

The Freethinker

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JUST AS THE Jewish Passover when brought to England by the early Christians became the *Pagan* Easter, so the first day of the Jewish Pentecost became known here as Whitsunday. It is reckoned as seven weeks after the second day of Passover—seven, like forty, being one of the “magic” numbers of the Jewish and Christian religions.

The word Pentecost is never mentioned in the Old Testament for the feast has several names for Jews, and it is only mentioned three times in the New Testament, but not in the Gospels. You will however find it first in Acts 2, 1, where we are given a very remarkable story which has to be believed by all good Christians though they are not, or do not appear, to be too anxious or enthusiastic these days to exploit it as fully as they should. In the many years I have listened to religious broadcasts on the radio and TV, I have never once heard it referred to. So it is worth while to reproduce the Precious Words here so that they can thoroughly sink in:—

And when the day of the Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language.

Did It Happen?

It would not, I think, be unfair to challenge anybody, even a good Christian, to equal that passage for sheer gibberish. What for instance is the “Holy Ghost”? Webster merely says, “the third person of the Trinity”; while the Encyclopedia Biblica shirks any real discussion. You are fobbed off with “see Spirit”, and when you do see “Spirit”, the article trying to explain it is almost unintelligible. It is the same with other Biblical “helps” I have looked into, for all they do is to convert “Ghost” to “Spirit”, and then imagine it is now quite clear. After reading many articles on the subject I can quite understand why people like Dr. Soper much prefer to get you to talk about “our Blessed Lord” rather than about the Holy Ghost.

It is almost the same when Biblical encyclopedias or “helps” have to deal with the Book of Acts which first mentions the Holy Ghost in the Bible. Most of them shirk discussing the remarkable stories which permeate that book. They will tell you that it is really a continuation of the Gospel of Luke and by the same writer, and discuss the probable date of its publication. And they will even admit that in some of the more ancient MSS, it has other names like the “Gospel of the Holy Ghost” or “the Gospel of our Saviour’s resurrection”; but only in specialised works on Acts will you find commentaries

on its contents.

Whose Acts?

Moreover, the unique thing about Acts is that it does not deal with the “acts” of all the Apostles but only in detail with two of them—Peter and Paul. The rest are hardly referred to. Perhaps there are good reasons for this—one of them being, as the Variorum Teacher’s Bible admits, “When and where the Book of the Acts was written must be a matter of mere conjecture”. One could say exactly the same of the Gospels.

But whatever the date assigned to it—and it could not be before about the year 180 AD—the fact remains that it is the only source of information about the primitive Church. As the famous Dutch theologian Dr. Hooykaas says in his *Bible for Learners*, “we should know as good as nothing” of the apostolic age “if we had not the book of Acts”. Actually we have another account of the same period in Paul’s Epistles, especially in Galatians; but the two accounts, as far as Paul is concerned, frequently contradict each other. One example is where Paul declares he is “the Apostle of the Gentiles”—in Romans. But, according to Acts, during the whole of his ministry described therein, he continually preached to the Jews in their synagogues. It should be added, however, that in the very detailed history written by Josephus of the period, he obviously knew nothing of Paul or his preaching.

God or Man?

In the Gospels, Peter certainly recognised Jesus as God or as a God or as the Son of God. In Acts, Peter merely calls him “a man approved of God” which agrees with Paul’s “The man Christ Jesus”. But any theologian, anxious to prove that Jesus was God, could make mince-meat of both Paul and Peter on this. Whatever they may think of Jesus as a Jew, all Christians are determined that Jesus was God Almighty himself on earth.

But apart altogether from Peter and Paul, Acts is worth going through by Freethinkers because its gross credulity and superstition are among the funniest things in the Bible. A man crippled from birth was cured immediately by Peter uttering the name of Jesus Christ. This cure was so wonderful that crowds of sick people came to be healed in the same way “and they were healed, every one”. This was too much for the “high priest” who thereupon imprisoned the apostles, and must have had the surprise of his life when “the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors and brought them forth . . .”. No one appears to have been in the least astonished when the “angel” appeared, wings and all—he must have had wings, for how could he have flown from heaven without them? How in the world Josephus could have missed this angel surpasses my comprehension.

But what about Stephen—the first Christian martyr? Here again we find Josephus knows nothing about him though Holy Writ tells us that “Stephen, full of faith and

VIEWS and OPINIONS

The Descent of The Holy Ghost

By H. CUTNER

power, did great wonders and miracles among the people". Did he? Does anybody these days really believe these stories?

Miracles Galore

However, with Stephen dead it was necessary to have somebody else in his place; so "Philip" continued the good work, performing miracles and ejecting "unclean spirits". About the same time, "Saul" enters the story and soon has his name changed to Paul. But I have no wish to epitomise Acts which, as I read it, was as boring a narrative as I have ever read, full of miracles and angels, and some of the silliest speeches in the Bible.

Acts contains, however, nearly forty references to the Holy Ghost; and because of that it should give the Third

Person of the Trinity even more publicity than "our Lord" gets at Pentecost. The radio and TV should blare out night and day what he stands for, and how, just as he worked miracles through the Apostles, so he should work them through all believing Christians.

But we shall hear very little about him either on the radio or TV. And we shall certainly not hear that some critics look upon Pentecost in Europe as "one of the great summer festivals of the pagan inhabitants of Western Europe". (*The Book of Days* edited by R. Chambers.)

We know that Easter was a Pagan feast. If Pentecost was also pagan are all the great Christian festivals in fact Pagan after all?

"The Mad Major"

By F. A. HORNIBROOK

[*The Mad Major*, an autobiography of Major Christopher Draper, D.S.C., 230 pages profusely illustrated (Air Review Ltd., 25s.)]

WHEN THE NAME "The Mad Major" was bestowed upon Christopher Draper by his many admirers, it was not a reflection on his sanity, but rather a tribute to the many dashing exploits he had carried out and got away with during the first world war, and the name still stuck when he continued his flying career in the Second World War as if it was only a couple of years after the first one.

When it was all over and the cheering had died down, Major Draper joined the "Over Forty-fives Association", hoping that by so doing he might find some kind of a job—but with little success. So, to call attention to the plight of many of the "heroes of yesterday" in May, 1953, Major Draper flew under 15 bridges between Waterloo and Kew—a difficult and dangerous flight for which he achieved notoriety, not only in Britain but all over the world. And, far more important for him than the mere notoriety, it led to his getting a job.

Members of the National Secular Society will remember Christopher Draper. He was, for some time, on the Executive Committee and has spoken several times in London and in the provinces, notably on "Religion in the Forces", a subject which he handles with knowledge and humour. While in the Service he hid his atheistical opinions and he tells us some amusing incidents of the official attitude to any criticism of the God of Battles. He tells us that there was in existence, a certain Confidential Admiralty Fleet Order on the subject of religion which said that it was open to any man to declare himself an Agnostic or a Freethinker, but not an Atheist. The argument was that Freethinkers and Agnostics do not necessarily deny theism, so they could be placed under the head of "Religious Denominations" but the word Atheism definitely implies disbelief in God and cannot be deemed a religion. Therefore, if a man stated that he did not know whether there was a God or not, nothing was done about it. If, on the other hand, he stated definitely that he believed there was no God, this was disapproved of by the "powers that be".

When the author was a schoolboy, his mother gave birth to another son, and a short time later she was taken to church to give thanks to God for the baby and to be "purified"—the ceremony known as "the churching of women".

"This meant nothing to me at the time", says Major Draper, "but today it makes me boil with indignation. In the first place my mother should never have been

allowed to bear six children. Such burden undermined her health and brought about her death at the comparatively early age of 62.

"It is, of course, a superstition—which reduces the work of a parson to that of a Witch doctor in the most primitive parts of the African jungle. Why should the wonder of childbirth degenerate into something dirty and unclean, demanding the mumbo-jumbo of primitive superstitions before a woman can emerge again in public? Let us at least give our superstitions a modern look.

"My darling mother did not know an impure thought or deed, and during her entire life there was never anything of which she needed purifying. I know all about adoring children whose parents can do no wrong and state simply that in her case it was so".

This autobiography is full of good stories taken from a rich, full life during the course of which the author met all sorts of people in the public eye, from Hitler to royalty. In addition to his flying experience he has had 12 years on the stage, and although it has been said that a rolling stone gathers no moss, it does get a great deal of polish on its journey.

Whether one agrees or disagrees with Draper's opinions on all subjects is quite immaterial—he does not ask you to see eye to eye with him all the time—you cannot help but enjoy his racy humour and admire his courage, both physical and mental. No matter how bleak his prospects seemed—and many a time they have been—he has faced life with a natural cheerfulness and pluck.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY ANNUAL CONFERENCE

to be held in the Secular Hall,
75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester,
(by kind permission of Leicester Secular Society)
The N.S.S. Executive Committee invites delegates
and friends to

RECEPTION AND SOCIAL
in the Secular Hall on Saturday,
June 9th, at 7 p.m.

THE CONFERENCE
(for Members only)
will be held in the
Secular Hall on Sunday, June 10th
at 10 a.m. — 12.30 p.m. and 2 p.m. — 4.30 p.m.
and will be followed by an

OPEN AIR MEETING
in the Market Place, Leicester at 6.15 p.m.

World Conference

By E. G. MACFARLANE

THROUGH THE GOOD offices of a friend of mine who happens to own an ESP tape recording machine, I am able to put before you the following snatches from speeches which seem to be going to be made at a world conference of political humanists shortly.

"Fellow humanists from all over the world, may I bid you welcome to yet another of the world conferences of political humanists, which yearly grow in size and public impact—a fact which proves that political humanism is the heir of all the ages of progressive thinkers whose ideas have inspired and guided the faltering and sometimes disastrous political manoeuvres of human groups in the past.

"This year the conference particularly welcomes the agents of American television companies to record our conference. (Cheers and a shout 'Wait till you see what they do to us in their programmes!') As you know these conferences have consistently been boycotted by all the nationalist authorities except India and Russia. However, now that Americans may get the opportunity of hearing at first-hand about the aims and objects of political humanism, let us hope that it will not be long before the British and other European nationals will follow suit and permit their viewers to see something with a little more intellectual content than Queen's speeches and Party Political Broadcasts. (Shouts of 'Hear, Hear!' and 'No harm in hoping!')

"As you know, we consider that our movement represents a major break-through in political thinking. In a brilliant speech at the last conference, our former president showed the historical development of the merging of social groups, and impressed us all with a conviction of the inevitability of the ultimate merging of all mankind under a single social order, governed by a single supreme political authority, in a world federal system of government which will really make us all citizens of the world in law as well as in aspiration. Unfortunately, this speech was not reported by any of the national newspapers nor by the television authorities which recorded our proceedings. ('Shame!' and a single shout from the gallery 'You won't reason them into your way of thinking. Do it with a gun!')

"Well I am glad that the last remark came from the gallery and not from one of the members of conference, because one of the essential principles of political humanism is a reliance on propaganda by argument and reason. We hold that every society which succeeds in uniting men into a co-operative group, does so by successfully persuading them to adopt a common purpose and common principles of pursuing that purpose or goal.

"World federal government, we hold, is no different from any other social movement in this respect. Whether we have a world society in the integrated form in which we seek it, or a dangerously divided society such as we used to have under the miscalled United Nations, depends upon which social purpose becomes established in the minds of the majority of the people everywhere. As political humanists we have worked consistently and persistently to persuade all men to forsake their traditional purposes of local national glorification in favour of a conscious purpose of seeking the good of mankind as a whole.

"Our persistence in insisting upon the importance of human responsibility for the survival of living things has gradually but surely led to the weakening of all the

traditional forms of religious observance and belief. In other words, political humanism has found it necessary to dethrone the idea of God in order to inspire mankind to unite to save itself from extinction. Belief in divine responsibility has been publicly discarded in favour of a new and vitalising sense of human responsibility.

"Here our friends the Communists have done most important work, and we must all welcome them into the fold of political humanism following upon their recent adoption of the principle of political freedom within Russia. Let us hope that the Chinese will soon follow suit, and thus allow political humanists full opportunities to educate their people in our theories and to show them the factual basis for these theories.

"Our work within Africa in recent years has unfortunately shown less progress than some of us hoped. But the recent war between neighbouring states will no doubt cause many people in that continent to wonder if the fruits of national independence are not rather bitter in some way, and cause them to say with Nurse Edith Cavell that 'Patriotism is not enough'. (Commotion here.)

"I must apologise for that interruption. Apparently an African delegate approached the platform and wished to speak. No doubt he will get this opportunity later. No doubt too, many hearers will be able to make contributions which may inspire us all to go back to our homes and make a greater impact in our own localities. Meantime I would like to close these introductory remarks with a reminder to all delegates of the essential features of our new attitude to society.

"Fundamentally we are avowed agnostics so far as having a knowledge of the true end of human endeavour is concerned, and it is this agnosticism which is the basis for our tolerance of the expression of original beliefs, theories or guesses in this sphere. In positive terms, we are truth-seekers, and thus encouragers of all sorts of scientific enterprises which have been hampered and opposed by religious movements throughout history. Our new attitude will lead to changes in education and other aspects of social policy everywhere. The 'sacred cows' of old religious outlooks will be evicted wherever they hinder social well-being—whether it is a 'sanctity of burial grounds' which is holding up the making of a car-park in Dundee or the 'sanctity of insect life' which is holding up the elimination of malaria in Asia . . .".

That was all I could properly make out of this recording but the speaker had not finished. A gradual increase of interference simply made transcription impossible beyond this point.

PENGUINS

By C. P. SNOW and GEORGE ORWELL

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This Believing World

According to the "Daily Express" (May 25th), the Russian newspaper, *Pravda*, reports a lecture by the Russian scientist, V. K. Zaitzev, in which he claimed Jesus was a spaceman—though rather surprisingly—not as the greatest spaceman that ever lived! He came to earth with a space crew, and began healing people with the help of hypnosis. *Pravda* ridiculed the idea, of course.

Still, Jesus certainly went back through space, as duly recorded by Luke, blessing the Apostles before being "carried up into heaven". He was by no means the first who made the aerial voyage (which is firmly believed in by all good Christians) for the Bible tells us of Devils and Angels flying backwards and forwards in space. And no nonsense about rockets, capsules, radio communication, etc., either. For with God all things are possible!

ITV seems to have slipped up badly in the Sunday show, "Journey of a Lifetime", which recounts the wanderings of Miss Anne Lawson and Mr. John Bonney in Jordan noting where Biblican heroes lived or moved—thus proving the literal historical accuracy of God's Precious Word. Unfortunately, the journey appears to have been merely a job of work for Mr. Bonney who now objects to having his portrait published in some Bible or other on the grounds that he is an Atheist. In fact, when he was wandering about on one religious occasion, he "went through a list of reasons why he wasn't a religious believer".

Oh dear—how these Christians will squabble! The Moderator of the Church of Scotland might visit the Pope, but we note that the General Assembly of the Free Church in Scotland, meeting in Edinburgh the other week, had a motion that "Romanism is the greatest obstacle to Christian unity", and "Romanism is not only a misrepresentation, it is a usurpation both of Christ's throne and of His Kingdom". We are always thrilled when stout believers in "our Lord", though always ready to placate "working men" with a Jesus who was a fellow worker (in sooth, a carpenter) yet much prefer to call him the "King of Kings" sitting on a "throne". A bit of Divine Royalty goes a much longer way than a mere worker.

Be that as it may, the Earl of Mansfield, who is the Lord High Commissioner to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, did not think that Protestants need be afraid of visits to the Pope. This would imply, he maintained, that "the Presbyterian belief of ours was a weak plant which on contact with an outside plant was going to wither away". But surely Presbyterianism is withering away—no matter what the cause.

A dear, cherubic-looking boy of 11 who reads only one book, the Bible, and who thus spurns harmful comics, was put on probation the other day at Wimbledon. He had actually stolen £2 from a church missionary box—which only goes to show how splendidly juvenile delinquency can be fought through Biblical, Christian, and religious training.

One of the wonderful examples of modern industrial art which distinguishes the new Coventry Cathedral from the old-fashioned Gothic ones is a bishop's mitre in metal. The *Daily Express* (May 7th) publishes a photo of it, and it looks more than ever like a representation of a fish head, which is not altogether surprising, for Jesus was for cen-

turies worshipped as a Fish, perhaps the greatest of all fishes. The Coventry mitre however, is covered with nuts and bolts, and one gushing believer, a Mrs. Harrie, points out that this is to show that Christ was a Carpenter, and also because "the chief trade of Coventry is making cars". But really—a fish head covered with nuts and bolts . . .!

We notice—not without a little surprise—that "Today" actually prints an article with the heading "The Night Jim Spent in the Body of a Whale", giving a full account how a seaman called Jim Bartley was swallowed by a whale *à la* Jonah and spewed up alive. This hoary old hoax regularly turns up, and that it should appear again proves how desperately Christians try to prove the Bible is true. It has been exposed as a Christian lie over and over again. Of course, there never was a Jim Bartley—but it is almost impossible to catch up with a good old Christian lie once it is on the run. It may even appear fully filmed on TV!

Free Advertising

UNDER THE above heading, on March 30th, we reported that an English outdoor advertising firm, Mills and Rockleys Ltd., informed one of our readers: "Our Trade Association have an arrangement with the National Council of Churches to exhibit free of cost poster displays 'Come to Church' on poster sites which become vacant either for short or long periods". We now learn, through a New Jersey reader, Richard Stern, that there is a similar "arrangement" in the USA. Mr. Stern is informed by the Self Winding Clock Co. Inc. of New York, that:

The advertisement you see in our subway clocks is known as the "Worship" program, sponsored jointly by the Protestant, Catholic and Jewish faiths. It is arranged for by the National Advertising Council with many media, such as television, outdoor billboards, national manufacturing firms' ads in national magazines and other media such as ours on a donated basis by the several supporting media solicited by the National Advertising Council. Accordingly we have donated the space in our displays, and we feel that any one of the three major faiths can give you the information you request.

MAJOR DRAPER'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY

The Mad Major, 230 pages, illustrated.
25s. plus postage 1s.

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Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (The Mound).—Sunday afternoon and evening: MESSRS. CRONAN, McRAE and MURRAY
Leicester (Market Place), Sunday, June 10th, 6.15 p.m.: N.S.S. Outdoor Demonstration, Chairman: J. W. BARKER.
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

Leicester (The Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Saturday, June 9th, 7 p.m.: N.S.S. Reception and Social or Delegates and Friends. Sunday, June 10th, 10 a.m. to 12.30 p.m., 2 p.m. to 4.30 p.m.: ANNUAL CONFERENCE for Members only.
Tyneside Humanist Group (100 Pilgrim Street, Newcastle, 1), Wednesday, June 13th, 7.30 p.m.: ALD. ALAN HENDERSON, "Law, Science and Humanism".

Notes and News

THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE of the National Secular Society takes place on Sunday in the Secular Hall at Leicester, headquarters of the oldest Secular Society in the world. The Executive Committee of the N.S.S. very much appreciates the kindness of Leicester Secular Society in donating the use of the hall, and hopes that a good attendance of members and friends at the Saturday evening reception and of members at the Sunday Conference will make the weekend a successful one. A Sunday evening demonstration will be held in the Market Place, under the Chairmanship of Mr. J. W. Barker.

THE DEBATE on Christian origins continues. As C. Bradlaugh Bonner concludes his article on the historical background, F. A. Ridley adds "more" random reflections. And if Mr. Ridley is right in saying that more heat than light has been generated in the course of the debate, we are sure that his own and Mr. Bonner's articles are exceptions.

BROADLY—reports a *Daily Mirror* inquiry (28/5/62)—the young people of Britain profess these denominations: Church of England—five out of ten, Protestant non-conformists—two out of ten, and Roman Catholic—one out of ten, while two out of ten do not belong to any Church. Half the Roman Catholic youngsters, a third of the non-conformists, but less than one in ten Church of England members attend church regularly. The Church of England members "also fall short of other denominations in the strength of their beliefs". Eighty-four per cent of the youngsters believe in God "without any qualification".

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

Previously acknowledged £189 0s. 10d. "Pius John XXIII", £3 7s.: R. Brownlee, £6 1s.; Anon, 2s.; A. Pigott, £1 13s.; S. C. Merrifield, 3s.; K. Wootton, 3s. 6d.; E. Henderson, 10s.; A. Addison, £5. Total to date, £206 0s. 4d.

four per cent have "some qualified belief", six per cent are undecided and six per cent do not believe.

ONLY SIX out of ten believe in the Bible without any qualification—seven out of ten girls and five out of ten boys. As for church attendance, a third had been within the last month, and another third within the last year. The remaining third hadn't been in church for over a year.

MRS. ARPAD PLESCH, wife of the Hungarian-born banker and owner of last year's Derby winner, is, we are informed, a devout Roman Catholic (*Daily Express*, 25/5/62). One can understand her concern then, that the Church should recognise this—her fourth—marriage. Two of the previous ones presented no problem, having taken place in register offices and so not being recognised by the Church, but the first one—to a Mr. Ryan—had been Catholic. However, this has now been conveniently annulled and Mrs. Plesch has been able to go through the required religious service with Mr. Plesch in Rome. "My daughter wanted the church ceremony because she is a very correct and devout Catholic", said Mrs. Plesch's mother, Countess Woumbradt. "I was all for it". So, too, it seems, was the Church, so now all is "very correct".

IN ITS ISSUE of May 13th, 1962, the *Sunday Pictorial* reported that a Dundee couple, Mr. and Mrs. McKelvie, who wanted to adopt a baby had been turned down as unsuitable by an adoption society because the husband is a barman. It seems, though, that the society was also "disturbed because we had no church connection", as Mrs. McKelvie put it. "We have never placed a child with a couple where the husband is a barman", explained the society's superintendent. "If we did so now, it would set a rather dangerous precedent. In addition, the couple do not have any church connection".

THE POPULATION of Egypt is increasing by more than 1,000 a day, and a birth control conference was held in Cairo recently (*Daily Herald*, 24/5/62). President Nasser has told Egyptians that family planning is a necessity, and it has been ruled "not contrary to the Muslim religion".

THE BIRMINGHAM Branch of the National Secular Society is holding its Annual Dinner at the Stork Hotel, Corporation Street, Birmingham on Saturday, June 30th at 6.30 p.m. The Branch extends a welcome to all its friends in the Midlands, and tickets at 12s. 6d. each are obtainable from the Chairman, W. Miller, 62 Warwards Lane, Selly Oak, Birmingham, 29.

F. A. RIDLEY'S article, "In the Steps of J. M. Robertson" (*THE FREETHINKER*, 3/11/61) was reprinted in *The New Zealand Rationalist* (March-April, 1962).

ON THE BANDWAGON!

For the first time since the civil war the workers' discontent is being echoed by the all-powerful Roman Catholic Church. The Spanish Primate, Cardinal Daniel, who once described Franco's conquest of Spain as a "crusade", now publicly demands wage increases from his pulpit.—*Daily Herald*, Madrid Report, (21/5/62).

The Background of Christian Origins

By C. BRADLAUGH BONNER

(Concluded from page 175)

An Arab, an Edomite, Antipater, had been appointed Roman Procurator by Julius Caesar with a Roman garrison at Jerusalem. He was murdered in 43 BC, and was succeeded by Herod Megas who ruled for forty years and who rebuilt Jerusalem and the Temple. Herod was more a Hellenist than a Roman, and the new city was more Greek than Latin; Herod the Great died in 4 BC, and in 6 AD Rome resumed direct rule through Procurators, the most famous of whom was Pontius Pilate, until 42 AD. For two years another Herod, Agrippa, ruled. The Jews were far from happy under Roman rule, and, with memories of the success of the Hasmoneans against the Antioch kings, they rose in revolt and massacred the Roman garrison of Jerusalem. This was a silly thing to do, particularly as there was not far away a victorious Roman army under a great general Vespasian, who had just been elected Emperor. Without delay Vespasian marched his legions south to the gates of Jerusalem. There he left his competent son Titus. In 69 AD Jerusalem once again suffered a long siege, was sacked and destroyed. The site was ploughed up according to Roman custom; not a stone was left standing of the city and the Temple. Innumerable crucified Jews marked the site of the city of Solomon. The survivors fled to Galilee, where they found dwelling room amidst a hotch-potch of races.

For sixty years Jerusalem was a vacant space. Then the great Emperor Aelius Hadrianus had it rebuilt with the name of Aelia Capitolina, named after himself and dedicated to Jupiter of the Capitoline. It was a Roman city to which no Jew was allowed to come for many a year.

Among the Jews of Galilee were bitter fanatics, from whom were drawn those Zealots, forerunners of the Ismailite Assassins of "Old Man of the Mountain" fame, dagger-men, terrorists. About the time Hadrian rebuilt Jerusalem, Simon bar Cocheba raised once again the standard of revolt. It took the Romans nigh three years to suppress him with ruthless efficiency, in 135 AD.

There were then few Jews in Jerusalem; most of the Jews were in the Diaspora, the largest number in Alexandria. Here was worshipped the Saviour God Serapis, entitled, as were many of these saviour gods, Chrestos, and Hadrian wrote that the Christians at Alexandria were worshippers of Serapis. There were Jews in Syria, Jews in Asia Minor, Jews in Greece, in Cyprus, in Crete, and Jews in Rome. Few of them spoke Hebrew; nearly all knew Greek. They were in demand as, among other things, wizards. Some of the clubs of which I have already mentioned were for the practice of magic. In most there was a graded membership of novices and several degrees of initiates, to whom momentous secrets were revealed.

Many of these Jews dreamed of a new Jerusalem and a King of Glory, "a Lord, strong and mighty, a Lord strong in battle", a conquering Messiah. Others revelled in their weakness: "If I needs must boast, of my weakness will I boast". Others had their personal revelation of a God of Goodness who would save them from the world about them. Suddenly a wild hope possessed some of them that this Good Spirit, this Christos, would come immediately, that his Descent on Earth, his Advent was imminent. "He that has ears, let him hear". The message was for

the initiate. The Angel came "to show his servants what must shortly come to pass; behold I come quickly. Do not seal the Words of Prophecy of this Book for the *hour is at hand*". A New Jerusalem would be built, more wonderful than that of Solomon, more splendid than Herod's Jerusalem, grander than Aelia Capitolina.

The initiates were shaken by a thrill of madness, the thrill of an ineffable hope. And the days passed. The power of Rome grew seemingly greater as the years went slowly by. The hope waned, faded, passed away.

There came a new message. The Saviour was not to come; he had come and gone. He had been sacrificed, as saviour gods had to be sacrificed, by the Princes and the Powers. His Kingdom was not of this world (that could be left to the Romans). All that the Initiates suffered in the world would be rendered to them in that secret kingdom of the Spirit. The Initiate *knew* this. (There is no arguing with those who *know*.) *All was well*. The Christos would appear to his Faithful in his Cross of Glory; the cross of the outstretched arms of light; the cross of Victory.

The Secular Society Ltd. is shortly publishing *An Analysis of Christian Origins* by Georges Ory, translated from the French by me, which gives in compact form the most recent opinions of the French school which has been studying the problems of religious origins for the past half century without intermission. The Cercle Ernest Renan owes its origin to the late Prosper Alfaric and much of its inspiration to Paul Louis Couchoud. The Cercle issues a monthly *Bulletin* and frequent pamphlets, called *Cahiers*; it also organises monthly meetings; all focused on this great problem. Last year the French Rationalist Union published Ory's little book as one of their monthly *Cahiers*, and the edition was quickly exhausted.

In this work M. Ory shows good reason for thinking that the Jerusalem of the Gospels was as imaginary as the New Jerusalem of the Book of Revelation; that a Christian Church in Jerusalem was unlikely before 70 AD and impossible between 70 and 135 AD. He concludes that the Christos was worshipped from 100 BC, and was not united with the Jesus element until about 110 AD or after; that the humanising of this composite Jesus Christ began about 135 AD or later, and into this compound crept memories of other Jesuses, who were real persons, Galilean bandits, fishermen, Zealots, etc.

M. Ory accepts Paul as an historic figure for the time being, although he agrees that Paul may be as imaginary as the Twelve. Paul represents a body of Gnostic doctrine. As far as the human Jesus Christ is concerned he challenges the Historicists to say which was the man: the Good Spirit, the Jewish Messiah or the Galilean bandit?

CULBERT L. OLSON

WE HAVE just learnt with regret of the death in Los Angeles on April 13th of Culbert L. Olson, former Governor of California and for the past five years President of the United Secularists of America. A memorial service was held in Los Angeles on April 17th, at which Stanley Mosk, Attorney-General of California and Hugh Robert Orr, editor of *Progressive World*, were the speakers. A full report is promised for the June issue of *Progressive World*, and we hope to reprint parts of it for English readers.

More Random Reflections on Christian Origins

By F. A. RIDLEY

QUITE RECENTLY I published an article on the above theme, in which I expressed the opinion that the admittedly complex and difficult problems associated with the historicity or otherwise of the titular founder of Christianity appear, so far, to have aroused more heat than light. This random remark appears to me to have been justified by the subsequent correspondence columns of this paper, in which several writers who say they do not believe in a historical Jesus, none the less write in a tone which suggests that they regard him as a personal enemy. They virtually try to make the mythicist position into a sort of freethinking dogma (if one can mention such a contradiction in terms).

I would like to say right now, at the start of these random reflections, that I altogether deplore any such attitude. For the question whether there was, or was not, any historical basis for the Gospel story—and this is surely the crux of the whole problem—is admittedly a very difficult one upon which eventual certainty can only be established by the critical methods customary in such cases. In point of fact, freethinking scholars of the highest capacity, say J. M. Robertson (mythicist), Joseph McCabe (historicist), Joseph Turmel (who held Jesus to be a composite character), to take three outstanding examples, all reached different conclusions after weighing up all the available evidence.

In the case of the allegedly historical founder of Christianity, as in the case of non-Christian religions, the problem is one of historical evidence only; e.g. as far as I know, no critical scholar, whatever his personal views, denies the historicity of say, the prophet Muhammed, the founder of Islam, or of Joseph Smith, the Mormon prophet. These men undoubtedly existed and their "Revelations" actually occurred, if only in their own imagination! But when I say this, I trust that my critics will not therefore accuse me of believing that the Koran is God's Holy and Infallible Word, or that I firmly believe that the celestial golden plates were handed down to Joseph Smith by the angel Morom on the Hill of Aestorah in the State of New York. Because, and only because, Christianity happens to be our local religion, I do not see why one should apply any different standards of critical analysis to Christian origins than one habitually does to the origins of other religions.

One is presumably safe in assuming that all contributors to a paper such as this, reject *in toto* the orthodox god-man Trinitarian theory of Christian origins. What any freethinking scholar contends who rejects, or (like me) is not altogether convinced by the mythicist arguments as a complete explanation of Christian origins, is that there was a Jewish prophet—the Jesus of history—who played in the spectacular drama of Christian origins a perhaps somewhat similar role, *mutatis mutandis* as Muhammed—an indubitably historical founder of a world-wide religion—to whom none of his followers has ever ascribed a divine status, or in more modern times, Joseph Smith, of whom precisely the same can be said in a more limited sphere. One might perhaps add that as Smith was genuinely murdered in the USA, our hypothetical Jesus might have been authentically crucified as so many of his historical predecessors and contemporaries indubitably were: e.g. in my forthcoming book on the great Spartacus slave-uprising (73-71 BC) I have given many examples of crucified rebels.

It must also be added that whatever the ultimate truth may be about this extremely involved question, the mythicists—or at least some of them—unnecessarily weaken their case, which up to a point seems to be a strong one, by using some very bad arguments. The so-often reiterated argument that no contemporary accounts of any historical Jesus survive cannot even be regarded as a serious objection. How are we (or they?) to know that they did not exist? Every ancient document that has survived down to our times, has had to endure the tireless scrutiny of a ruthless Christian censorship which systematically eliminated every hostile reference to Christ and to Christianity. And what could have been more damaging to the Christian Church and orthodoxy of later centuries than a contemporary reference to a human and Jewish Jesus? Any such reference from non-Christian (Pagan or Jewish) sources would unquestionably have been consigned to the flames.

Actually, Christian Roman Emperors legislated not once but repeatedly against anti-Christian polemics which, as one of them stated, "might provoke the wrath of God". It was due primarily to this tireless censorship that what is known to have been the extensive freethinking and materialistic literature of classical antiquity has almost completely disappeared. Actually, its virtually solitary survivor, the great poem of the Epicurean Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, survives from a single copy, an obvious accident. Every line of Plato, that "Christian before Christ", as Nietzsche aptly termed him, has survived, but of the two major materialist thinkers of Greek antiquity—of Democritus, nothing, and of Epicurus only a few fragments.

Precisely the same has happened to what also appears to have been the considerable output of anti-Christian polemics composed before Constantine. Only Celsus has survived in part, again merely through the obvious accident that he was quoted by the Christian writer, Origen. In view of such facts, the fact that no surviving contemporary refers to Jesus, proves absolutely nothing against the existence of one Jesus or of several—a variant of the historical position which I personally regard as probable.

Historically, it seems clear from the surviving New Testament that there were two rival schools of thought in the early Church, and the New Testament, which assumed its present form between about 150 and 200 of the present era, shows obvious traces of both. Broadly speaking, these were the Messianists, who believed in a professedly historical Messiah Jesus, a man raised up by God but not himself a god, and the Gnostics, traditionally associated with Paul who, however, seems to have been introduced into Christian circles only by Marcion towards 140 AD. (Marcion's own excommunication by the Church of Rome in 144 is, in my opinion, the earliest certain date in the evolution of Christianity.) Prior to Marcion, Paul seems to have been the founder of a rival Gnostic sect whose writings (real or alleged), Marcion probably at least, edited. The Pauline Epistles were re-edited and only slowly accepted by the Christian Church, as we can still see from critical allusions in II Peter and Tertullian (c. 200 AD) (nothing is known about the actual Paul, but his fame and therefore presumably his actual existence are indicated by the numerous writings in his name; again "imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.") Where Paul and his Gnostic editors were concerned, the mythicists

have an unanswerable case; the Christ Jesus of Paul, Marcion and Co., was a god and never anything else.

The same also can be said of the Christ of the Gnostic fourth Gospel (John), an originally Marcionite document only slowly accepted (and no doubt edited!) by the Catholic Church after 170 AD, when it is first mentioned (cf J. Turmel—*Histoire des Dogmes*). However, whilst the Pauline mythicist Gnostic tradition is the dominant one in the New Testament, it is not the only one. We still read of a Galilean Jesus who is condemned by Pontius Pilate, an otherwise completely obscure minor Roman official whom surely no forger would ever have selected for the doubtful honour of passing sentence on God. He would surely have gone for a big name likely to be known to his readers. We still read about "the insurrection" (definite article in the original Greek) in which Barabbas was involved. We are still told that Jesus "cast the money changers out of the Temple" which itself implies the insurrection, since the Temple was held by a Roman garrison and whoever held the Temple must have been at least temporarily the master of Jerusalem. And incidentally we still read that Peter, in the Garden of Gethsemane, carried and used a sword to cut off the ear of the servant of the High Priest which, as the German socialist historian, Karl Kautsky so aptly remarked, was a peculiar tool to take to a prayer meeting (cf. *The Foundations of Christianity*).

All such stories belong to the original Messianic tradition and not to the Pauline Gnostic one, as does also the violently anti-Roman Apocalypse of John, the real theme of which is the violent overthrow of the Roman Empire by a celestial Messianic revolution. In my submission, it is extremely probable that one of the sources of Christianity lay in an armed Messianic rising against Rome for participation in which crucifixion was the normal punishment. The French scholar Joseph Turmel suggested, one of the "Jesuses of History" was probably Judas the Canaanite, who actually led such a Messianic insurrection against Rome.

It will, I hope, be clear from the above, that Christian origins represent a complex affair involving composite causes in different fields. I trust also that my friend, Mr. C. Stanley, will now realise that there is really much more to it than the mere rehash of a primeval sun-myth, though this also may have provided a contributory cause.

CORRESPONDENCE

DR. J. V. DUHIG

I have a letter from my brother in Australia from which I extract the following appreciation: "Since I last wrote, I got a FREETHINKER and my wife and I both read Dr. Duhig's article with much interest. We both remember his kindness to a poverty-stricken neighbour long ago—30 years in fact; and help he gave to an Aspley man 4 months ago who had big trouble. We know a bit about James Vincent Duhig over 36 years of time. Hurrah for him."

Dr. Duhig is evidently very well known and much esteemed in Queensland.

F. J. HOUGHTON.

ECUMENE

The Faculty of Theology of the (Catholic) Nimeguen University held a Congress in view of the coming Vatican Council. The Rev. Pop (Dutch Reformed Church) attended the congress as an observer. According to *Trouw* (16/5/62) the Dutch Protestant daily, Mr. Pop was staggered and bewildered by what he saw and heard there. "... Neither Israel nor the Churches of the Reformation played any part in the lectures..." he said. "It appears that we have nothing to say that means anything to them and that they lack the organ with which to hear us. As to life and doctrine, we are a negligible quantity within their world Catholicism... Of course, I knew before something about the theology practised there, but now I have had a bodily contact with it, which was embarrassingly disagreeable".

Mr. Pop remarked that the World Council of Churches holds a place in their thoughts only in so far as it offers a possibility that some day this organisation may enter into the whole of their Catholicism. Outside this perspective, he went on, the World Council is without value, "not playing any part in the world of their thoughts and feelings, for, to them, real conversation partners are only those who in fact take part in their own papal-episcopal determined religiosity... The congress has thoroughly bereft me of my optimistic hopes for a future collaboration or unification."

A. M. VAN DER GIEZEN.

DICKENS AND THE ESTABLISHMENT

Concerning Mr. H. Cutner's Charles Dickens essay March 23rd, and the letter about it on April 13th. I bring to your attention four instances in which Dickens criticised the Established Church.

In *Our Mutual Friend*, John Podsnap always knew what Providence meant. It always meant whatever John Podsnap meant. See especially Book 1, Chapter 11. As far as I can remember, without reading the whole book again, Podsnap belonged to the Establishment.

Hard Times was written at a time when, owing largely to the influence of the Establishment, a British divorce could be had only by a special Act of Parliament, which only the well-to-do could afford. This is ferociously criticised in Book 1, Chapter 11.

When the biographer Forster was just finishing his biography of Dickens, he found some loose slips of paper containing a suggested chapter, for *Edwin Drood*. In this new chapter Sapsea the auctioneer was surrounded by some character new to the story. This new story, which was published, is a masterpiece of criticism of the Establishment!

I once read a short story in which Dickens made fun of sinecures. I vaguely remember that the story was called *Lively Twittle*, but I no longer remember where I read it.

I also bring to your attention the fact that Dickens was aware of the teachings of Malthus. Dickens's wife gave birth to a dozen babies, and she finally left him, so we should expect that Dickens would have been thrown into a rage if he had ever read that family limitation is not only possible, but actually desirable. This is exactly what Dickens did, in his Christmas story *The Chimes*.

RICHARD STERN (U.S.A.)

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