name Jesus became involved in it?

Mr. Ridley says that there is no case for denying the existence of Paul. Perhaps he will explain (without invoking the well known Christian "argument from silence") how, as late as the time of Justin Martyr, Paul's existence seems to have been unknown. Josephus and other early historians do not appear to have heard of him.

If I may say so, Mr. Ridley's parallel with Dickens seems singularly unfortunate. One might as well say that it cannot be denied that Mr. Pickwick existed. The scene of his exploits was London and the surrounding countryside in the 19th Century; there are portraits of Pickwick and descriptions of districts and houses visited by him. Members of various Dickensian societies make pilgrimages to his alleged home and haunts. There are even "apocryphal gospels" such as *Pickwick Abroad* and *Penny Pickwick*.

Mr. Ridley admits that Paul, if he existed, knew nothing about any actual Jesus or Jesuses, but was only concerned with a god. How this indicates that an actual Jesus existed is not explained. Moreover, how is it that no contemporary knows anything of Jesus being killed under Pontius Pilate or Paul being converted or preaching?

No, Mr. Ridley, I must come down very heavily on the side of Mr. Cutner. The story of Jesus is simply a variant of the

sun myth which had been many times adopted for earlier gods. Under the name of Christianity we get a similar story of a god with his twelve apostles, personifications of the Zodiac signs.

C. STANLEY.

HOW DO YOU SPELL IT?

On page 123, Mr. Ridley tells us that at the beginning of the Christian era "Jesus" was a very common Jewish name. How sure is he of this? The termination "us" suggest Latin, not Hebrew. How is the word spelt in Hebrew? I confess I have never seen it.

Assuming his historicity, what was he called in the family circle? In the land of his supposed birth he is now called Esau, and the name is used by present-day missionaries. "Jesus Christ" is translated "Esau Mas'hih" in the publications of the British and Foreign Bible Society.

W. E. HUXLEY.

[Mr. Ridley writes: *Jesus is, of course, the Latin form of Joshua, a common name among the Jews of the pre-Christian era. In fact, John M. Robertson based his mythicist case on the supposition that there was a Joshua-cult of which the name Jesus represented the symbol. I am not a Hebrew scholar but it seems probable to me that Esau and Joshua have the same root.*—ED.]

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