

The Freethinker

Volume LXXXII—No. 50

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Sixpence

PERHAPS THE MOST IMPORTANT, as it is certainly the most dramatically spectacular of scientific developments in the present century, is the astounding revolution of our knowledge of the universe around us, and the vast increase in our power to invade, and eventually to explore outer space. For whereas until recently, astronomy regarded the entire universe as synonymous with the Milky Way, we now know that this is only one of innumerable galaxies—something like 1,000 millions are already known—each containing many thousands of millions of stars. The earth, planet number three in the solar system, and long since deposed by Copernicus (or more precisely, by his ancient Greek predecessor, Aristarchus) from the centre of the universe, is merely one of the less important planets (at least in the physical sense) of an average star, but it is yet a starting point, a kind of glorified air base for future inter-planetary exploration of a kind totally unknown in all previous ages. One could add that during this 20th century, humanity has become sky-conscious for the first time. The surrounding universe, and in particular our solar system, is no longer something merely to look at; it represents somewhere to go to, as well as something to study.

The Church and Astronomy

It was, no doubt, no accident that the first major clash between European science, at its dawn at the Renaissance, and the pre-scientific Christian religion which Europe had inherited from the collapse of her ancient civilisation, first transpired in the domain of astronomy. Long before the Bible had been scientifically studied, or the science of comparative religion had been born, the astronomers of the Renaissance, Copernicus and Galileo in particular, had effectively dethroned the primitive anthropocentric cosmogony upon which all orthodox Christianity was—and is—based. Strictly speaking, Christianity had, and still has, no astronomic theory, since the only astronomers known to Christian tradition were those primitively-equipped space travellers, Enoch and Elijah, not to mention even more exalted voyagers in space who periodically violated laws of gravitation by ascending bodily to an area still unknown upon any stellar map, called "Heaven". As befitted its origins, the early Church was profoundly indifferent to science, including astronomy. Did not an eminent Father of the Church, St. Ambrose of Milan, go on record with the observation that "the motions of the heavenly bodies are a matter of indifference to our salvation?" However, as the Church made contact with the reviving civilisation of a later day, it found itself compelled to take up some positive attitude towards astronomy. Accordingly, it contracted a "marriage of convenience" with the prevailing Greek-Arabic, Ptolemaic system of astronomy, a system based originally upon the Greek science of Pagan antiquity. Ptolemy himself, its titular founder, was a Greek savant of Alexandria about 150 AD, who appears to have known nothing about

Christianity. His system (which did not finally receive its death-blow until 1610, when Galileo first proved the truth of the Copernican theory by direct observation with his newly-discovered telescope) though of Pagan origin had still one supreme merit in the eyes of Christian theology: it was geocentric, placing the earth in the centre of the universe; all of which accorded admirably with the essentially geocentric outlook of Christianity in which man is made in God's image.

It is only fair to add, of course, that opposition to Copernicus's heliocentric theory came from scientists as well as theologians. The Protestant Tycho Brahe, for instance, one of the greatest

of pre-Galileo astronomers who lived after Copernicus but died before the discovery of the telescope, continued to oppose the Copernican theory. It was Galileo—or rather his telescope—that finally overthrew the Ptolemaic system and dethroned the earth.

Modern Astronomy and the Argument from Design

Not content with dethroning the earth from its central status in the universe, the telescope went on to disclose fresh planetary vistas; as a result of which, astronomers—and in time, mankind at large—went on to ask pertinent, or from the point of view of the Church, impertinent questions. For, according to the inspired text of Genesis, which describes the act of creation, God "saw that it was good"; upon which scriptural foundation, Christian theology subsequently evolved a formidable theory, none other than the argument from Design, which proved the power, the wisdom, and the beneficence of the Creator from the perfection of his celestial handiwork. "The Heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handiwork".

Today we have reached a point where our own solar system has become merely a coffin for the Design argument. Could not even a Creator of limited intelligence, let alone one all-wise and all-powerful by definition, have produced something rather better than our solar system in which, apart from our own very unequally constituted planet, much of the system is too hot to support any kind of conscious existence (the sun, Mercury, probably Venus) whilst the remainder is too cold (Jupiter, Saturn, Neptune, Uranus, Pluto, probably Mars). Truly a soppy "design". One that, if it proves at all the existence of a designer, suggests a virtually unbroken record of incompetence that would cause any earthly workman to lose his job. It is perhaps no wonder that contemporary theology appears to be turning its attention to the remoter parts of the universe, parts which have the definite advantage that they are probably forever beyond the reach of telescopic observation. In these blessedly remote regions we are assured that "rational beings" exist, even perhaps celestial Adams and Eves who inhabit celestial Edens unspoilt by the Fall. Certainly it is an awe-inspiring thought for us poor sinners here below, that somewhere upon a starry night we can

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

Theology and Astronomy

By F. A. RIDLEY

actually see the Garden of Eden twinkling in the sky. (cf. *A Treatise on God the Creator* by the Dutch Catholic, Father George van Noort: "One does not violate the Faith if one asserts the existence of rational creatures on other worlds". And in 1600, Rome burned Bruno alive for saying just that.)

Christian Theology and the Origins of the Universe

Telescopic astronomy having run the argument from Design to earth between 1616 and 1962, theoretical astronomy made possible initially by the telescope seems to be upon the verge of running down the Creator himself to his original habitat and finding it empty. For neither of the rival theories that contemporary astronomy invokes to explain the origins of our universe really requires the existence of a creator. According to the Stationary State theory, which will have it that the universe is infinite and eternal, no such creator is obviously necessary or indeed possible. (viz. The Cambridge astronomer Guttleton expressly states that the universe as such, has no "meaning".) Nor does the (so-called) "Big Bang" theory (which declares our expanding universe to be the direct effect of a colossal atomic explosion some nine(?) thousand million

years ago) presuppose a creator. For matter, some kind of a universe, was already in existence and obviously must have preceded the Big Bang. One of the leading advocates of this theory, George Gamow, even names the earlier universe of already existing matter. (With perhaps an eye upon God's own country, where he wrote, Gamow rather gratuitously describes the pre-explosion universe as "St. Augustine's Universe", since it was Augustine, the best brain in the annals of the Christian Church who asked the surely pertinent question: "What was God doing before he made the universe?" cf. George Gamow, *The Creation of the Universe*.) The Big Bang theory does not really require a creator, even as the first atomic scientist. Everything at present indicates that the last and the most fundamental of all dogmas of all religions, the existence of God, will soon be scientifically disproved by astronomic theory, which will provide the universe itself with a natural origin.

Astrologers and Astronomers

In that case Christianity which began with astrologers, the "Wise Men" in the East, will end with astronomers, the wise men in the West.

"Vicissitudes of Adolescence"

By DENIS COBELL

"VICISSITUDES OF ADOLESCENCE" was the title chosen by Professor G. M. Carstairs for the third of his Reith Lectures in the series "This Island Now", heard on the BBC and printed in *The Listener* of November 29th. It was concerned with adolescent sex-behaviour, and naturally raised an outcry from traditional and religious moralists, who regard the subject of pre-marital sex-relationships as one which the BBC should avoid like the plague.

Professor Carstairs drew upon the valuable field work carried out by Margaret Mead in Samoa in 1926, and said: "There was, she believed, much less neurosis among Samoans than among Americans, and she ascribed this to differences in their early experiences—particularly to the diffusion of personal relationships among many kinsfolk instead of their intensification in small self-contained family units, and to the tolerant acceptance of sexual experience as one of the pleasurable facts of life". It would, of course, be difficult to emulate Samoan sex-behaviour in a neurosis-ridden society such as ours, but there is a trend towards this freedom, and it is one that Freethinkers will welcome. Margaret Mead revealed that there was an absence of choice of belief for Samoans. By contrast, the religious crises of many persons in our society must be responsible for a large percentage of neurosis. In another study, concerning the transition of the Manus from a "primitive" to a "civilised" society, Miss Mead has written: "pre-marital sex freedom has resulted from permitting women to go away to school or work or to become economically independent". (*New Lives for Old*, pp. 335-6; Gollancz 1956).

Professor Carstairs had the religious moralists grounded when he stated: "It has always been those whose own sexual impulses have been precariously repressed who have raised the loudest cries of alarm over other people's immorality". He looked on charity—consideration towards one's fellows—as the supreme moral virtue; chastity was far less important. St. Paul, in spite of teaching the Corinthian Church that charity was supreme, "introduced the concept of celibacy as an essential part of Christian

teaching, and centuries later it was the reformed libertine St. Augustine who placed such exaggerated emphasis upon the sinfulness of sex". Bertrand Russell once wrote that he thought women should be allowed sexual freedom, but should not conceive until the age of twenty; however, Professor Carstairs states: "One of the consequences of improved health and nutrition has been a steady lowering of the age of puberty". Maturity is reached earlier, but society makes little or no allowance for it. Hardly surprising, then, that youth should be antagonised and should rebel.

Professor Carstairs mentioned the increase in the number of cases of venereal disease during 1961, but he very wisely did not speak of it as an "alarming" situation, as Mr. Ambrose-King, Ministry of Health adviser on VD, is recently reported to have done. I wrote, in a letter in *THE FREETHINKER* (28/9/62) that Dr. Claude Nicol, a consultant in venereology at two London teaching hospitals, had said that a breakdown in moral standards is responsible for the alarming increase in sexually-transmitted diseases. Yet, despite the comments of these two gentlemen, official figures show syphilis totals in 1960 as one third of 1950 totals, and gonorrhoea no higher than it was in 1939. The cures for both diseases have improved radically of course, making hereditarily-conveyed infections much less likely.

Professor Carstairs, who holds the Chair of Psychological Medicine at Edinburgh University, has also carried out anthropological studies among Indian jungle tribes. His mind, unlike those of his vehement critics, is apparently unfettered by preconceived Christian views of morality. And nowadays, as he said, "the former theological canons of behaviour are seldom taken seriously".

WITHOUT COMMENT

The ghost with a soft-shoe shuffle which had been haunting a shop quit yesterday after the Rev. Hubert Roberts, vicar of Long Whittenham, Becks, conducted a service of exorcism at the village Co-op shop. Mr. Derck Bird, shop manager, said: "Everything has been quite normal today. I believe our ghost has gone for good".—*Daily Herald* (28/11/62).

Something Happened!

By I. S. LOW

MOST FREETHINKERS will be familiar with the "Something Happened" argument. At a critical moment in history, we are told, something happened to ensure the triumph of Christianity. Therefore it must be fated to succeed. Therefore it must be true.

Those who have trouble with this argument should read Hilaire Belloc's book *The Crusade*. This book (written before the Second World War in the late thirties) tells the story of the First Crusade and explains why it failed. Since Belloc was a Catholic his views are not likely to be distorted by freethought bias. Let us see what he has to say.

First he hammers home the essentials of the strategic position with almost wearisome clearness. Shortly, these were as follows: the Christians were established along the coast of Palestine. But their position was not happy. They were far from their homelands. To transport men from the West to reinforce them needed time and effort. Therefore their numbers must remain small. On the other hand the Muslims were near their homes and in great numbers. There were two centres of Muslim strength: to the north-east of Palestine, around Aleppo, and to the south-east in Egypt. Should they ever join they could outnumber and overwhelm the Crusaders.

The two areas were connected by Palestine and Syria: for to the east lay desert wastes where armies could not march. Only in the strip of land formed by Palestine and Syria could water and the necessities of life be found. This strip of land (which Belloc calls "the bridge") is crossed by three routes running north and south. To prevent the Muslims joining together, the Christians needed to control all three routes. In fact they controlled two: the route along the coast and the valley of the Orontes and the Jordan. But the third most vital route—between the hills east of the Orontes-Jordan valley and the desert, the route in which stands the great city of Damascus, was never controlled.

It was never controlled for a simple reason. When the Crusaders were able to get control of it they did not want to, and when they did want to they could not.

The first chance came in 1098. Vast numbers of knights and soldiers were gathered together in Palestine. It would have been easy for the Crusaders to have occupied Damascus, the key to the vital third route. But they did not do so, for they never thought of it. They hardly knew anything of the geography of the Holy Land; they failed to grasp the strategic situation. Their only aim was to liberate Jerusalem, and this was done. Damascus was left alone. So the First Crusade achieved its object and lost it.

After the fall of Jerusalem, crusading states were set up along the coasts of Palestine and Syria. For some time the two Muslim powers quarrelled violently with each other and could not combine against the Crusaders. The reader may ask—why, when the Crusaders settled in Palestine and learnt about its geography, did they not realise the need to seize Damascus? The answer is—they did, but every time they tried to seize it something went wrong.

To take Damascus needed men; far more than the Crusaders had at their disposal. In 1101 armies were raised in Europe and sent to Palestine; but they were destroyed by the Turks in Asia Minor.

About 1125 Baldwin II of Jerusalem attempted to capture the great city. In some ways this was to be the best

chance the Crusaders ever had of cutting the third route. Baldwin's army, though not vast, was adequate—as Belloc himself admits. In Damascus civil war threatened. One would think that, if it was the Divine Will that the Crusades should succeed, Damascus would fall this time.

What happened? At the critical moment a violent and unexpected rainstorm burst on the battle. The Crusaders were disorganised and routed. (Rainstorms at this time of year were, according to Belloc, most unusual). A splendid chance of making the conquests of the Crusade secure was ruined by what the American satirist, Mr. Peter de Vries, would delight to call an Act of God.

One more effort was made in 1147. Another crusade, consisting mainly of Germans and French, was launched. But quarrels broke out between the different units. Many were destroyed by the Turks. Still, enough reached Palestine to attempt the city's capture. An attack on Damascus was made and it almost succeeded; but at the last moment, a Muslim force slipped into the city.

By this time disaster was approaching. Under Saladin, the Muslim Man of Destiny, the two halves of the Mohammedan world gathered themselves together. Along the unsecured third route poured Muslims from West and East, swelling into a mighty flood that swept the Crusaders into the sea.

When one thinks how often the attempt was made to do the deed that would save Palestine for Christianity and how often it was frustrated, one wonders how it can be said that the Crusaders fought for a Power ruling the universe: or was the Mohammedan God the true one? Anyway, one thing is certain: whenever there was a chance of Damascus being captured by the Christians Something Happened to prevent it.

Nor is this the only revelation. The story of the Crusade, as told by Belloc, does not shine brightly. Right at the start we are faced with a masterpiece of unscrupulousness by the powerful Prince Bohemund. He joined the Crusade to get possession of Antioch for himself. His example provoked an orgy of similar land-grabbing. When the Crusaders took Jerusalem they staged a massacre—for which Belloc admits there was no excuse. Finally there were jealousies and intrigues and even open warfare between the Crusaders and the Christian Emperor of Byzantium.

When Pope Urban II launched the Crusade the people shouted "Deus vult!"—God wills it. But was this true?

MANCHESTER BRANCH NSS

The energetic Secretary of the Manchester Branch of the National Secular Society, Mr. William Russell, has recently changed his address. It is now, 26 Hayfield Road, Salford 6, Lancs.

METAPHYSICIAN

I've been
thinking a bit
on the
Cosmic confusion.
The key
doesn't fit,
So the lock's
an illusion!

A.E.C.

This Believing World

Just like misguided Protestants and blatant infidels, our Cardinals and Popes never go to Lourdes and kindred shrines, but when ill hurriedly send for the best medical advice available. We never hear of any "miraculous" cures for them. So we hope the Pope has a speedy recovery from his illness, and congratulate him on preferring to trust doctors than to trust to "miracles".

★

Professor A. J. Ayer came before Mr. Malcolm Muggeridge's cynical analysis the other evening on TV not as an outright unbeliever, but as a "Humanist"; though in his case the title didn't much matter. Professor Ayer, with every sympathy and understanding for those who do not share his views, never wavered in expressing his own unbelief which, if religion had been more stern and widespread, would certainly have been called Atheism.

★

Mr. Muggeridge himself, who appears to share Professor Ayer's "Humanism", also appears to dislike being herded with plain-speaking unbelief. "Unbelievers" he insists, "will believe in anything"—in fact, he pompously said (in introducing the "I Believe" series in the *TV Times*, November, 4th-10th) that "they keep fortune-tellers in business and crowd the waiting rooms of quack psychiatrists". Well, well. There was a time when people like Mr. Muggeridge linked Atheism, not with quacks and fortune tellers, but with murderers, drunks, criminals of all sorts, wife beaters, and child torturers. No doubt finding that our jails were actually filled with people who have always stoutly protested that they were true Christians and not unbelievers, he now associates unbelief with quacks and fortune-tellers. Even Professor Ayer?

★

Lord Montgomery (who comes we believe from a clerical family) is now having a tussle with lovers of Christian hymns. He recently poured scorn on "O Paradise, O Paradise, how I long for thee . . .", pointing out, "We don't long for that. We want to stay here a bit longer". But that is what Monty thinks *now* as he gets nearer and nearer to the inevitable. In his younger days, he would have been horrified at anybody in the army saying as much. Soldiers were virtually forced on to Church Parades, and made to sing in the name of Jesus and Army Regulations twaddle like "Washed in the blood of Jesus".

★

In the meantime however another pious discussion has been looming up—did Eve give Adam an apple in the most famous Temptation scene in history? Dr. Whitehead, lecturer in botany at Bangor University, complains that Holy Writ has made a mistake, for there are—or were—no apples in Mesopotamia. The apple must have been an apricot, and in this he is supported by at least a few profound Biblical scholars like Dr. Stopford, Bishop of London.

★

On the other hand, Dr. Austin Ferrer, who is an authority on Church history, won't have anything to do with an apricot; only an apple will do. Canon Collins said it didn't matter two hoots, and in this was supported by the Roman Catholic Father Norris. The *Daily Mail* (November 26th) then asked Dr. Glyn Daniel, famous archaeologist of Cambridge, and he had the nerve to pooh-pooh the whole theory. He actually said that Adam and Eve never existed!

★

Such outrageous blasphemy was too much for the Rev. A. H. Waugh of New Barnet, who immediately weighed

in with Matthew 19, 4-5 which, he asserted, "authenticated" Genesis by Christ himself—and "many of us prefer to believe Him". Blasphemers and infidels can now most ungracefully retire, for of course it was an apple.

Caesarism and Clericalism

By ROBERT LOUZON

(Translated by F. A. Ridley from the November issue of the French Syndicalist journal, *La Revolution Proletarienne*.)

ONE OF THE MOST important lessons to be learned from the French October referendum, represents an ancient well-known truth; that, Caesarism and clericalism usually go hand in hand. In order to confirm this fact, one has only to consult the maps which various journals have recently published in different colours, indicating the various electoral districts which returned either a majority or a minority, a "yes" or a "no" to the proposals of President de Gaulle. The departments of the Midi, for example, irreligious, with strong traditions of paganism and anti-clericalism, included a majority of votes in which the "Noes" (opponents of de Gaulle), were in the majority; in Alsace-Lorraine, Brittany and Normandy, all strongholds of clericalism, the "ayes" were in an overwhelming majority; whilst in the Flemish north, where religious influences predominate, though not quite to the same extent, the "ayes" had it again, though not so overwhelmingly. All of which is in accordance with the strict logic of the situation.

For both clericalism and Caesarism are offspring of an identical ideology, or of an identical attitude to life. In both cases, absolute submission is voluntarily given to an external authority. The individual hands over his destiny to another. He submits his destiny to the will of a master either a temporal master, Caesar, or a spiritual master God. His personal love of morals, his fundamental attitude towards the world around him, his definitions of good and evil, are no longer decided by his own reason or conscience, but by the orders of his confessor—or perhaps by the inspired pronouncements of reputedly Holy Scriptures.

Similarly, he prefers not to have to take any personal responsibility for the way in which the secular state is to be administered, or for what reforms are necessary or what dangers have to be averted; he prefers to shelve all personal responsibility; to refer all to a higher authority to whom he voluntarily resigns complete control.

Undoubtedly one of the most important facts in French history is to be found in the inseparable nature of the parallel struggle for political and for religious freedom. Throughout French history, republicanism and anti-clericalism have been indivisible, and if one looks at world-history, one is soon confronted with considerations of an identical order. The West, that cradle of political liberty in all its major epochs, has been the land of philosophy rather than of priests, whereas contrarily, the East, the cradle of secular despotisms has, similarly been the cradle of religion. For it is in the East that religions were born, and it is in the East also, that they grew to maturity, for it is there that human beings are still classified as adherents of a religion rather than as citizens of a nation; and it is in the East also, that the all-powerful despot is simultaneously, king and pope, where he is not simply the tool of the priesthood, the "mouthpiece of God".

Unhappily, one of the fundamental defects of our own epoch, is to be found in the belief that it is possible to separate these two fundamentally inseparable struggles, the struggle against secular autocracy and that against God and his clerical representatives.

THE FREETHINKER

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

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Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch NSS (The Mound).—Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. CRONAN, McRAE and MURRAY.

London Branches—Kingston, Marble Arch, North London: (Marble Arch), Sundays, from 4 p.m.: Messrs. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER, C. E. WOOD, D. H. TRIBE, J. P. MURACCIOLE, J. A. MILLAR

(Tower Hill). Every Thursday, 12—2 p.m.: Messrs. J. W. BARKER and L. EBURY.

Manchester Branch NSS (Car Park, Victoria Street), Sunday evenings.

Merseyside Branch NSS (Pierhead).—Meetings: Wednesdays, 1 p.m.; Sundays, 7.30 p.m.

North London Branch NSS (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Every Sunday, noon: L. EBURY

Nottingham Branch NSS (Old Market Square), every Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

INDOOR

Birmingham Branch NSS (Midland Institute, Paradise Street), Sunday, December 16th, 6.45 p.m.: A. R. WILLIAMS, "Christian Unity".

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Tuesday, December 18th, 7.30 p.m.: F. H. AMPHLETT

MICKLEWRIGHT, M.A., "The Mythical Element in History".

Hornchurch Humanist Society (Red Cross Hall, Westland Ave., Hornchurch), Tuesday, December 18th, 7.45 p.m.: DAVID READ, "The Nature of the Universe", Part 2.

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, December 16th, 6.30 p.m.: RAY SEATON (*Leicester Evening Mail*), "The Press: How Free is It?"

Marble Arch Branch NSS (The Carpenter's Arms, Seymour Place, London, W.1), Sunday, December 16th, 7.30 p.m.: F. H. AMPHLETT MICKLEWRIGHT, M.A., "Historic Secularism and Present Problems".

Nottingham Branch NSS Discussion Circle (People's Hall, Heathcote Street), Thursday, December 20th, 7.30 p.m.: J. W. CHALLAND, "An Atheist Looks at His Parish Magazine"

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, December 16th, 11 a.m.: VADAKKAN

V. ALEXANDER, "East and West: Shall the Twain Meet?"

Notes and News

ROBERT LOUZON, whose article "Caesarism and Clericalism" we print this week, in a translation by F. A. Ridley from the French Syndicalist journal, *La Revolution Proletarienne*, is the author of a well-known *History of China* that Mr. Ridley has often cited in our columns. Way back in the 1920s, M. Louzon had a notable controversy with the then Bolshevik leader, Leon Trotsky, on Socialism and Democracy.

AT ITS annual convention in Montreal, the French Speaking Secular Movement of Quebec province urged that ministers of religion should cede to the civil authority "their present responsibility in registering births, deaths, marriages and divorces" (*The Montreal Star*, 19/11/62). The Secular Movement (often wrongly called "Lay"; it is "Mouvement Laique", not "Laic") asked for the establishment of divorce courts in the province, and for a "radical reform" of the Catholic Committee of Education, which is at present the supreme authority in education.

As Marcel Trudel, Director of the Institute of History at Laval University, rather nicely put it: "The time has come for Quebec to adopt a solution which frees the Church from its servitude to the state and from its civil role, because the province is not a one-religion state any more".

MEMBERS OF the League for the Abolition of Religious Coercion, which advocates the secularisation of the state of Israel—and which is bitterly opposed by religious parties—were recently attacked in Jerusalem as they sought signatures for a petition for civil marriage. "Four members of the league, including a woman, were injured", and their stand and documents were destroyed, as "several score" attackers "burst into a bar and smashed windows" (*Daily Telegraph*, 3/12/62). The league has complained of a number of incidents in various towns in connection with the petition.

FROM THE intolerance of Judaism to that of Mohammedanism, Malayan politicians and religious leaders have condemned a projected kissing scene between a father and his daughter in the film *Fajar Manyising* ("Dawn is Approaching") as "savage" and "contrary to Islam" (*The Guardian*, 28/11/62). The scene has therefore been withdrawn. "I was all the time under the impression that Malaysians had mature minds and would not mind a scene where a father kissed his daughter on the cheek", said the film's director, Mr. L. Krishnan. "I never expected all this fuss, but anyway I am prepared to scrap the entire scene". The dawn seems to have been delayed in Malaya.

WE AGREE with Sheffield businessman Mr. Kenneth Jukes, that a Corporation ban on organised games in recreation grounds on Sunday is "ridiculous". Mr. Jukes staged a match between Dore Juniors and Sheffield Rovers at Dore recreation ground on December 2nd, but it was stopped after 33 minutes and the players and team managers had their names taken by the police (*Daily Herald*, 3/12/62). The Sheffield Corporation by-law of 1946 states that recreation grounds are open on Sunday for the playing of "other than organised games", and in this instance, the match would have been allowed if no goalposts had been used. By asking for goalposts, Mr. Jukes infringed the law.

THE TREASURER of the Humanist Council, Colin McCall, reports an excellent first response to the appeal for donations towards the Humanist Swaneng Hill School at Serowe, Bechuanaland, founded by Mr. and Mrs. Patrick van Rensburg (see Views and Opinions last week). Now in his capacity as Secretary of the National Secular Society, Mr. McCall reminds members that subscriptions are renewable at the beginning of 1963. In each case the money should be sent to 103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1.

"ANYONE WHO does not believe is a fool. The rules are too right." The speaker was Charlie Drake, the comedian, and the Rev. G. C. Potts (writing in the *Birmingham Evening Dispatch*, 1/12/62) knew "just what Charlie Drake meant". Have you ever thought that the story of Jesus is "too good not to be true?" Mr. Potts asked. How otherwise could the story have come to be written? he continued. "No human imagination could have produced it, no novelist or dramatist at his most inspired". We can only conclude that Mr. Potts has a very limited experience of human imagination at work. Perhaps in his next "Think it Over" article he will similarly argue for the veracity of *Gulliver's Travels* and *Alice in Wonderland*.

Atheism

(An unscripted radio discussion broadcast on the BBC Home Service, October 31st, 1962, concluded from page 391)

Kenny.—Well would you say that the belief in God, which is essential to belief in Christianity, would you say that this belief was contradictory, a self contradictory belief?

McCall.—I would say that if by the belief in God you mean an almighty, all-knowing, all-loving God such as I defined earlier on, if you mean this, I would say that it is an impossibility.

Kenny.—I see. But you did say didn't you earlier, that you thought the notion of God a meaningful notion, and surely if it were self-contradictory it would be meaningless.

McCall.—I said that it is meaningful to ask whether God exists, and that it is important to us to ask whether God exists, but I answer no, such a God just can't possibly exist.

Wren-Lewis.—Now why do you think people ever thought he did?

McCall.—I think that people thought that a God existed, in the days when they didn't understand the world in which they lived. I think that as time went by, the role of the God—the role of the gods, and later of the monotheistic God—became reduced until, nowadays I think it's quite definitely true to say that the vast majority of people in this country, and probably most civilised countries, go through life without ever a thought of God. Certainly they don't think about God in their ordinary everyday affairs.

Wren-Lewis.—But would you say that this necessarily means that belief in God is out of date? May it not simply mean that a lot of very crude and twisted notions of God, along with the kind of contradictory notions of religion that you've been talking about, are going out? But this may be a long way from making the notion of God out of date, it may be allowing a real notion of God to emerge from underneath a lot of distortions for the first time.

Kenny.—But surely what matters is not whether it's out of date, but whether it's true or false. If it's true that there is a God, then even if it's becoming extremely unfashionable to believe in God, we ought to teach that there's a God.

McCall.—Yes. Well I think it's untrue. I think it's false.

Kenny.—Well you think it's untrue, but I'd like to press you on whether you think it's untrue because you think that it's meaningless and self-contradictory. Do you think it's untrue that there's a God because you think the notion of God is self-contradictory, or do you think there just doesn't happen to be a God?

McCall.—I think that the only way in which one can reach any conclusion on the God idea at all, is from one's own experience. And I think that one's own experience—the experience of everybody who is at all receptive to influences in the world today—must be that in the light of these experiences there could not possibly be an almighty, all-knowing, all-loving God. I think it is impossible to explain, for instance, the problem of pain, the terrible problem of pain that is widespread throughout the world, almost universal; indeed universal; it's impossible to explain that in conformity with the existence of an almighty, all-knowing, all-loving God.

Wren-Lewis.—But this problem has always been with us. I put it to you that had belief in God rested, as you suggest it does on an attempt to explain the universe, the problem of pain would have destroyed the belief even

before the first primitive man had ever scratched the idea on a bit of stone. If this most extraordinary belief in God has persisted, there must have been something very strong to keep it going against the argument that you put up.

McCall.—I think it has persisted because it has been inculcated from earliest childhood. At least I think that in so far as it persists today, it persists because the child is taught it from earliest childhood, in a very considerable number of occasions at any rate, and his thinking is conditioned thereby.

Kenny.—May I ask you to state more clearly what you mean by the problem of pain? You regard the existence of pain as itself an unqualified evil?

McCall.—I'm not concerned with whether it is an unqualified evil or not. The point is that I do not believe that it is possible to reconcile the existence of pain such as we know it, the terrible suffering which innocent people and innocent animals undergo, with the existence of the God. I don't really need to press this matter surely. I mean: if God is almighty, he could banish pain; presumably he will know about it, if he is all-knowing, and if he is all-loving, he would *want* to banish pain.

Kenny.—God could certainly banish pain, by annihilating the entire sentient race, I mean all men, all animals, who can feel pain; if God were to annihilate them all, he could banish pain. Would you regard this as being a suitable course for the Almighty?

McCall.—You see, this to my mind is not a very meaningful question, because it assumes the existence of the God to start with. And I don't assume it. Let us start off from what we do know. We know the terrible suffering that there is, we know that through no fault of their own, children are born in deformed states. An almighty God could prevent these children being born deformed. If such a God existed, surely he would prevent it?

Wren-Lewis.—Aren't you making an assumption, in saying, without qualification, that God *could* prevent pain?

McCall.—Well if he were all-powerful he could.

Wren-Lewis.—Well, there you have, I suspect, the root of a great deal of Atheism. It was certainly the root of mine at the age of twelve, when I became an Atheist, a state in which I stayed until I was about twenty-two. I suspect that the root of a great deal of Atheism, certainly the root of yours, is the idea of God as a sort of almighty Manager who is running the world. You go on to say that if he *is* almighty and all good, then he ought to make everything go right. But I put it to you that this is not and never has been the meaning that the word "God" has had in the history of religions, and if it *had* been, belief in God would never have lasted at all. You didn't have to have modern science to bring out the extent of the problem of pain; it's always been evident to people. I put it to you that anthropology shows that the origin of the word "God" comes from something quite different—a wish to take a certain aspect of human life, seriously. In trying to take that aspect of human life seriously, it may do something which, in so far as you compare it with down-to-earth literal statements, you could, if you wished, call myths, but these myths are essential in order to take that certain aspect of life seriously. Now I want to press you on two statements you made right at the beginning. You said that if we were frank, we'd have to admit neither

of us knows any more about God than you do. I'm simply going to deny that. I in fact *do* know God: if I didn't I wouldn't be a Christian. And secondly, you used the term myth as if it were a bad thing. Now you apparently believe that science is on the whole going along the right lines, but when science talks about things called electrons and waves, it's using myths. It uses them as a means of explaining things, a means of communicating facts about them. Surely the idea of God can be a means of communicating something vital about personal life.

McCall.—I consider that you are there using "myth" in two different ways, but I would first of all take up one of your previous remarks, that people have been aware of the problem of pain throughout the centuries, and if their idea of God were similar to the one that I have put—almighty, all-knowing and all-loving—they would have thrown it overboard before this time. But of course you're ignoring the dualism of Christianity, the dualism of Christianity being that there was also a devil. Now it may be that you two have dispensed with the idea of the devil now, and this of course creates the problem of trying to explain pain, and reconciling it with the existence of the God who could banish it.

Kenny.—Do you think it is conceivable that there could be something we could call a human being which did not have the possibility of suffering and of sinning, and making mistakes?

McCall.—We've got to distinguish between whether I think that in a naturalistic system, which is the way in which I view life, pain does play some sort of a role. But I would even then say that there is a great deal more pain that I at least like to see. And I would furthermore suggest that both of you would probably agree with me that, if we had the possibility of creating a world, had almighty power, then we could have made a better job of it than the God that you believe in apparently has done; but of course in which I don't believe at all.

Wren-Lewis.—You remind me of the American who said—of Coney Island I think it was—"This is what God would have made it, if he'd had the money". But I think that you're starting from a set of concepts we're not going to agree with. You're starting from the idea that the hypothesis of God is invented in order to explain the world, without taking account of this fact of pain. It isn't. It's invented because people are compelled to invent it.

McCall.—I didn't, as far as I'm aware, say that the idea of God was invented. Certainly I don't mean that it was invented in the way that you're more or less implying now. I think that man in a certain stage of his development—a primitive stage of his development—from lack of knowledge of the world around him, believed in the existence of spirits which eventually developed into gods. Which is rather a different process. In other words, I think that gods evolve like anything else. But I think now we are sufficiently informed about the world in which we live, to dispense with the idea of God, because it doesn't help us in our descriptions, our definitions or our understanding of the world to any degree. At least that is my contention, as an Atheist.

Wren-Lewis.—You would presumably therefore substitute something for it. What would you substitute for it?

McCall.—I don't substitute anything at all for God, because I think it is an unnecessary hypothesis.

Wren-Lewis.—This of course is exactly where we would disagree with you and say that it *was* necessary and *not* a mere hypothesis.

McCall.—Yes, but I feel that we have had an interesting discussion, and I hope you agree.

Leicester Debate

IT IS ONLY RARELY that a Christian minister can be persuaded to debate in public with an Atheist, so we were pleasantly surprised when we heard from Harold Day of Bradford that he was to debate with the Rev. Bill Matthews, vicar of Copt Oak, at Leicester on December 2nd. Unfortunately, Mr. Day is at present suffering from a very serious illness, so his place was taken by the experienced Tom Mosley of Nottingham.

The Rev. Bill Matthews, a cheerful extrovert with the face of a film star and the physique of a "rigger" forward opened. Mr. Day's challenge (in the form of a pamphlet) was not in the best of taste, and was couched in terms of 60 years ago. It accused Mr. Matthews of "being on the inside of a tremendous and organised racket based on phoney ideas", and so on. This was entirely untrue and Mr. Matthews intended to show that it was possible to base one's idea of God upon reason.

There were five traditional proofs: (1) The need for a Maker, (2) The First Cause, (3) The idea of a Perfect Being, (4) Individual revelation, and (5) Historical: the fact that the idea of God is common to all kinds of people everywhere. Although this may not be proof of a scientific kind it was reasonable, and should be accepted from Christians in the same way that evidence is accepted from a witness in a courtroom.

The Bible, said Mr. Matthews, contains history, parable, myth, poetry, song and sermon, each facet should be examined within its own context. History, for instance, was to the Hebrew more a record of moral precepts than a list of important personages. The stories of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, etc., were myths; they personified the whole of humanity rather than historical personages, and as such we could regard them as true even today. They are the story of the behaviour of mankind and womankind. Finally it should be mentioned that there was no conflict between science and religion, since both pursue the same end, a search for truth. It is also, a fact that in its search for truth, science used instinct and intuition in the formulation of its theories, as did religion. It is also a fact that most scientists today (including the late Dr. Einstein) were Christians.

Tom Mosley then put forward the case for the unbelievers. He started by mentioning that, during a debate with another parson, the latter had rejected all the arguments which Mr. Matthews had used tonight. In fact, most of the traditional proofs had been demolished by Emmanuel Kant.

It was reasonable to infer the existence of a watchmaker on discovering a watch. After all, one can go to a watch factory and see watches made, but one cannot go to a universe factory. So the analogy breaks down. If there was a first cause, what was God doing before it, when there was nothing to do, nothing to know, and nowhere to go? The first cause was absurd. It has also been shown that revelations are common to many religions and tend to cancel each other out, while it was untrue that all people everywhere have the same conception of God or even a conception of God at all.

The Christian religion, said Mr. Mosley, is based on the story of the fall of man in the Garden of Eden, and the subsequent coming of Jesus to redeem the world from the effects of that fall. If, however, as Mr. Matthews had said, the Garden of Eden story is a myth, then why was Jesus necessary? Apparently he wasn't, because all that he ever said had been said before. Probably the best of his sayings was the Golden Rule, do unto others, but this was also taught by Confucius, Buddha and others, long

before he ever came—that is if he ever did come, which many doubt. Other points made by Tom Mosley were that science and religion were not compatible, since one gave a natural account of the universe, whilst the other gave a supernatural one; that all definitions of God were either self-contradictory or did not fit the facts of nature; and that gods were mainly men writ large.

A lively half hour of questions followed, out of which it became obvious that some of the Christians in the audience were not happy about the way the Rev. Bill Matthews had discarded the Garden of Eden, etc., as myths. One member called the debate a swindle; there were *two* Atheists on the platform!

As the Rev. Bill Matthews has agreed to come to the Secular Hall again next season, we are hoping possibly to stage another debate then.

C. H. HAMMERSLEY
(Secretary, Leicester Secular Society).

CORRESPONDENCE

H. CUTNER

I was very pleased to read "Historicus's" upholding of Mr. Cutner in THE FREETHINKER (30/11/62). It surprised me very much when I read Mr. Ridley's most unfortunate remarks regarding Mr. Cutner, whose articles I have enjoyed for many years.

Mr. Cutner deserves our warmest thanks for the services he has rendered to Freethought and Secularism.

(Mrs.) ANN CALDERWOOD.

THE DECLINE OF A MYTH!

The Scottish Roman Catholic hierarchy has recently shown concern about the tremendous drop in the number of pilgrims—especially women—visiting that bastion of superstitious mumbo-jumbo, Lourdes. The Glasgow Lourdes Pilgrimage Society has hurriedly sent out a circular to every parish priest in Scotland inviting his assistance towards "bringing the pilgrimage to the notice of his parishioners, especially *women* and *girls*." (My italics.)

Now considering the constant publicity campaign in Catholic newspapers, periodicals, parish bulletins, and from the pulpit, it is virtually impossible for the average Papist to remain ignorant of his local pilgrimage to the town alleged to have been honoured by eighteen descents of that celestial cosmonaut, Mary the Immaculate.

However, rather than waiting for a miracle to bring back the lost souls, the Romanist authorities have decided to adopt more earthly forms of persuasion. They have appointed a task force of priests (under the direction of Canon Daniel and Father Thomas Brady), whose job it will be to visit a large number of parishes and to lecture the Catholic Women's League, the Union of Catholic Mothers, the Children of Mary, and the ladies section of the Don Bosco Guild of Teachers on the "Fact of Lourdes".

Canon Daniel (obviously a very optimistic cleric) has high hopes that the 1963 pilgrimage from Scotland will be a memorable one. "It is," he says, "going to be a real pilgrimage—predominantly feminine." (*The Universe* and *Catholic Times*, October 26th). "Men," he goes on, "are not excluded. My word no. We need men. But what a wonderful thing it would be to have a great pilgrimage of women". And he is enthusiastic, too, about senior schoolgirls. "What a wonderful field we have to draw upon" he exclaims. Anyone can see from these statements just how important women are to the Church of Rome. When women stop patronising its absurdities, the Church will be *kaput*.

It is not surprising therefore that the priests are worried. Nor that they should attempt to stop the Scottish apathy from spreading to other lands: to stop the decline of the myth of Lourdes.

JOHN W. TELFER.

CHRISTMAS CAROLS

During the approaching Christmas and New Year holiday period, we shall see, once again, the spectacle of thousands of motorists eager to reach their chosen objective—like so many birds on their seasonal migration.

Policemen and patrolmen will have a busy and an anxious time endeavouring to reduce the hazards of our roads. In an overseas city, one such officer, confronted with a similar problem, issued a card containing the following advice to motorists. It is submitted here for the consideration of our own motoring public.

At 40 miles per hour, sing "Highways are happy ways".

At 50 miles per hour, "I'm but a Stranger here, Heaven is my home".

At 60 miles per hour, sing "Nearer my God to Thee".

At 70 miles per hour, sing "When the roll is called Up Yonder, I'll be there".

At 80 miles per hour, sing, "Lord, I'm Coming Home".

E.J.B.

GEORGE ELIOT

Mr. Cutner's article on George Eliot is very engaging. Whether she was a freethinker or not can be made dependent upon the meaning you give to the word. But it does not seem to me to be any necessary part of freethought that one should be a militant. It is possible for a man, for much of his life, to hold his convictions quietly, but nonetheless decidedly, without publicly parading them. But if a person uses quasi-religious language he may expect to be misunderstood, as George Eliot would seem to have been. However, the crux of the matter is: Did she or did she not believe in ecclesiastic doctrines, the existence of a personal God, the reality of a future life? If she did not, then by my definition she was a freethinker.

George Eliot felt, as others have done, that there is something in religion that may elevate and ennoble, and this obviously explains her reluctance to condemn religious faith out of hand. I have some sympathy for her point of view. We live in a society today that glories in a sort of don't-care-a-damn hedonism. Clerics lament this and point to a growing elasticity in personal principles. Are they wrong to do so? And if they are, then where are we heading? I have, I think, always admired conviction honestly thought out, but the lack of conviction of any sort that characterises a large proportion of young people today is a bad augury for the future.

G. I. BENNETT.

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