

The Freethinker

Volume LXXXIII—No. 1

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Sixpence

IN MY EARLY EFFORTS to find out something of the "origins" of Christianity, it did not take me long to learn that chronology was one of the biggest problems. I found it utterly impossible to reconcile the dates given in the Bible with history. The "heaven and the earth" of Genesis and all they contained were allegedly "created" in the year 4004 BC. Though my own Bible does not give either the month, week, day, or time, when that marvellous event occurred, I have read somewhere that the exact time of the first day was computed by the Rev. J. Lightfoot (1602-75), but I have not the reference by me. However, I am quite sure that if the date had been given in our Authorised Version, Protestants would have vigorously defended it as part of God's wonderful revelation to man.

Convenience
Though of course absolutely true for them, the date 4004 BC is not particularly liked even by many believing Christians these days. The tremendous advance of science has given Biblical dates a death-blow. We do not accept the date given for our New Year because of anything in the Bible but only as a matter of convenience. The date "1 AD" does as well as any other to mark time in the modern world.

New Year takes place seven days after Christmas, but actually there is no connection. From the time when man became a thinking animal with an insatiable curiosity regarding his own existence—where did he come from and how?—the question of time has intrigued him. And it must have taken centuries, or possibly thousands of years, before he came to realise how heavenly phenomena occurred at regular intervals, and could be measured.

In his once well-known *Epitome of History*, Professor Ploetz does not waste much time on what can be called "pre-history", but calls it "X BC". He gives the date 3000 BC as about the beginning of Egyptian history, and 2000 BC for the Biblical Israelites. "The chronology of Jewish history is uncertain", he adds. He says nothing at all about the Creation.

Chronology and Cosmogony
That a study of chronology is necessary to understand the origins of religion in general and Christianity in particular, can be shown from the fact that the article on the subject in the *Encyclopedia Biblica* consists of over forty columns of close print and argument. It does not waste much time over the 4004 year of Creation. The only point worth discussion is whether it was taken direct from the Babylonians, or whether there was an independent tradition about the Creation from which the Genesis and the Babylonian accounts were taken. We may settle the matter by insisting that both accounts are completely mythical. In fact Canon Cheyne begins his own article on Creation in the *Encyclopedia* calling it, "Mythical basis of Genesis 1, 1-2, 4". We are told that "The Babylonian New Year's festival called Zakmuk, which has clearly influenced the corresponding Jewish festival, stands

in close relationship to the cosmogonic myth . . . In its popular conception, Zakmuk was probably at once the anniversary of creation and the day of judgment". Dr. Cheyne is quite convinced that the Babylonians borrowed their own cosmogony from previous cosmogonies and myths, and the whole Christian world will have to come to the same conclusion sooner or later.

The whole question of chronology can easily become formidable for a very simple reason. The "ancients", whether Jews or Gentiles, were not strong on dates. One reason may have been that they may not have had (as we have) easily read numerals. Another reason was that it was difficult to

VIEWS and OPINIONS

The New Year

By H. CUTNER

get a start—that is, a "first" date which all nations were willing to accept. It is only by recording events with absolute accuracy that we can be sure of a time sequence, and this was something antiquity appears never to have understood.

New Years

According to F. A. Arbuthnot's *Mysteries of Chronology*, it was J. J. Scaliger (1540-1609) who "was the first person who seems to have attempted to introduce some conformity into the tangled skein of datings, and laid the foundation of the science of ancient chronology". He did a number of things with some of the known ancient calendars, trying to simplify them and bring them into line as far as possible with each other. There were in actual fact dozens of them, all listed by Arbuthnot. Whether Scaliger was right or wrong in giving such precise dates to eras and cycles as he did "in the total absence of records and registers" does not now matter very much; for if wrong, the dates he gives, says Arbuthnot, "cannot now be altered in any way". The year beginning 1 AD must therefore stand, and dating from it will always be our New Year.

Naturally, Judaism will not agree, nor will Islam, for both have a New Year of a different dating. In fact, Judaism is in a bit of a fix about its New Year, for Exodus 12, 1-2, makes Passover (about March) the beginning of a New Year, while it actually celebrates the New Year in autumn. Islam's New Year began in 1622 AD—according to Scaliger—on July 16th.

Julius Caesar introduced the calendar known by his name dating it the year of Rome—from the building of Rome, that is—758 BC, but he made many reforms at the same time to keep it in line with the known movements of the sun. And Pope Gregory XIII (1572-85) rectified its mistakes during his reign.

In England, however, the New Year began (in the twelfth century) on the 25th of March, and this was not changed until 1751. The New Year then had to begin on January 1st, 1752, a year in which we lost eleven days. These lost days caused a riot in the country. Henry Ford was by no means the first to say that history was bunk. It is said that Napoleon anticipated Ford, for he said that "history was a fable or fiction agreed upon". Chronology

appears to support Napoleon's contention. I have often wondered how the date, October 25th, 1066, for the Battle of Hastings was computed.

How far the Christian Churches are to blame for the general chronological confusion can be seen if one consults Alexander Del Mar's *Worship of Augustus Caesar* or his *Middle Ages Revisited*. Whether his conclusions are generally accepted, I doubt, but he certainly made a very serious study of the difficulties of chronology when it was dominated by the Churches. He insisted that Augustus Caesar (63 BC—14 AD) "was worshipped not as a hero or demi-god, but as a Messiah, an incarnation of the Deity" in "a miraculous manner" which was "to

bring peace on earth . . . restore the Golden Age . . . and fulfil the prophecies of the Cumaean Sybil". Tacitus said that Augustus claimed the same reverence given to the gods. "Temples were built to him and statues were erected to him; a mortal man was adored; and priests and pontiffs were appointed to pay him impious homage". Del Mar gives some extraordinary evidence to show how chronology was tampered with both by Augustus and the early Christian Church.

We can do nothing about it now. And it would help very little if we could. So we must wish for this year of grace 1963, the best possible year in the best possible world.

God and The Soviet Union

By OTTO WOLFGANG

THE ITALIAN FREETHOUGHT PAPER, *La Ragione*, recently asked Dr. Conforto, a scientist fully conversant with Russian, to get authentic information about the official attitude of the Soviet Union towards organised religion. The following is an abridged report of the interview he had with the Soviet magazine, *Science and Religion*.

Question—Marxists do not believe in God; do they also deny his existence?

Answer—Marxism denies that there is a God. We do not believe in any deity. The idea of God arose out of primitive conditions, i.e. before there was an exact science or when such science as existed did not possess the means of providing satisfactory answers to man's problems. The idea of god is without foundation, ludicrous and false. It is therefore superfluous. However, it is not enough to negate the necessity or utility of this conception; Marxists have to analyse the social conditions which, more or less inevitably, gave rise to this illusion, first created to counteract man's impotence in the face of nature and, later on, his fear of the seemingly mysterious action of social agencies, including the "blind force" of capital. A Greek philosopher of Antiquity, Xenophanes (6-5th century BC) already taught that, in his frustrated dreams, man has created his gods in his own image.

Q.—Do you think that the conception of God is a contradiction in itself?

A.—Of course, it is; but it is even more: it is absurd. All the aspects attributed to the God of Jews, Christians or Muslims are not only contradictory but even exclude each other. God is supposed to be all kindness and yet scriptures abound with reports of his cruelty, vindictiveness, bloodlust and jealousy; and whence comes the dogma of eternal punishment in hell, etc.?

God is supposed to be all-knowing or omniscient; and yet he couldn't foresee happenings and has to revert to confession in order to get knowledge of man's "sins".

God is almighty or omnipotent, and yet impotent to root out evil (he is still struggling against the Devil and his ilk!). He is said to be omnipresent, and yet there is, in opposition to his heavenly realm, the undisputed realm of Hell where the Devil rules.

Q.—Which are the scientific proofs that disprove the existence of God?

A.—We Atheists do not need to prove that something does not exist; God's existence is already disproved through our material existence without that conception. It is well known that all the so-called "proofs" brought forward by theology have been dismantled long ago. The frequently-heard argument that this idea had existed in our minds from the beginning has been demonstrated as a fallacy by

the sciences of anthropology and philology; it can be shown that always and for long periods there have existed human communities without the conception of gods. If the upholding of this idea were a sustaining argument, the fact that more and more thinking people deny the existence of a god would similarly count as a proof against God.

Moral laws and ethical behaviour existed long before the rise of any religious ideology; and the apologetic argument that everything in nature is well conceived and obeys rational laws is easily disproved. It was Darwin who showed that nature does not follow rational laws and has no sensible purpose but that a struggle for existence is waged and determines survival. It is not necessary to invent a deity whose task it is to regulate the universal individual fate and society. Such a deity, if he existed, must be utterly incapable and stupid.

Q.—Why do the Soviets not join the World Union of Freethinkers?

A.—In the early years of the USSR there existed the League of Militant Atheists and they belonged to the World Union of Freethinkers. Today, atheist propaganda is widespread as a fundamental part of our materialist conception of history and scientific education of the citizen.

It goes without saying that not all our scientific bodies and organisations can join an international organisation of that sort. Marxist atheism and the atheism of the bourgeoisie do differ to a certain extent—mainly in that we, seeing religion as the ideological result of oppression in class societies, fight it in close connection with its causes. We strive to erect a new society where there is no private property, no injustice, no exploitation of man through man, and no war; and thus we believe to eradicate the roots and possibilities of religious conceptions.

Bourgeois atheism, on the other hand, opposes religion mainly as a cultural residue in the path of progress; this leads to conditions where, particularly in ethical questions, its leaders are prone to compromise with religious traditions.

This, of course, does not exclude the possibility and desirability of co-operation between the two camps. We fully recognise that the World Union of Freethinkers carries on a highly progressive struggle, and by exchange of information, publications and common conferences, the struggle against religion could be greatly furthered on the broadest possible plain. We are greatly pleased that the atheists of the bourgeois camp are pacifists and in favour of peaceful co-existence, and in our mutual fight against war and for peaceful relations between all people there exists a strong basis on which to build our profitable co-operation.

What is the Soul?

By G. L. SIMONS

IN ALL THE WORLD religions the idea of "soul" (suitably defined) is important. For religion is concerned primarily with survival after death, and because physical death is undeniable, survival is only possible if man is not only physical but "spiritual" also. Thus each human being, interpreted religiously, is not one but two, not only this-worldly but also other-worldly, comprising a temporal physical self and a spiritual non-physical self which lives for ever.

There are of course several variations on this theme. For example Catholics believe in the physical resurrection of the body, although at times they do not seem too clear what this means. Also Buddhists believe in a causal, unpersonified cosmic principle called "karma" which sees to it that a man is reborn on a plane determined by the merit of his previous life. Thus the effects of a man's life are thought to endure and to cause a just rebirth. The "something" which is reborn is akin to the "soul" in Islam and Christianity. But what is the soul? How was the idea born? And is it necessary for a rational world-outlook?

Since it is certain that complex modern societies have evolved from primitive social groups it is highly probable that, where possible, man's concepts and ideas have undergone a corresponding development. Because of this, to understand the modern concept of "soul" it is helpful to examine similar concepts in primitive societies of the past and the present. The following anthropological examples are taken from *The Golden Bough* by Sir James Fraser.

It may be assumed that, when early man witnessed death, he was unable to perceive any physical difference between a living person and one just dead and inferred therefore that the thing which gave life and animated the body had departed. He believed that an animated object must be activated by some agent which, in a sense, was independent of the object and which may cease to activate it in unfavourable circumstances. Hence in some societies when a man was sick or dying it was customary to place fish-hooks around his mouth and nostrils to arrest the flight of his escaping soul. Similarly, when a man dreamt it was thought that the soul had left the sleeping body and had actually undergone the dream-experiences which the man recalled upon waking. For this reason it was considered sinful to paint a sleeping man's face lest his returning soul should not recognise its owner.

Fraser has shown that the belief that in dreams and in sickness the soul left the body was of prime importance for early man (and still is in many primitive societies). Sorcerers were thought to be able to catch the wandering soul and thus have power of life and death over its owner. They set traps for the soul and if it should be caught (disguised as an insect or bird) the death of its previous owner was thought certain to follow quickly. When the Dyak medicine-man is initiated he is equipped with hooks to prevent the soul of the sick man from escaping. If as sometimes happens the soul nevertheless escapes, an attempt is made to lure it back into the body of the sick man by singing and flute-playing. If the man dies it is assumed that the efforts were unsuccessful.

According to Fraser, the people of Nias believe that a man's soul is a miniature replica of the man himself. In this way souls are thought to have weight, shape and size. There are fat souls and thin souls, long and short, quick and slow. An attempt is also made to relate the

length of a person's life with the size of his soul. Thus if a child dies it is regretted that he must have had a short soul. In modern Greece many superstitious people believe that a man's shadow is his soul, that if a man's shadow falls upon a coffin that is being buried the man will soon die. Not long ago the Zulus believed that a man's soul resided in his reflection. It was therefore thought to be dangerous to peer into a lake or river since a crocodile may swallow the man's reflection, causing his death. Fraser has shown that the concepts of the "shadow-soul" and the "reflection-soul" have been (and still are) widespread in many simple societies.

Some Indian tribes of North America believe that souls reside in all things, animate and inanimate. (Other Indian tribes believe that a man has four souls, one main soul and three subservient ones.) The notion that all living things have souls has been very widespread. For example, Philippine Islanders apologise to a tree before they cut it down. Other societies have believed that all animate objects possess souls; yet others that only men possess them, women being excluded due to their supposed inferior nature. However, in the modern world the most popular view is that all human beings possess souls, but not other animals. This view is as legitimate as the others we have mentioned, if a little more exclusive than some.

Nowadays the idea of the soul has changed. Those who believe in its existence do not claim that it has size or weight, or that it can be captured like a rat in a trap. Rather they attempt to divest it of all qualities that have a general meaning, and bring in new words to describe it, such as "transcendental", "ethereal", "metaphysical", etc. To give the soul everyday attributes would no longer suffice, since science is capable of investigating everyday attributes and would quickly come to the conclusion that the soul was a figment of the imagination. Hence if the idea of the soul is to be preserved it must become abstract and remote (as did God). Whenever the believer defines the soul as "the immortal part of man which cannot be scientifically detected", it is tempting to ask how he perceives it. The usual answer—that he is *intuitively* aware of it—is less than satisfactory.

Until recently, modern psychology was fettered by the dualism instigated by Descartes. However when Descartes posited the existence of mind *and* matter he underlined a serious theological difficulty by stating that since mind and matter were radically different in nature *they could never interact*. This meant that the changing states of the body coincided with the changing states of the mind since the two causal chains, although independent, corresponded due to divine control. Modern psychologists, however, inspired by the work of such scientists as Pavlov and Watson, have realised that there is no need for such a dualism, that "mind" or "soul" as an independent "substance" is a logically superfluous idea. The modern emphasis on training psychologists in physiology and neurology indicates the direction in which modern psychology is heading. It is not difficult to see why the notion of a Life Force (the *élan vital* of Bergson) has appealed to many thinkers. It is also not difficult to see how the notion evolved. The belief of the Vitalists that animation necessarily entails the existence of some mystical force is a sophistication of primitive beliefs formulated because early men knew no physiological

(Concluded on next page)

This Believing World

The "Sunday Express" for December 9th must have sown the seed of doubt in the minds of many faithful Christians who longed to express their heavenly joy at the birth of their Saviour. Mr. Percy Howard asked in it: "Are those Ancient Druids just a Myth?" and proceeded to ask the further very pertinent question, why is the mistletoe so much in evidence at Christmas? His article dealt with the Druids whose wonderful story has interested every English historian, but may very well be exaggerated through the accretion of myth.

★

The answer lies in the fact that Christmas is a pagan festival, taken over by the early Christians. Whatever else the first converts were ready to give up—if anything at all—they would never give up these customs; so they were quietly absorbed into the Christian religion. If this is not so, do we find Jesus anywhere enjoying Christmas pudding or roast turkey? Not on your life!

★

When a Pakistani Muslim bus conductor lost his job with Bradford (Yorks) Corporation Transport Department through refusing to shave off his beard (*The Guardian*, 18/12/62), a Bradford representative of the Pakistan High Commissioner commented that all Muslims were supposed to wear beards although most of them did not.

WHAT IS THE SOUL?

(Concluded from page 3)

difference between the dead and the living. Hence it appears that those who believe that every person has a soul are akin to the superstitious folk who thought that inside every steam engine there was a horse.

Belief in a soul existing in each animate human frame (which Professor Gilbert Ryle has called the dogma of "the Ghost in the Machine") is a necessary stage in the evolution of our ideas of consciousness, mind and life. But today, when computers can "compose" music and write love-letters, when brain surgery and drugs can produce predictable changes in personality, when neurologists recognise that "mind" is probably nothing more than complex brain organisation working according to a two-state system of logic, when the mentality of the schizophrenic can be simulated by taking mescaline, the notion of "soul" is not only completely superfluous but a fetter on scientific investigation and the growth of man's emotional and intellectual awareness.

Today, belief in the soul is sustained by those who have been encouraged to fear eventual extinction. Since the body is distressingly mortal, a second self, which will live for ever, is posited. That there is no reason to believe in its existence is not thought to be a disadvantage. But those who deny the importance of evidence, and who encourage men to fear, are not only perverse but short-sighted. For they do not realise that they are restricting the activity of man's loftiest faculty—reason—the free exercise of which is the surest guarantee that man will realise the "spiritual" riches of which he is capable.

RUSSIAN SCIENTIFIC WORKS IN ENGLISH

Space Laboratories, by G. Zhdanov and I. Tindo. Illustrated with photos and diagrams, including map of far side of the moon. 6s., plus 6d. postage.

The Universe, by A. Oparin and V. Fesenkov. Illustrated. 4s. 6d., plus 6d. postage.

Strengthen Your Heart, by V. Zelenin, USSR Academy of Medical Science, 5s., plus 6d. postage.

from THE PIONEER PRESS

Was Einstein a Christian?

T. M. MOSLEY has pointed out to us that in the Leicester Secular Society's report of his debate with the Rev. Bill Matthews at Leicester Secular Hall on December 2nd, 1962 (printed in our issue of December 14th), an incorrect statement by Mr. Matthews went apparently uncontested.

Mr. Matthews alleged that the late Albert Einstein was a Christian, and Mr. Mosley, of course, denied this. That Mr. Mosley was right is proved by the following excerpt from Einstein's contribution to *I Believe (Nineteen Personal Philosophies)*, first published by George Allen and Unwin in 1940, and now available as a paperback. Unwin Books, 7s. 6d.

"I cannot imagine," says Einstein, "a God who rewards and punishes the objects of his creation, whose purposes are modelled after our own—a God, in short, who is but a reflection of human frailty. Neither can I believe that the individual survives the death of his body, although feeble souls harbour such thoughts through fear or ridiculous egotism. It is enough for me to contemplate the mystery of conscious life perpetrating itself through all eternity, to reflect upon the marvellous structure of the universe which we can dimly perceive, and to try humbly to comprehend even an infinitesimal part of the intelligence manifested in nature".

By no stretch of the imagination can such beliefs be called Christian.

From Canada

THE FOLLOWING letter, titled "The Church and its Worldly Goods", first appeared in French in the Canadian weekly *La Patrie* (Montreal) on December 13th, 1962. That it expresses the view of an ever-growing body of French-Canadian opinion is no longer deniable. The subject was recently discussed openly at a meeting of 150 priests and laymen, and again on December 16th in a television "Tribune Libre", when the participants were Francois Angers, Professor of Political Economy, the Dominican Father Dallaire, and two Professors of Philosophy, Paul Lacoste and André Morel.

To the Editor:

The recent sale by the Sisters of Charity of a part of their "municipality" to commercial interests raises an interesting problem.

Are not indeed all the taxpayers concerned in the fact that some 250 religious orders are very great landowners in our province without appearing on any assessment rolls for taxation? As the clergy and the religious orders are corporations which never die and which perpetuate themselves through the centuries, they do not pay succession duties either, even though the value of their holdings increases in geometric progression as a result of industrial progress fostered by others.

A very simple glance at the domains which religious orders own in the very heart of our fair city will suffice to convince the least inquisitive person that religious orders are well acquainted with the real estate game.

Whence comes all this material wealth thus accumulated in the hands of these defenders of spiritual values? Would there not be ground to proceed to a serious inventory of the wealth of the clergy and religious orders? The figures thus obtained might prove useful in the event of a future taking over by the state.

JOSEPH LA RIVIERE.

NEXT WEEK
TWO MYTHS—CHRISTMAS DAY AND
NEW YEAR'S DAY
By F. A. RIDLEY

THE FREETHINKER

103 BOROUGH HIGH STREET, LONDON, S.E.1
TELEPHONE: HOP 2717

THE FREETHINKER can be obtained through any newsagent or will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates: One year, £1 17s. 6d.; half-year, 19s.; three months, 9s. 6d. In U.S.A. and Canada: One year, \$5.25; half-year, \$2.75; three months, \$1.40.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1. Details of membership of the National Secular Society may be obtained from the General Secretary, 103 Borough High Street, S.E.1. Inquiries regarding Bequests and Secular Funeral Services should also be made to the General Secretary, N.S.S.

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. 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

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Tuesday, January 8th, 7.30 p.m.: Miss R. BUSH. "A Happy New Year in a Hungry World?" with film, "The First Priority".
Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate). Sunday, January 6th, 6.30 p.m.: FILM, "The Gadfly" (USSR).
Marble Arch Branch NSS (The Carpenter's Arms, Seymour Place, London, W.1), Sunday, January 6th, 7.30 p.m.: COLIN McCALL. "Catholicism and Crime".
South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, January 6th, 11 a.m.: DR. JAMES HEMMING, "The Direction of Human Development".

Notes and News

ONCE AGAIN we enter a new year; an entirely arbitrary one, no doubt—as Mr. Cutner indicates in Views and Opinions—but customarily a time of hope. And our main hope, in common with all sane people, must be for peace and international understanding. 1962 came perilously close to being our last year, and we hope that the New Year resolution of both the Mr. Ks will be: "No more Cuba brinkmanship"! For the Freethought movement in all its shapes and shades, we hope for continued progress. Disagreements and disputations we not only expect, but welcome. Where there is no argument there can be no freethought, and this paper has never been afraid to present widely different points of view so long as they were reasonably and sincerely expressed.

WE NOW have the syllabuses for the second half of the indoor season for Leicester Secular Society and Marble Arch (London) Branch of the National Secular Society. Both resume this Sunday, Leicester with a Russian film, *The Gadfly*, and Marble Arch with a lecture by Colin McCall on "Catholicism and Crime". Mr. McCall will also be the guest speaker at the Leicester Society's 82nd anniversary meeting on March 10th, while H. J. Blackham (Secretary of the Ethical Union) and T. M. Mosley also feature on both lists. Mr. Mosley making one of his rare but welcome appearances in London on March 3rd. Leicester will present another film, *Island Aflame* (the story of the Cuban revolt) on February 3rd, and the

following week Miss Gillian Romney, Lecturer in Philosophy at the University will be the speaker. Among other attractive speakers at Marble Arch may be mentioned Hector Hawton (Editor, *The Humanist*), A. L. Morton (author of *A People's History of England*) and Brian Pollitt.

A HUMANIST Students' hostel was opened in Hanover in November. The house has been named "Humanistas" and the address is Josephstrasse 22.

ONE OF our readers, himself a science teacher "in a very narrow wee Highland town", who refuses to teach religion and to attend assembly, draws our attention to an item in the *Scottish Daily Express* (14/12/62). Ex-Provost Robert Callaghan of Kilsyth told Stirlingshire Education Committee that two applicants for a post of principal physics teacher at Stirling High School had said before a sub-committee that they did not believe in a Creator or a hereafter. Mr. Callaghan thought this "most dangerous", and suggested that the job be re-advertised. But there were other schools with atheist teachers said Mr. John Anderson of Shieldhill, while two clergymen were among those who voted for Mr. Hugh Maclaren, whose appointment was approved by 18 votes to 5. As the Rev. Gordon Budd, of Holy Trinity Episcopal Church, Stirling, said: "the Education Committee advertised for a physics teachers and not for one to teach religion".

R. J. CONDON of Ilford, Essex, reminds us how important it is for Freethinkers to write letters to the press, and to keep on writing even if they don't have much success at first. Actually, local papers are often quite willing to print unorthodox opinions, and Mr. Condon says that about half his are printed. National papers are harder, of course, due to the larger number of letters they receive (if for no other reason), but they are also worth trying. The more letters that are sent, the more that are likely to appear. We know that many readers already act on this principle: our words are addressed to others.

IN MARCH Billy Graham will lead a crusade of "unmatched scope and magnitude" to Japan. Dr. Graham will be accompanied by 600 Southern US Baptists, most of them Texans, who will be split into four-man teams, spreading out to evangelise 147 Japanese cities (*Newsweek*, 10/12/62). The cost of the invasion will be \$300,000.

"THANK GOD for Mr. Graham and thousands upon thousands can say that." So, at any rate, said an anonymous correspondent who came across a copy of Colin McCall's leaflet, *Billy Graham*, and who returned it (apparently after depositing it for several weeks in the coalshed) along with a printed warning that "Hell awaits the unrighteous" and a written description of the National Secular Society: "them lot of fanatics [who] want to know more about were [sic] we came from than were we are going to". Not all our critics are illiterate, of course, but the loudest ones often are.

THE GOD OF LOVE

When the dust has settled
They will arrive
And ask
Who lived here
None can answer
Except the ruins
Who say
They worshipped a god of hate

L.C.W.

Doubts in Dialogue

Between a Christian Missionary and a Sceptic

By CHARLES BRADLAUGH

Christian Missionary—Do you deny immortal life?

Sceptic—The words immortal life are to me contradictory. By life I mean "the totality of functional ability, its activity and result in each individual organism". To speak of life as immortal is confusing.

C.M.—But you ignore the soul?

S.—I have no meaning for the word "soul" if you imply an entity other than the living animal or vegetable.

C.M.—But where does the life go when a man dies?

S.—Do you ask where the life goes when an oyster dies?

C.M.—That is an evasion, and there is no fair comparison between the life of an oyster and that of a man.

S.—Each organism differs from all other organisms, or it could not be distinguished in thought. The word "life" only expresses state of organism, *i.e.*, the state of the particular organism described as living. Normal life is health; abnormal activity, excess, or collapse, would be disease. Cessation of activity, and negation of its possible resumption, is death. You do not ask where the life of a sheep has gone when you have converted the sheep into mutton pie.

C.M.—But sheep is not intelligent as is man.

S.—Sheep is more intelligent than oyster; but why do you mix up intelligence with this assertion of immortality?

C.M.—The soul, which is immortal, is intelligence as well as life.

S.—What you call intelligence, which you do not define, is to me the totality of nervous encephalic ability, its activity and results in each animal. I cannot conceive the individual intelligence of any animal continuing in activity after the individual animal has died.

C.M.—But where do you say life goes when the breath leaves the body?

S.—When an animal permanently ceases to breathe, no breath leaves his body and there is no life to go anywhere.

C.M.—Yours is a black doctrine of annihilation.

S.—Instead of finding unpleasant colour for a doctrine that I do not hold, explain your own view. Do you say that a man does live when he has died and whilst he is dead?

C.M.—I say that the Bible teaches that man has an immortal life—that man is a living soul.

S.—Before dealing with the supposed teaching of any book let me be sure that I know what you mean. Do you mean that man continues to live notwithstanding that he has died.

C.M.—Man's soul lives.

S.—The body ceases to be a living body?

C.M.—Yes; the body is mortal, it is the soul lives on.

S.—Can you afford me any means of distinguishing what you call soul as separate from the body, or of identifying a soul living on after the death of the body?

C.M.—You reject the Bible.

S.—Apart from the Bible, can you answer my question?

C.M.—The best and most intellectual men believe in the immortality of the soul.

S.—My question is, can you afford me today any means, apart from the Bible and apart from the belief of others, of identifying a soul as living on after the death of its body?

C.M.—If you will not believe, it is useless to reason with you.

S.—It is not a question of my willingness or unwillingness to believe, but it is rather a question of your ability to make yourself clear on propositions to which you ask my assent. What do you mean by soul?

C.M.—Man's immortal spirit.

S.—That is only a change of words; it is not an explanation of meaning. What do you mean by man's immortal spirit?

C.M.—That which is intelligent and living in man.

S.—Is that which is intelligent and living in an ox its immortal spirit?

C.M.—The intelligence of an ox is very different from that of a man.

S.—But the ox lives: has an ox immortal life, or when it dies does it cease to live?

C.M.—That is always the way with infidels; you try to reduce man to the level of the beast.

S.—That is not true, and if it were true would at least as to dying have the scriptural justification, "As the one dieth, so dieth the other"; but as you say the soul is that which is intelligent in man, I will ask you whether the basis of intelligence is sensation and memory of sensation?

C.M.—No doubt the soul uses the senses.

S.—Leaving aside "soul", which you have not defined, what kind of intelligence would you expect to find in a person born without sight, hearing, taste, or smell?

C.M.—You take an almost impossible case.

S.—Or in the case of a congenital idiot? Do you say that the intelligence of the idiot boy is his soul?

C.M.—I do not deny that there are some mysteries, but these do not justify your disbelief.

S.—But does your absolute inability to explain what you mean by "soul" justify your requiring me to believe that which to me is meaningless, and with you is inexplicable?

C.M.—But what explanation do you give of life and intelligence?

S.—It is rather on those who assert that the onus of explanation should rest. Functional ability is inherited, and depends on the parents and their surroundings, meaning by parents much more than the immediate father and mother. Functional ability may be developed under good conditions; may be checked and arrested under hostile conditions. Individual life varies according to heredity and life surroundings. The sensitive abilities are results of heredity, the scope and intensity of their exercise varying; the ability to remember sensations, differing; the brain, as to quantity, quality, and convolutions, peculiar to each individual; the nervous centres and nerve systems different, though like. Life and intelligence are the word-labels of physical states and results. When the man dies, it is absurd to describe him as living.

C.M.—But your argument would make consciousness a mere attribute of matter, and we all know matter cannot think.

S.—By matter, if I use the word, I mean the totality of all phenomena and of all that is necessary for the happening of any phenomenon: that is, existence, everything. By totality I only mean infinite—that is, indefinite—quantity. The material phenomenon iron pot, or granite block, does not think. The material phenomenon man, or cat, does think. There is no general consciousness in

any animal, there is an ever varying state of mind as long as the animal lives and thinks.

C.M.—But surely there is a vital principle in man.

S.—Why more than a digesting principle?

C.M.—But the huge majority of humankind believe that there is a vital principle in man, and that the soul is that principle.

S.—It would be as conclusive and relevant to say that the huge majority in every nation have at some period

believed as true some proposition which at another period the huge majority have rejected as false. And the "huge majority" scarcely ever believe: they acquiesce, and drift with the stream; having much the same effective relation to the creed of the day that the clay has to the river which holds it in suspension, carries it towards the sea.

[Reprinted from *The National Reformer*, October 16th, 1887.]

The Plight of the Theologian

By E. G. MACFARLANE

THIS WINTER in the local University building, I have attended what has proved to be the most popular series of classes ever sponsored by the Dundee Education Committee so far as evening classes are concerned. Under the general title "Christianity or Humanism?" we have heard statements from theologians and philosophers as individuals and also listened to discussions or symposiums between lecturers with differing views. After each statement or discussion an opportunity was provided for participation by any class member who cared to do so and, in general, the idea was an hour's lecture and an hour of general discussion. The fact that the enrolment was in the region of fifty whereas many other classes struggle along on a basis of twelve, shows that there is an active interest in the subject matter, and since the class was held at the instigation of the Dundee Humanist Group I think that other groups throughout the country might do well to exploit a similar situation in their own areas.

Two of the lecturers regarded themselves as Christians, although discussion revealed that they were by no means agreed as to what they meant by the words "Christianity" and "God". The other two lecturers were frankly atheist, and philosophic in their approach to all the matters raised. And they made things so difficult for the theologians that I feel sure that many of the people who came to the class thinking they were Christians, and that there was no doubt about the strength of the Christian position, were made to think again very seriously indeed.

In the earlier stages of the series the theologians were full of confidence in the strength of their own position and were obviously comfortable and at ease in giving their lectures. However, when one of them asserted that the Word of God, as contained in the Bible, was the basis of their views, the way was open to challenge the many contradictions which existed between the views about the Bible before and after the onslaught of scientific common-sense on the details contained therein.

For instance, when Professor Robinson of St. Andrews University was asked whether he believed that Adam and Eve ever existed as actual persons and gave the answer that all theologians today would say that this part of the Bible was to be regarded as a folk-tale, the way was open for a similar question regarding the actuality of Jesus Christ.

Although he was quick to deny the actuality of Adam and Eve, the actuality of Christ was obviously a different matter, and one which could not be surrendered so easily. Then he was taken up on the question of whether the rejection of Adam and Eve did not destroy the possibility of the traditional theology of the Fall being the basis of the justification for the self-sacrifice of the Messiah. Here the answer was that there had been many developments in theology since the early tidy theological structure was

generally accepted, and that this would be dealt with in a later lecture. When the "later" lecture did come, we found that the connection between the Bible and modern theology was so very tenuous that we might almost say it was non-existent, because when we came to the point of hearing the theologians discoursing on morality, we found them asserting that "personal experience of God" was the only possible basis for a theology of any kind—on the "modern lines" being given in the talks.

On the Humanist side, we were fortunate in having Dr. Walker (who has recently been representing the Humanist point of view in the ITV Sunday afternoon programmes called "Seek the Truth") and in his main lecture he told us flatly that, in his view theology was as outmoded as alchemy and astrology, so far as being a scientific discipline was concerned. His ideas on morality were of course directly derived from a concern for the general human welfare and the search for truth which has animated science and philosophy ever since these approaches to problems of belief and knowledge began to grow and become generally effective.

Some curious ideas emerged from the discussion too. For instance, to justify the spectacle of theologians and philosophers having a discussion at all, one of the theologians said that this could be classified as an exercise in Natural Theology. This was immediately objected to by one of the class as it involved the concept of an atheist theologian which was surely a contradiction in terms.

Another speaker then suggested that a new subject might be introduced to the University in which philosophical ideas might be applied to theology ("Although one would have to be careful to warn students considering taking the subject, that their faith might be upset by it!") and he suggested that the title "Philosophical Theology" might be suitable for such a study. But this too was objected to on the grounds that the assumption of the existence of God was involved in the title.

One of the Humanists asked "Is the subject title 'Moral Philosophy' not a more suitable title since both atheists and theists have systems of morals which are related to their beliefs?" But the answer from the theologians got lost in the discussion.

There is much more I could write about points raised and erased during the course of these lectures but perhaps I have said enough to suggest that the day of the existence of theological study in the University is drawing to a close. The theologians are becoming worried men, and the people who are worrying them are the persistent opponents of the mumbo-jumbo and question-begging which has always been associated with theology, whose advocates have consistently been the enemies of science and scientific philosophy which rejects superstitions of every kind.

There's No Divinity that Shapes Our Ends!

THERE IS no such thing as divine law, and therefore no such thing as sin declared the Rev. Dr. Walter Donald Kring, an American Unitarian minister in his sermon at All Souls Unitarian Church, Lexington Avenue and 80th Street, New York, on December 2nd, 1962.

"There is no set of laws, not even the Ten Commandments, which comes directly from heaven in finished form and to which we must conform", said Dr. Kring (*New York Times*, 3/12/62). And: "If there is no such thing as the final law of God available to man then there is also no such thing as sin in the technical sense [since] sin has been defined by religion as a trespass against the laws of God. Those of us who call ourselves liberals in religion do not feel that God has spoken through a man who became a God-man."

With a divine creed or a God-man "whose words are the final dictum of reality, the quest is gone from life", Dr. Kring said.

One should act ethically out of regard for one's self, other persons and society, rather than "because God wrote these laws on Mount Sinai with an indelible pen on some stone tablets held by a Jewish leader named Moses", he said.

"The Church that makes the greatest claims for its own infallibility may simply be indicating in a subtle way its own conviction of fallibility. No one has a stranglehold on God's law, and no human institution can speak for God no matter what its claims in this area may be," he said.

Dr. Kring warned that those who accepted the freedom of individual judgment in morals must also accept the consequences of their disagreement with society or the law.

"Jesus went to death on a cross because the ideals he elucidated were not in accordance with either the legal codes of his day or the views of the men who felt they had a stranglehold on God's law. They hung him on a cross because he had a higher principle than either the law or the authoritarianism of his day. But it was a free choice by Jesus, not part of some divine, pre-arranged plan."

"I believe that loyalty to the truth is the highest ethical condition of man and that dishonesty to our highest insights is the lowest scale to which we can fall," Dr. Kring said.

CORRESPONDENCE

ACTS OF GOD

Your note on insurance companies and "Acts of God" (*THE FREETHINKER*, 16/11/62) reminds me of a schoolboy definition of the term. "Please Miss", said the boy, "an 'Act of God' is something no reasonable man could expect!"

MALCOLM G. CLARKE (Ghana).

MILITANCY

In reply to Mr. G. I. Bennett (14/12/62), I should like to state that religion in general and Christianity in particular have done little to elevate and ennoble; in fact, quite the contrary has been the case. Particularly is this noticeable if one reflects on historical church-state relationships with their attendant evils. The don't-care-a-damn hedonism and lack of conviction which exist today have been condemned constantly in the past and in the present by people like Kropotkin, Vanzetti, Camus and many other avowed Atheists. Among the reasons for the lack of conviction amongst the young people today is that they have been disastrously taught to put their trust in priests and politicians when,

for a meaningful life, both ought to be dispensed with. They can be if people will think and act for themselves. But to change things it is essential to be a militant where freethought is concerned.

J. BOYLE

CHARITY AND CHASTITY

I fancy Denis Cobell is a very young man. Certainly he writes like one. But his article on Professor Carstairs's radio talks ought not, I think, to pass without challenge from those of us who have a moral conception of the role of freethought. These are my comments:

Professor Carstairs is entitled to his own point of view, but a freethinker who accepts it as *ex cathedra* simply because it flatters the Christian outlook seems to me to think shallowly indeed.

No, there cannot be any comparison between a complex society like ours and a primitive community of Samoans. Civilisation imposes restraints; that is the price we pay for being civilised. But I should like to point out to such people as Mr. Cobell that *restraint does not betoken neurosis*, which is a sort of pejorative term he flings at those who uphold sexual ethics.

Sex is not the only thing in life. If it were, we should still be a species indistinguishable from the rest of the animal kingdom, which mates and procreates blindly.

A rejection of Christianity, or of any theological religion, does not and cannot imply a rejection of morality. I strongly repudiate the idea that moral nihilism and freethought go together.

Unlike Professor Carstairs, some of us do not look upon chastity as "much less important than charity" (although charity to me means so much). Of what quality is love if a woman gives her body freely and experimentally to others?

I do not believe that easy virtue makes for happiness and freedom from neurosis, which it is the fashion for a considerable number of "modernists" to assume. Indeed, the condition of being promiscuous may in fact denote a deep-seated neurosis or defect in a person's psychological make-up. (I know of one case where it did.)

How many men really want to marry a girl who has lived loosely—if only for the reason that there must be considerable doubt that she will henceforth be content with the role of faithful spouse?

Though I have been an atheist throughout the whole of my adult life, it always seems necessary in *THE FREETHINKER* nowadays, when rebutting an unfairly anti-Christian point of view, to underline the fact that I have never seen reason for revising my opinion about unbelief.

G. I. BENNETT

FREEDOM'S FOE: THE VATICAN. By Adrian Pigott. Illustrated. Price 3/-; postage 6d.

A SHORT HISTORY OF SEX WORSHIP. By H. Cutner. Price 2/6; postage 6d.

THE BIBLE HANDBOOK (11th Edition). By G. W. Foote and W. P. Ball. Price 5/-; postage 8d.

AGE OF REASON. Thomas Paine's masterpiece with 40-pages introduction by Chapman Cohen. Cloth 5/-; postage 7d.

THE THINKER'S HANDBOOK. By Hector Hawton. Price 5/-; postage 7d.

PAMPHLETS FOR THE PEOPLE. 18 of Chapman Cohen's celebrated pamphlets bound in one Volume. Indispensable for the Freethinker.

Price 5/6; postage 8d.

CATHOLIC ACTION. By Adrian Pigott. Price 6d.; postage 3d.

FAMILY PROBLEMS AND THE LAW. By Robert S. W. Pollard. Price 2/6; postage 6d.

MATERIALISM RESTATED (Third edition). By Chapman Cohen. Price 5/6; postage 7d.

MEN WITHOUT GODS. By Hector Hawton. Price 2/6; postage 5d.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE IDEA OF GOD. By Grant Allen. Price 3/6; postage 8d.

THE LIFE OF JESUS. By Ernest Renan. Price 2/6; postage 5d.

THE ORIGINS OF RELIGION. By Lord Raglan. Price 2/6; postage 5d.

A LETTER TO ROMAN CATHOLIC PRIESTS. By Emmett McLoughlin (An Ex-Franciscan Priest). 2/6 per doz. (incl. postage).

POPE JOHN AND THE COLD WAR. By F. A. Ridley. Price 5/-; postage 4d.

THE CULTURE OF THE ABDOMEN. By F. A. Hornibrook. Price 2/6d.; postage 6d.