

# The Freethinker

Volume LXXXIII—No. 8

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Sixpence

IT HAS BEEN SAID that there is only a single step between the mystic and the mystery-monger. It has been said that there is only a single step between the mystic and the lunatic. Also, that that single step is often not easy to distinguish. There is certainly plenty of reason to suppose that these strictures are not far off the mark. Mysticism and mystification are next to each other even in the dictionary and it would not be too difficult to make the given meaning of the one serve as the given meaning of the other.

Mysticism, as commonly understood, belongs strictly to the sphere of religion. To talk of mysticism in any secular sitting is merely to create confusion. Mystery-mongering however, as long as there are politicians and financiers, to name but two, will never be quite such a monopoly of religion, though religion comes near to being a monopoly of mystery-mongering. Religion initiates, fosters and feeds upon mysteries. In fact from the crudest salvationism to the most theatrical Catholicism religion mainly depends upon a mystery-mongering that a touch of ordinary everyday commonsense quickly exposes as absurdity if not downright fraud.

**Aquinas's Wink**  
We need only think of the bogus mystery of transubstantiation. Even the astute Thomas Aquinas, one of its principal supporters, was not so easily fooled. Like all ambitious churchmen Thomas was after authority through the duplicities of religion as surely as most politicians and all financiers are after their own advantage through politics or money. But although magic ritual might delight, it could not deceive Thomas. He plainly saw that in spite of the priestly mumbo-jumbo over them, the wafers and wine undeniably remained wafers and wine and he tacitly admitted as much when he said that the eye of faith would have to be brought in to make acceptable what the natural eye rejected. It is easy to imagine one of Thomas's own natural eyes momentarily closing as he said it.

**Miracle**  
And it is intriguing to speculate on what would be the result if ever one of these typical Romish miracles came off and under the eucharistic incantation the wafers and wine did then and there actually turn into human flesh and human gore. Would the stomach stand up to so cannibalistic a communion or would it react like that of the sea-sick Frenchman who, when asked if he had lunched replied "Au contraire"?

Life has plenty of genuine mysteries to baffle it without this childish pretence and one of them is that there should be people, otherwise sane and shrewd, who cannot, so to speak, resist the primitive and unreasoning urge to touch wood. In other words, people who readily give uncritical acquiescence in the trumped-up mysteries of clerics and theologians.

**Hollow**  
One possible explanation may be that deeply ingrained

superstition combined with an indifferent reasoning capacity provides an ideal medium for manipulation by the unscrupulous company promoters of religion. And another likely reason is the undoubted power of language. Even a good intelligence, not easily imposed upon in other matters, will unwarily succumb to the insidious influence of a silly thing said in a solemn way. It is the reason why so much of the Bible and nearly all religious dithyrambs often score so heavily.

Translate their high-flown phraseology into the forthrightness of common speech and their hollowness at once becomes apparent.

Take for example that well-known bit of Wordsworth about our coming

into this world in trailing clouds of glory and so forth. It is a matter of opinion whether or not from a literary point of view it is luminous poetry. It is a matter of fact that from any literal point of view it is blazing nonsense.

## Riddle-Me-Ree

A mystic we are told, is one who seeks direct experience of God or spiritual truths by self-surrender and contemplation. This is a typical mystical riddle-me-ree which hardly makes verbal sense let alone defines intelligibly what it is supposed to define. Surrender to what? Contemplate what? If it means surrender to God then it predetermines an experience of God which it is supposed to be seeking. If it means surrender to the search, then it is surrender to a mere assumption that God may be at the other end. It is a gamble. And whatever may be alleged on one side there is no lack of evidence on the other that "seek and ye shall find" can be as barren a promise as ever was made.

## Mystical Bee

As for spiritual truths, any mystical bee in any mystical bonnet can be, and is, set up as spiritual truth, especially where it serves some personal predilection. Truth however needs no qualifying support. Indeed to qualify truth is to falsify truth. That is why, though so-called spiritual truths can never be shown to be true they can often and easily be shown up as untrue. They always violate reason, and for a grown-up mind that relies upon the comprehensibility and integrity of reason, spiritual truths are, as Einstein said he found them, virtually meaningless.

## Examples

Comment is scarcely necessary for the following examples from the celebrated mystic Meister Eckhart: "God is the denial of denials". "God likes forgiving big sins more than small ones. The bigger they are the gladder he is and the quicker to forgive them." "I vow that God is omnipotent but he is impotent to thwart . . . , etc." Or these from the equally celebrated Silesius: "No little worm can God make without me; It bursts unless I help both constantly". "Came I to nought then God's own death must be; He would give up the ghost for lack of me."

It can be hoped that not all mystic attempts to utter the unutterable are as fatuous as these. Nevertheless, thickly sprinkled across the pages of mystic literature are

## VIEWS and OPINIONS

### Mystics and Mysticism

By REGINALD UNDERWOOD

any number of similar inanities. To wade through a collection of them is enough to make one dizzy if not to drive one dotty. It is seeing through a glass so darkly that there is nothing to see but the dark distortions of the madhouse. Yet such maunderings will be thrust forward and quoted as if they were the matchless gems of an other-worldly wisdom, by sentimental devotees (and sometimes astute publishers) who can simulate a look of profound understanding while they gaze very hard at nothing with visible intent to convey that they are verily beholding the invisible. It is a posture too feeble to succeed as imposture. It wilts before the mildest raillery. It is in fact nothing more than the sanctimonious affectation which a cute schoolboy might describe as a short-sighted man with a far-away look in his eyes.

## Looking and Listening

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

WHEN YOU switch on the radio or the TV, what do you expect to hear or see? Entertainment, news, music, sport, pageantry, features—things that, in varying degrees, interest most people. Which is only right, for everyone with a set has to pay a licence fee. Do you really expect a lot of time to be found for your own private beliefs, beliefs which you know aren't acceptable to most other people?

Many TV and all radio programmes in Britain come, as you know, from the BBC, which produces as well as broadcasts them. As a public corporation with a Royal charter, it announces, very properly, that "to take sides on a controversial issue would be contrary to its policy of impartiality".

Does it carry out this policy in the highly controversial topic of religion? Religion is today in this country only a minority interest in the lives of a minority of people. But you would hardly know this from listening to the BBC.

There is strong evidence that this situation is the result of a deliberate crusading policy. Various BBC year books and handbooks state the Governors' intention. World War II converted "what, until 1939, was largely a Sunday activity, into a weekday activity". In 1944 "the main work and purpose of religious broadcasting, like that of the Church, is to preach the Gospel". In 1948 there is fleeting mention of "controversial discussions which lay bare fundamental points of conflict between belief and unbelief". But in 1955 the faithful are reassured that "the primary aim of most religious broadcasts is therefore 'evangelistic'". In the handbook for 1958 we read for the first (and last) time of a policy statement announced in the *Radio Times* of March 15th, 1947: "The Governors recognise that this must involve the broadcasting of conflicting views; but they are of the opinion that affirmation of widely differing beliefs and of unbelief can be made constructively . . . Such a broadening of the policy will be gradual and experimental". The broadening gradually led to a series of talks on Scientific Humanism by Mrs. Margaret Knight in 1953, and the experiment was so successful in stimulating an enormous correspondence, two-thirds in enthusiastic support, that it wasn't repeated!

The Religious Broadcasting Department is not only terrified of Freethought, but disdains to mention any religion other than Judaeo-Christianity, notwithstanding the many Commonwealth citizens in this country. Besides

devotional programmes it broadcasts highly tendentious and often misleading material designed to give intellectual credentials to the theory of Christianity, or a whitewashing of its historical record—a classic example being a series in the mid-fifties, outrageously called *Religion and Philosophy for Sixth Forms*. It was, in fact, nothing but a vehicle for Christian propaganda. The whole department is little better.

This wouldn't matter if it were counter-balanced by a Secular Humanistic Broadcasting Department—the sort of arrangement that applies, at least in theory, to party political broadcasts (however imperfect in practice). But the Religious Broadcasting Department has cornered the market in popular "philosophy". And in ethics, despite all evidence that religion is not a safeguard of morality, and that Christian ethical theories are often confused, unrealistic, outmoded, or even mischievous. Of course, non-Christian views are sometimes expressed on the Third Programme (listening public about 50,000), but such sporadic broadcasts to specialised audiences merely suggest that religious scepticism is an egghead oddity.

So-called "healthy competition" from commercial television seems to have had little effect on the BBC, save to increase the scope of its religious broadcasts. Independent programmes on social problems, such as family planning, or drama, like John Osborne's play about the Secularist pioneer of the Co-operative movement, G. J. Holyoake (eventually produced by the BBC), have been mutilated or banned on the grounds that they are religiously controversial. As they are privately produced and scheduled, the public has no redress.

In 1961, National Opinion Polls Ltd., carried out a survey for the *Daily Mail*. As Rhona Churchill reported its findings, "90 per cent of the people claim they believe in God". Ignoring those who think an avowal of belief is expected of them, we see that 10 per cent openly admit they are atheists or agnostics. This is higher than the percentage of either Anglican or Roman Catholic communicants. Yet they are denied popular programmes of freethought information and uplift.

Anybody who has ever gone to a public house knows that responsible clash of opinions can be stimulating and refreshing. A devout believer in religion or anything else may emerge with his faith revitalised, positively and not just passively held. This has been recognised by official committees on broadcasting. In 1949, the Beveridge Report said "the first consideration is that the BBC's highest duty is the search for truth". It recalled paragraph 20 of the Government White Paper of 1946 "where it is stated that the prohibition of broadcasts on controversial subjects was withdrawn by the Post-Master General in 1928 in the belief that the Corporation would ensure that such subjects would be treated with complete impartiality". What subject is more controversial than religion? Finally it recommended "a 'Hyde Park' of the air". The 1962 Pilkington Report declares it "the more important that the non-religious bodies are allowed their fair share of time in controversial broadcasting outside their periods set aside for religious broadcasting".

Surely this means regular talks and discussions on the popular networks. A BBC spokesman was reported in *The Times* (June 28th, 1962), as hoping "as soon as possible to carry out those recommendations which affect the corporation". And now that freedom to criticise Christianity and other religions has been achieved by such programmes as *That Was The Week That Was*, and the ban on religious jokes in light entertainment has been lifted, is it too much to ask for freedom seriously to discuss and criticise?

# The Evidence

By Dr. J. V. DUHIG

IF HUMANITY is to be happy, active, vigorous, creative and healthy, and if the world its members create is to be good, and profitably and beautifully used, we must know the truth about how it works. There is only one way of accomplishing this: by science and not by theology, essentially a system of swindles. In the scientific world the scientist has no urge to kill other scientists who do not agree with him. On its record science is beneficent and socially cohesive. Theology is intellectually repulsive and socially divisive; clearly there is such a gulf between the two systems as to make them mutually exclusive, and the essential factor in the difference is the respective ideas about the value of evidence.

Down to the end of the 16th century, thought was directed almost solely by the Church. Galileo, for instance, was condemned not so much because his ideas were thought intrinsically wrong, as because the Holy Office thought them contrary to Holy Writ. This is interesting, because Holy Writ has not changed, but the heliocentric universe, still presumably contrary to Holy Writ, is now taught in Catholic schools. This is typical theology—duplicitous. Since Galileo, Harvey and Newton were altering the whole structure of thought, implacably and irreversibly, and as the process they started has continued, the scientific method they founded has made religious methods, if there are such, completely out-of-date.

The scientific method starts with a hypothesis which has some prior probability, is then tested by experiment and demonstrated by the proof furnished by experiment and verified in practice. Moreover the theory or law demonstrated is laid open to general discussion and criticism, and if necessary modified in accordance with the mass of evidence thus procured. This is a necessary oversimplification, but the point is that the testing of evidence is so thorough that any idea so tested successfully tends to work in practice, is fruitful of more new truth and is useful in prediction of facts in circumstances where similar masses of data are accumulated. The scientific method is above all fruitful which leads to the ever enlarging scope of science. For example, Einstein's Theory of Relativity took up the slack in Newton's cosmology, which however was such a close approximation to truth that it served very well for 300 years. And above all, science is honest and beneficent; only a glance at its recent history proves that. In spite of the waste of scientific war the balance is all in its favour.

Now let us look at religion and theology. If religious thought had persisted unchallenged and unattacked (and the theologians did their best to exterminate scientists and wreck their investigations) life today would be short, squalid and brutish. Theologians still believe in what they call the "truths of religion" for which there is no evidence or, at least, for which none is ever produced but which are believed on "faith", the supreme religious virtue, which I define as a belief in something for which there is no evidence; for, if there were evidence, there would be no need for faith. It is impossible to go all through the falsehoods of religion which must be numberless. Let me take some typical examples.

The Christian religion depends for survival on belief in God, Jesus, prayer, ritual, miracles, all taught on the purely personal capricious conjectures of theologians, and

not on evidence. I do not believe in the Judaeo-Christian, or any other god. Apart from the innumerable metaphysical and conjectural arguments for a god, which reverse the usual logical process by taking "God" for granted and then fitting arguments to the idea, there is to me one totally insuperable objection: this world is filled with evil; with war, disease, crime, famine, squalor, volcanoes, earthquakes, floods, cyclones, and cruelty, etc. To tell me that all this is the work of a beneficent, intelligent supreme being is to talk nonsense. Theologians can tell me quite confidently what God will do to people who do not go to church, fornicate a little, who blaspheme a little (like I do), but when I ask them to tell me why he acts so malignantly they say, "Ah, the ways of God are past finding out; his ways are not ours". That sort of equivocation is contemptible; it is not evidence.

In the same way, the existence of Jesus cannot be unequivocally proved, even from the sacred books; but apart from that, the complete absence of evidence from contemporary sources in the Roman world is highly significant. No Roman historian, no soldier or civil employee in the Roman army of occupation in Palestine heard of or witnessed the fantastically formidable events associated with the birth and death of Jesus. That is, there is no evidence for the existence of Jesus that will stand up, certainly in a modern court of law.

On examination it will be found that all major Catholic doctrines are primitive folklore. Let us take the Eucharist. The Catholic Church asserts that one of its ministers, in fancy dress, and only when in fancy dress, can turn a piece of bread into a dead god. This is just old pagan ritual cannibalism by which the qualities of the god get into the devotee. All the evidence I have on this point completely negates the idea; it is plain and dangerous rubbish. And it is typical.

So, we have the two major systems of thought now competing in the world for adherents, one, science, with the truth, the other, religion, with falsehood; science offering life, happiness and health; religion with sin, misery and death; with cruelty and persecution and the massacre of millions. Science, with very minor differences, is universally unanimous about its truths and beliefs when, just within Christianity there are at least 200 sect leaders, all necessarily differing about what they would call fundamental theology. The only peace-maker on earth is evidence. And this the theologians have not got.

From remote centuries, children of immature minds have been indoctrinated with religious rubbish by silly ignorant parents who believe in charms and rosaries and think the priest can make magic for them. These poor children grow up with minds permanently distorted; some become priests and so endlessly carry on the wicked work of mind destruction. The prospect of such a process going on for ever is appalling. Let us hope that more and higher education will stop this dreadful rot.

Let me end on a note of black humour. The Archbishop of Canterbury said recently that he looked forward to meeting atheists in Heaven. That was nice of His Grace, but to a simple atheist like myself it seemed a little presumptuous of the Archbishop to assume that he was already honoured with a reserved seat, and I would like to

(Concluded on next page)

## This Believing World

We are wondering if the "wind of change" is being felt even by the nation's spooks. In the past, spooks were always recognised by being without heads or wearing heavy and clanging chains. They were almost always dressed in nun's clothes or like an Elizabethan gentleman who had just murdered his wife. Nowadays, they appear to have only a nuisance value and seem to enjoy nothing so much as frightening aged spinsters or banging doors. The latest spook we have read about was described in the *Sunday Express* (January 20th) as a "hum" which at first we thought was a misprint for a "bum", that is, a "bum-bailiff".

★

So far no one has discovered where the "hum" comes from, though "every type of expert and investigator" has tried. The members of a London spook club are having another try or, as it is so eloquently put, "another listen"; and if the "hum" isn't located and a pious exorcism complete with bell, book, and candle also fails, the two ladies who have been living with it will have to move. They have had enough of a spook with a hum!

★

The English "biography" of Jesus, which had a phenomenal sale, was written as far back as 1874 by Dean F. W. Farrar who, curiously enough had achieved just before its publication a great reputation as the author of two school stories—*St. Winifred's* and *Eric or Little by Little*. Farrar's *Life of Christ*, full of illustrations, was reprinted many times, but seems to have been allowed to go out of print this century. We are not surprised that it is however at last being reissued, though we would certainly be astonished if this edition was sold out. The *Daily Mail* (February 7th) reviewer calls it "a curio of piety" and adds, "Jesus himself remains blurred in this purple fog of imaginative hyperbole". In truth, it is like Renan's *Life of Jesus*, very "imaginative", and these days would probably make an intelligent Christian squirm.

★

As an example, let us take the Rev. Leslie Weatherhead, so long absent from a regular ministry. He has had time to contemplate the story of Jesus as given in God's Precious Word and, in an interview in the *Daily Mail* (February 8th), he bluntly throws doubt on the Virgin Birth. He doesn't believe it, and the Apostles and two of the Gospels don't mention it—so overboard it goes. Some "cheering" words which often appear on church notice-boards and which are worth repeating he likewise throws overboard. They are: "Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels"—and Dr. Weatherhead is quite angry that there are people who believe that "our blessed Lord" (as Dr. Soper loves to say) really said them. He claims that "we know" that Jesus never spoke these words, for they were "lifted by Matthew from the book of Enoch". Thus, in passing the buck to Matthew, he makes that famous Apostle and Gospel author, a liar and a fraud. Still that's better than making Jesus responsible for everlasting fire and the devil, isn't it?

★

Then there is our contemporary "Psychic News", most of whose readers not only literally believe in a still-living Jesus who is always curing millions of sick people by or through faith. In the number for February 9th, there is an article by a George Rulf headed, "Most of the New Testament is sheer fabrication", and in it he insists that

"derision is the only missile that will penetrate the heavy armour of the Church". He should thank his lucky stars that this kind of "blasphemy" nowadays does not bring with it twelve months hard labour as it did to G. W. Foote towards the end of the last century. The penalty he paid for his "derision" makes it possible for Mr. Rulf to get away quite easily with blasphemous statements that, a few centuries ago and with a Roman Catholic judge like North, would have meant an *auto-da-fé*.

★

We don't mind in the least that Mr. Rulf steals our thunder—like saying that "the man [Jesus] never existed save in the fervid imagination of his papal creators" who called him "the only begotten Son of God", so that "the biggest and most brazen fraud in the history of mankind" like "the blood-curdling crucifixion was invented", and so on. All these and lots more are commonplaces of Free-thought—but what say all the "spiritual healers"? Are they going to take these blasphemies lying down?

## Failure of Nerve

"JUDGING BY church attendance this is the most devout of all Christian lands", wrote columnist Cassandra from the USA (*Daily Mirror*, 4/2/63). Between 60 and 70 per cent of the population attend divine service every Sunday, he reported. No doubt many are prompted by social rather than strictly religious motives. Still, Professor Sidney Hook of New York University seems to have been right in detecting "a new failure of nerve" in Western civilisation in our time. The phrase was borrowed from the late Gilbert Murray's *Four Stages of Greek Religion*, where it was used to characterise the period from 300 BC through the first century of the Christian era. Its manifestations in 1943, said Professor Hook, "are more complex and sophisticated than at any previous time. . . . But at bottom it betrays, except in one respect, the same flight from responsibility, both on the plane of action and on the plane of belief, that drove the ancient world into the shelters of pagan and Christian superstition". The difference, as he saw it, was, that "Today the churches are so much of this world that their other worldiness is only a half-believed prophecy of man's inescapable destination rather than an ideal of personal and social life".

## THE EVIDENCE

(Concluded from page 59)

have the evidence on which this assumption is made. His Grace seems to have the flimsy mind so typical of churchmen who fail to see that religion has nothing to do with morality except to demoralise it. The religionists in jail are many times the number of atheists and infidels generally. Religion has nothing to do with human welfare here and now. Intellectually and morally Christianity is bankrupt but very, very wealthy.

[Note: For further reading on some of the points raised I recommend *Critique of Religion and Philosophy* by Walter Kaufmann, London, Faber, 1959, especially Chapter IV.]

## NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY 57th ANNUAL DINNER

Followed by Dancing  
Chairman, MRS. E. VENTON  
Guests of Honour: MR. & MRS. F. A. HORNIBROOK  
SATURDAY, MARCH 2nd, 1963  
at The Pavlovs Arms, Page Street, London, S.W.1  
RECEPTION 6 p.m. DINNER 6.30 p.m.  
Vegetarians catered for Evening Dress Optional  
TICKETS 21/- from the Sec., 103 Borough High Street, S.E.1

# 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, 7 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, February 24th, 6.45 p.m.: S. M. CAINES, "After Independence—What Next?"  
Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Tuesday, February 26th, 7.30 p.m.: HAROLD CHESHIRE, "The Art and History of Mime" (Illustrated).  
Glasgow Secular Society (Central Halls, Room 7, Bath Street), Sunday, February 24th, 3 p.m.: COLIN MCCALL, "Catholicism and crime" (Tape-recording followed by Discussion).  
Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, February 24th, 6.30 p.m.: H. J. BLACKHAM, "An Educational View of Religion in Schools".  
Marble Arch Branch NSS (The Carpenter's Arms, Seymour Place, London, W.1), Sunday, February 24th, 7.30 p.m.: DEBATE: "Are Experiments on Live Animals Justified?" For: MRS. MURIEL WOOD; Against: CHARLES SLATTER.  
South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, February 24th, 11 a.m.: PROFESSOR HYMAN LEVY, "On Being a Liar".

## Notes and News

FEBRUARY 12TH was the 85th birthday of F. A. Hornibrook President of the Marble Arch Branch of the National Secular Society, who with Mrs. Hornibrook will be Guest of Honour at the Annual Dinner of the Society in the Pavilions Arms, Westminster, on Saturday, March 2nd. We hope that many of Mr. and Mrs. Hornibrook's friends will be present at the Dinner to pay tribute to two of the most respected figures in the Freethought movement. Mrs. E. Venton, Vice-President of the Society and President of the West Ham and District Branch will be in the Chair. Tickets are obtainable from the Secretary of the NSS and are one guinea.

★  
WE HAVE good news from the two Trinidad (West Indies) branches of the National Secular Society. Thanks to the kindness of Mr. George Charles and his mother of Unique Hall, Poyzabad, a room is readily available to the local branch, complete with refreshment facilities, and acting secretary Mr. John T. Jules reports that attendances at meetings have been usually good. Last month, Mr. S. Gustavus Stephen gave a demonstration of "magic". Mr. Stephen's own branch at San Juan, meanwhile, is making the most of its new printing press, and we look forward to the first issue of their paper which is on its way to us.

## The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

Previously acknowledged, £50 3s. R. H. Scott, £1 19s. 4d.; J. Coffey, 4s.; F. Soater, 5s.; T. Laird, £10; A.S.H., 8s.; I. Barnes, £1; Anon, 5s.; Anon, 1s. 8d.; A.W., 12s. 6d.; S. J. Barker, £10. Total to date, February 15th, 1963, £74 18s. 6d.

THANKS VERY largely to the splendid response to the Humanist Council's appeal, Mr. and Mrs. Patrick van Rensburg were able to open their Swaneng Hill School in Serowe, Bechuanaland on February 11th. A library-classroom and administrative offices have been completed, and the primary schoolboys who worked so hard on the project are now assured of secondary education. Arrangements are also going ahead to provide education for girls, and applications for teaching posts have been received from Britain. The Treasurer of the Humanist Council was recently able to send another £600 towards the school.

★

AFTER A YEAR'S negotiations with the London County Council, the Roman Catholic Church is to launch a schools building programme in South London which will cost £370,000 during the next three years (*South London Press*, 8/2/63). The scheme will provide new schools at the Borough, Brixton, Lewisham and Wimbledon Common, while twelve other schools will be enlarged. "In London the LCC faces a falling child population", it is reported, "whereas the Catholic proportion is increasing very rapidly". By 1970 that proportion will be a quarter of all London's primary schoolchildren.

★

THE ARCHBISHOP of Quebec, the Most Rev. Maurice Roy, would not seem to have a very high opinion of Catholic morality. In a letter read in all churches on January 20th, he asked Catholics not to embarrass priests by demanding receipts for income tax purposes in excess of the amounts given to charitable and church causes during the year. "We are well disposed to show confidence in you", he said, "but we ask you not to embarrass us by asking for a receipt for an amount higher than that which you gave. It is not permitted to lie by signing a statement one knows to be false. Let us try to fulfil these formalities in all truthfulness and honesty". Forms for filling in and signature were provided at the presbytery.

★

A LETTER to the *Sheffield Telegraph* (23/1/63) from a Mr. F. W. Palmer, complained that it was "unfair" of the BBC to let Nobel Prize winner, Dr. Francis Crick say that he didn't believe in God, without "chasing him up" on it. On February 8th, the *Telegraph* printed a reply from Mr. T. L. Marshall of Sheffield University Rationalist Society, ridiculing the suggestion that the BBC was biased against religion and pointing out that "Rationalists have been trying to air their views on the BBC for years", but "The opportunities are few and far between". What would Mr. Palmer have liked? asked Mr. Marshall: "a five minute break while three bishops assured everyone that 'God is supremely present'?"

★

ON NOVEMBER 30TH, we referred to Mrs. Antonia Bretton's claim to have been cured of "recurring gastric ulcers" at a divine healing session at the Full Gospel Church, Albany Road, Chadwell Heath, and reported that we had written to the 50-year-old Barking schoolteacher for rather more precise details. As usual we enclosed a stamped-addressed envelope, and Mrs. Bretton telephoned us a day or two later to acknowledge receipt of our letter. She didn't profess to understand the cure herself, she said, but she would put the whole story down in writing for us. Alas, we have heard nothing since.

# The Trial of Jesus

By F. A. RIDLEY

MY ATTENTION has been drawn to a recently issued volume: *The Trial of Jesus*, by a Jewish scholar, Mr. Paul Winter, whom I have myself had the pleasure of meeting once or twice in the Reading Room of the British Museum. From the text of his narrative, I should infer that he is himself some kind of a Jewish Christian, possibly a Unitarian, since his researches are consistently critical of Christian orthodoxy; certainly a modernist and an obviously erudite specialist in the critical study of the New Testament. Like his more orthodox predecessor, the late Dr. Edersheim (well-known Jewish-Christian author in the last century), Mr. Winter is clearly a specialist in rabbinical lore, and his view of Jesus—whom he evidently regards as an historical character—as a Jewish Messiah but not, apparently, as himself God, appears to be based mainly upon Jewish and not upon Christian tradition, though his exhaustive notes, usually reproduced in their original language reveal the author as a scholar of encyclopedic range. Whatever views one may hold upon the historicity of the Jesus of the Gospels, *The Trial of Jesus* is certainly a book to be read, if only on account of the author's vast and varied erudition.

As is common knowledge, all four of the (canonical) Gospels describe in considerable detail but also with considerable variations in their respective details the trial, condemnation and crucifixion of Jesus, and it is with a meticulously detailed and scholarly analysis of these Gospel narratives both with regard to their points of agreement, disagreement and subsequent "editing" by the Church in later ages that Mr. Winter's narrative is solely concerned. How far do the Gospels record authentic legal and/or factual details, and how far do they reflect later trends in the evolution of Christianity which later editors of the Gospels read back into the Gospels themselves?

I may add that in my opinion, our Jewish author makes a very strong case for the supposition that there was a trial and a crucifixion under Pilate, of whom and of whose both real and alleged connection with the case, Mr. Winter gives a detailed and masterly description. But who, precisely was the defendant and eventual victim represents an altogether more complicated question. For believing Christians, even for Modernists like our author who accept the historical existence of a Jewish teacher named Jesus, no problem obviously arises; nor does any arise presumably in the converse case of 100 per cent mythicists who deny *in toto* both the historicity of any individual Jesus or any historical basis for anything in the extant narratives of the Gospels.

Personally, I do not myself agree with either of these extreme views. As I have indicated before in these columns, I think that the Jesus of the Gospels represents a *composite* creation, one ultimately compounded of the words, deeds and opinions of several contemporary Jewish rebels and heretics: e.g. John the Baptist was certainly one and (as the great French critical scholar, Joseph Turmel argued) the revolutionary Judas, the Gaulonite, was probably another. At least there is in my submission, strong internal evidence, even in the much-edited Gospels—which as Celsus said long ago, "have been rewritten once, twice, several times" in the later interests of Christian orthodoxy (Winter gives numerous factual examples of this bewildering process)—that one of the original sources of Christianity lay in an unsuccessful Messianic

insurrection against Rome, the leader of which suffered the death specially reserved for rebels—crucifixion. His name *may* have been Jesus, or quite possibly, Jesus Barabbas (son of the Father) who, according to the Gospel of Mark, usually regarded as the oldest of the canonical Gospels, "had committed robbery and murder in the [definite article in the original Greek] insurrection".

As Mr. Winter indicates, the Greek word for the thieves between whom Jesus was crucified, was the precise term used by the Romans of the numerous Jewish revolutionaries of the period who no doubt combined predatory raids with their subversive political activities. Mr. Winter even remarks categorically: "Senseless though the arrest, cruel though the sentence was, the oldest of the Gospels [Mark] gives the reason for both Jesus [or his revolutionary prototype F.A.R.], was arrested, accused, condemned and executed on a charge of rebellion". At least both the insurrection and the crucifixion as portrayed in the Gospels, seem to be based upon actual contemporary events. They are entirely in line with the grim character of Roman rule, and in general with the stormy rebellion-strewn Jewish history that preceded the destruction of Jerusalem and the expulsion of the Jews from Palestine.

In my forthcoming book on the great Servile Revolution led by Spartacus, I have given a list of the principal slave insurrections during the two centuries immediately prior to the Christian era. In all cases, crucifixion, a hideous punishment borrowed by Rome from Carthage after the Punic Wars and first applied to slaves in 197 BC, was the unvarying fate of the rebels. 6,000 were crucified *en masse* after the failure of the Spartacus insurrection. When Titus besieged Jerusalem in 70 AD, all Jewish prisoners of war were immediately crucified within sight of the city. As Mr. Winter himself conclusively demonstrates, crucifixion was not a Jewish method of execution, nor was it used by the Romans themselves except in the case of slaves and/or rebels. Presumably the Spartacists suffered on both accounts. Jesus or his revolutionary prototype obviously must have suffered as a rebel, since none of our sources represent him as a slave.

By whom was Jesus condemned? According to the Gospels, chiefly by his own countrymen, the Jews. The Romans, it is true, actually carry out the execution in the Gospel narratives, plus the preliminary scourging that was part of the sentence, but their role is only an accessory—and in the case of the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, an unwilling one. For Pilate, and still more urgently Pilate's wife (not otherwise known apparently to secular history) are convinced that the defendant at the Roman bar is innocent. In the Gospels (all four of them agree on this despite divergent details) it is the Jews who clamour for the death of Jesus: "his blood be on us and on our children" and "it is expedient [as the High Priest is made to say] that one man should perish rather than our nation".

It is again Jesus's own countrymen who finally bully the unwilling governor into reluctantly pronouncing the fearful death sentence by successively scourging and impaling alive upon the cross. The most interesting part of *The Trial of Jesus*, is devoted to debunking with conspicuous erudition, the process of Christian bowdlerisation that the original narrative of the Passion must have undergone at the hands of later Christian editors. For our author has

no difficulty in demonstrating that the original trial must have been conducted by the Romans and that the Jews had only probably a technical connection with it: viz before appearing at Pilate's bar, Jesus was subjected to what actually probably only amounted to a kind of identification parade in the court of the High Priest, the Jewish Sanhedrin.

Not only are the details in the Gospels impossible in Jewish law (as Dr. Israel Brodie, the Chief Rabbi, has recently pointed out on TV, no Jewish court would have sat over the Passover) but as Winter shows conclusively, had Jesus been condemned for any breach of the Jewish religious law, the contemporary Sanhedrin—the then Jewish Supreme Court had full competence both to try the case and if necessary to inflict the death penalty without any recourse to Roman jurisdiction. Roman polity sedulously avoided, except in very rare instances, interfering with the religious observances of its subjects. Had Jesus been condemned by a Jewish court, his death sentence would have been carried out in a Jewish manner, probably by stoning, certainly not by the exclusively Roman punishment of crucifixion.

Jesus then was crucified by the Romans, and no doubt the original narrative of the Gospels made this clear. But our Gospels were written after the fall of the Temple (70 AD), perhaps even after the Messianic rising of Bar-Cochba (131-35 AD), at a time when the expanding Christian Church had definitely broken with Judaism and when it was already gaining ground in the Roman Empire. Accordingly, the authors (or editors) of our Gospels steadily shifted the emphasis from the Romans to the Jews as being the main authors of the death of Jesus. This proved to be the first and vastly influential stage in the anti-Semitism later to be so prominently associated with the medieval Catholic Church.

This progressive (or retrogressive) falsification of history assumed a peculiarly ironic form in connection with Pontius Pilate himself, who "suffered a sea-change" from the ruthless military martinet recorded by contemporary Jewish writers like Josephus and Philo, into the vacillating weakling intimidated against his will by the Jewish rabble clamouring for Jesus's death, who is depicted in the Gospels. As Mr. Winter notes, the Pilate of history who (according even to the Gospels) "mingled the blood of the Galileans with their sacrifices" and was later recalled in disgrace to Rome on account of his excessive severity towards his Jewish subjects, would have made short work both of Jesus and his accusers, who presumed to tell him (Pilate) what he should do with a then obscure Jewish agitator.

However, Christian tradition became more and more favourable to Pilate as the Church drew closer to its 4th century amalgamation with the Roman Empire under Constantine. The Jews became the scapegoats for the supreme crime in Christian eyes, the death of Jesus; whilst Pilate's wife became and apparently still remains, a canonised saint of the Eastern (Orthodox) Church. Indeed, Mr. Winter is of the opinion that, had not Constantine, now also an Orthodox saint, so to speak beaten Pilate in the race for sanctity by his opportune conversion, "St. Pontius Pilate" would have been added to the celestial apotheosis of the Christian Church—certainly a peculiar hierarchy for the old Roman militarist. Mr. Paul Winter is to be congratulated upon a fascinating and immensely erudite, if in parts controversial, narrative. Certainly, and whatever his or their views, no student of Christian origins should omit to read this important contribution to New Testament scholarship.

## SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY

THE South Place Ethical Society extends a cordial invitation to members and friends of all groups associated with the Humanist Council to hear Dr. John Lewis at Conway Hall, Sunday, March 17th, 11 a.m. on the subject, "World Hunger—Material and Spiritual: Wherewith Shall We Be Fed?" This special Sunday morning meeting gives occasion to members of the Ethical Union, the Rationalist Press Association, and the National Secular Society to participate in the nationwide effort to be made on behalf of the Freedom from Hunger Campaign during the week of Sunday, March 17th. Brief Readings will be presented by Mrs. E. Venton (NSS), Mr. Michael Lines (EU), and Mr. Joseph Reeves (RPA). Mr. J. Hutton Hynd, Secretary SPES, will preside. Music by Miss Joyce Langley, piano, and Miss Pamela Woolmore, soprano.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### WHY NOT MILITANT?

I much enjoyed Mr. Cutner's article under the above title, but he was hardly fair to Sir Leslie Stephen. I am sure Stephen did not entitle his book *An Agnostic's Apology* in a mood of obsequiousness or humiliation. "Apology" was a synonym for "Defence". In the same way John Henry Newman entitled his well known book an *Apologia*. He was not apologising for being a Roman Catholic; he was defending his position. A lesser known and perhaps finer book of Stephen's was *Freethinking and Plain Speaking*.

I wish today we had an editor of Stephen's eminence who would indulge in such candour regarding Christianity. As to his treatment of Thomas Paine. I believe later in life he withdrew some of his criticism. At any rate, no reader of Paine would find fault with Stephen's article in the *Dictionary of National Biography*.

As to F. J. Gould. I agree he was a prominent specimen of those reverent rationalists Mr. Cutner so ardently pursues. This is shown by the fact that fifty years ago, when I as a "Liberal Christian" was a contributor to *The Inquirer*, the organ of Unitarianism, another writer in the Children's Column was Gould. He was a worthy fellow and I was most annoyed when in his little known (and little) autobiography Joseph McCabe thought fit to smear his character.

McCabe might have been mentioned as a militant. What about John Morley? He never hid his rationalist light under a bushel.

WILLIAM KENT.

May I welcome Mr. Cutner's article, "Why Not Militant?" as it raises questions of moment for the freethought movement at the present time? It is of course true that the historic movement has included people of very different types ranging from the iconoclastic Bradlaugh to the cautious Holyoake or from the incisive Robertson to the gentle Gould. But the movement itself was always militant and built up a solid body of negative criticism of the religious position. Indeed, much of its strength lay in this direction.

Issues may well have changed today. Many people have made up their minds and there no longer seems to be the public for advanced Biblical criticism such as appeared in the earlier Rationalist Press Association publications. Interests seem to have turned to wider sociological issues and much of the conflict with organised religion is on this field. The controversies ranging around ethics and morals have taken a new note from this fact. At the same time, social issues arising out of ecclesiastical establishment and endowment are more prominent than ever. Far from being won, the battle of the secularist and anti-clerical is only just commencing in the social sphere and it will call for all of the incisive weapons of negation and criticism if astute opponents are to be defeated in the name of human freedom.

It is true of course that a worthwhile movement must also exhibit a positive side. Humanism and secularism denote a positive approach to the problems of living together with the sequels which arise from them as well as a negation of opponents. But this does not justify the claims that the movement should concentrate solely upon its positive aims and ignore all criticism of Christianity or of its embodied forms. In the present situation, such a policy is one of virtual suicide. Yet it is a policy which one hears again and again in certain quarters claiming the humanist and freethought name. Cutner's implications about "reverent rationalists" are fully justified and they might well be extended to "ethical religionists", "religious humanists" and the remainder whose main aim seems to lie in some contact with formal religion achieved through an amalgam of social respectability together with a determination to prevent if possible the humanist movement

exhibiting any sort of militancy in its own right. As I have remarked before, it is the prevalence of this viewpoint which acts as a fifth column today within the movement as a whole. I would suggest that the time has arrived when it should be demanded of the humanist movement that it should show every militancy necessary in new situations and realise that the old battles are still with us and still need to be fought. Whether or not Christians would find such a policy irksome is an irrelevancy so far as we are concerned but the policy is one which would make freethought once again a living social issue.

F. H. AMPHLETT MICKLEWRIGHT.

If anything, we must be militant, but—and there is the rub: we must attack *in the right direction*. So long as we are looking back to former heroes and thinking it is enough to imitate the tactics that they used in days long gone by, people are justified in saying we are flogging a dead horse. So long as we go on publishing essays about things that have been said time and time before, we are no better than the religionists who rehash their old sermons.

Let us be frank: *who in our modern society is really interested in religion?* The true believers and the disbelievers only. The great majority of people may follow an ingrained tradition—from mental inertia or to get certain advantages in society—but they are totally indifferent and do not care a hoot whether or not there was a real Jesus and what the Bible has to say. All they want is to be left alone with this mental ballast which only we and our opposite numbers seem to take so seriously.

What this reverend or that godist has to say or print is so utterly unimportant that nobody will buy our paper to read about it. They make noise, of course, and there are vested interests in high places to lend them their sounding boards. But if they lay themselves open to attack, we have not to attack and rap them over the knuckles. Some silly utterance of a country parson is not such a weak spot; but what did we do to protect members like Mr. W. Baxter when they are being forced to take the oath? (This letter in the same issue of the paper cried out for action and was of greater importance than all the rest.)

For the benefit of our readers I sometimes record how this or that primitive idea became a religious dogma, but I would never dream of using it in discussion with religionists. They are mentally conditioned and common-sense is of no avail, therefore I cannot see what the good of disputations with them can be. It is far more important and beneficial to write, write and write to editors and producers to make people realise that we are not a mere debating club but a force to be reckoned with.

*Peace News* reprinted an item from the National Council for Civil Liberties *Bulletin* for January, called "Religion and the Law"—a topical revue of the disabilities of unbelievers. Immediately a few reverend gentlemen, old spinsters and even intellectuals wrote angry letters and threatened, or did, resign.

In one of the angry letters a medical man wrote he did not deny that unbelievers were at certain disadvantages in society. "But"—he said—"that is as it should be. Nobody must be allowed to rob other people of their religion and incitement to disbelief ought to be punishable".

Is this clear? Are we satisfied with our beautiful essays about the Bible and its heroes and the sermon of this and that person (heard by hardly anybody unless publicised by us)—stuff that is of no earthly interest to the majority of our citizens—whilst we, at the same time, quietly remain Second Class Citizens!

Militancy, by all means—but militancy where it pays.

OTTO WOLFGANG.

Militant Atheism does to some extent defeat its own purpose by serving as a stimulus to militant "clericalism". It was certainly no part of the atheistic intention to bring about any reunion of the divided forces of Christian clericalism. Yet that quite certainly, has been one of the effects of atheistic propaganda. The vast majority of people who simply ignore the teachings of religion and live their own lives as they choose, are probably doing more to bring about the final extinction of religion, than are the militant atheists who quite unconsciously do so much to keep alive what they are trying to destroy.

Atheism is an intellectual conviction that there is no god. Atheists have no right to feel angry with those who do not share their conviction. They have a right to feel very suspicious that some "defenders of the faith" conceal atheistic convictions beneath an outward profession of belief. But suspicion is not proof, and unless we have definite proof that people are being deceitful, we ought to give them the benefit of any doubt.

There must be more than one atheistic humanist terrified of the too militant atheists, that they would if they could, institute compulsory atheism and indulge in various forms of religious persecution utterly repulsive to any form of liberal humanism.

PETER P. CROMMELIN.

## ON KNOWING GOD

May I congratulate Mr. R. Underwood upon his article, "On Knowing God"? During the past six years, I have been a regular reader of THE FREETHINKER, and I cannot remember having read an article which expressed such clear cogent logic, and I am greatly indebted to him for such eloquent expression of my own thoughts.

A. C. ROBINSON.

## OBITUARY

The death of Victor Kilpatrick on February 8th, was a sad blow to Freethought in Northern Ireland, as well as a terrible shock to his friends. Victor had suffered a set-back after an abdominal operation, and we have reason to believe that he would not recover. But the end came terribly suddenly. He had an awful lot to live for", he told us only a few days before he died, and he hoped that the picture would soon be brighter.

The funeral took place at Belfast Crematorium on February 11th.

We send our deepest sympathy to Mrs. Kilpatrick and her daughter.

For Sale.—Four fine volumes of Encyclopedia Biblica, £5.—Box H.82.

## NEW PENGUINS AND PELICANS

Penguin Science Survey, 1963 A, 3s. 6d.  
Penguin Science Survey, 1963 B, 3s. 6d.  
Memories of a Catholic Childhood, by Mary McCarthy, 4s. 6d.  
Children of the Ashes, by Robert Jungk, 5s.  
Insecure Offenders, by T. R. Fyvel, 5s.  
Middle-Eastern Mythology, by S. H. Hooke, 4s.  
Mysticism, by F. C. Happold, 6s.  
Theory and Practice of Communism, by R. N. Carew-Hunt, 5s.

## RELIGIOUS SATIRE

The Mackerel Plaza, by Peter de Vries, 3s. 6d.

## RECENT PENGUINS AND PELICANS

The Seven Pillars of Wisdom, by T. E. Lawrence, 10s. 6d.  
The Island of Dr. Moreau, by H. G. Wells, 3s. 6d.  
A Short History of the World, by H. G. Wells, 5s.  
Hitler. A Study in Tyranny, by Alan Bullock, 8s. 6d.  
A Pictorial History of Nazi Germany, by Erwin Leiser, 3s. 6d.  
Meet Yourself As You Really Are, by Prince Leopold, 4s. 6d.  
Loewenstein and William Gerhardt, 3s. 6d.  
The Life of Sir Alexander Fleming, by André Maurois, 5s.  
Boundaries of Science, by Magnus Pyke, 4s. 6d.  
The Growth of Plants, by G. E. Fogg, 7s. 6d.  
Introducing Science, by Alan Isaacs, 5s.  
Magnetism, by E. W. Lee, 7s. 6d.  
Man and Energy, by A. R. Ubbelohde, 6s.  
The Strange Story of the Quantum, by Banesh Hoffman, 4s. 6d.  
A History of Science and Technology, by R. J. Forbes and E. J. Dijksterkius, 2 Vols. at 5s. each.  
William Morris edited by Asa Briggs, 7s. 6d.  
Common Sense about Smoking (Fletcher, Cole, Jeger and Wood), 3s. 6d.

## BERTRAND RUSSELL IN PAPERBACK

An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth (Pelican), 6s.  
Has Man a Future? (Penguin), 2s. 6d.  
Nightmares of Eminent Persons (Penguin), 2s. 6d.  
On Education - Sceptical Essays - Power - In Praise of Idleness - Marriage and Morals - The Conquest of Happiness (Unwin Books) all at 6s.  
The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism, 5s.  
Plus postage, from THE FREETHINKER Bookshop

## THE YEAR'S FREETHOUGHT

NOW READY

**The Freethinker for 1962**

BOUND VOLUME

32/-

(Post free)

THE PIONEER PRESS

103 Borough High Street, London. S.E.1