

# The Freethinker

Volume LXXXIV—No. 2

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Sixpence

WE HAVE RECENTLY been informed by Mr. Roger Lloyd, a churchman always gently ready to lead us up the "Guardian" path, that the Bible is "plainly staging some sort of a come-back, and many people must be reading it today who have not done so for years". Mr. Lloyd's freshly blossoming optimism in this respect, has been brought about by what he describes as the enormous publishing success of the *New English Bible*. Nobody doubts this publishing success. Nobody doubts that it can and will be piously looked upon as, in the most literal sense, a Godsend, especially by all those who have a financial interest in it. For if we have no direct scriptural affirmation, we have any amount of mundane confirmation that God is love. Considering the fame of the Bible, considering the colossal boosting, mostly free of charge, that this translation has received both before and since its appearance, considering the insatiable curiosity, the fathomless gullibility of—well, we know how Carlyle put it, this commercial triumph need hardly be cause for surprise.

## Come-Back or Come-Down?

These dramatic resuscitations however are notoriously liable to be as short-lived as they can be disappointing. It does not necessarily follow that a best-seller is a best buy. This new Bible is lauded as an outstanding sample of translation from old to modern English, but it does not follow that all who, one after the other rush to purchase the sample will rush to sample the purchase. Dour old Tammas did not use the word sheep, but it is a safe bet that it crossed his mind. There is no doubt that this new Bible is at present being made much of in those places where Bible reading is officially prescribed. There is plenty of doubt whether it attracts a greater number of serious readers than the version some say it is to supersede, others that it is to supplement. The worst of a come-back, it can so easily be a come-down. There is considerable reason to suppose that although on the whole language may have been made more plain, its meaning hasn't. Or if at times the meaning has been made more plain, then it has unluckily been made less convincing. For there is the alarming possibility that the clearer the expository the more it exposes. The translation could in this way defeat its own ends. Merely through its majestic language and stately style, the Authorised Version has an impressive power of its own. And there are critics who think that in the new version this power has been dangerously debilitated, without much compensating gain in intelligibility, let alone persuasiveness.

## Religious Truth

It is not so long ago that invoking gospel truth was commonly, like taking one's Bible oath, a sort of final, if desperate standard by which to swear. Any short story or any tall story would be emphasised as gospel truth if its author was anxious to secure its authenticity. But gospel truth isn't what it was. Fashion has changed. There seems to be a vague but growing general discern-

ment that gospel truth is too often all gospel and no truth, just as what old-fashioned folk used to call gospel gossip was much gossip and little gospel. If gospel truth, that is the truth of the actual gospel, is to be held up as a model and criterion of truth, then it must itself be incontestably true. But whatever gospel truth in this sense is, it is certainly not incontestably true. Gospel truth is merely another name for the indispensable expediency passed off as religious truth. And religious truth is always whatever upholds religious doctrine. Its function is not to propound truth but rather to veil truth in order to edify, to comfort, to delude, to sustain—especially to sustain the interests of those who live and thrive by promulgating it.

## Academic Weakness

In his *Guardian* estimate of three newly published commentaries on the gospel truth of Matthew, Mark and Luke, by three learned commentators unmistakably more theological than impartial, Mr. Lloyd has generously taken it upon himself to be their special guardian. He is filled with admiration for an introduction to the gospels which so eloquently supports his own predilections. He describes it as "thoroughly scholarly but free from all the weaknesses of the academic mind". The height of perfection, we gather. These weaknesses however consist in anything that is contrary to personal religious convictions. Mr. Lloyd apparently has no inkling that what he deplors as academic weakness, others may applaud as a more perspicacious honesty. He is glad to be reminded, he says, that "the gospels always grow out of the teaching of the early church and reflect it", and from this ambiguous statement he goes on to express a fervidly thankful agreement that it was "the death of Jesus that supremely mattered . . . a resurrection without the cross . . . would have made Jesus another Lazarus". And what if it did? It would only be putting one myth on top of another. To any normal human understanding, these alleged risings from the dead are nothing better than invented ghost stories. For no matter what the circumstances, death must be insignificant in comparison with any resurrection from it. Death is commonplace, natural and verifiable. Resurrection is miraculous, unnatural and entirely beyond verification. It has never been shown to be anything more than a gospel fantasy, never fact.

## Ecclesiastical Dogmatism

Myths however do not seem to bother either Mr. Lloyd or the commentaries he rates so highly. The arrogant and unsubstantiated ecclesiastical dogmatism that what is gospel truth is true gospel, appears to be unquestioningly and enthusiastically accepted. These commentaries we are told give us a general explanation of the meaning of the New Testament stories and while "scholarship has its proper place, it is there to fortify faith and to enable devotion and not to discourage either". One can but hope that after this, scholarship will know its place and keep to it. "If we take the words of the cross as an

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

## Gospel Truth

By REGINALD UNDERWOOD

example" Mr. Lloyd goes on, "here is a set of commentaries blessedly free from the laborious suspension of judgment which implants doubt in the reader's mind as to whether Jesus really said any of them. This kind of academical dubiety has marred too many gospel commentaries in recent years and it is good to have three which are free from it". There we have it, gospel truth all the way and no embarrassing academical dubiety please. Such feeble apologetics makes up a column given over to "The Churches" in a newspaper of acknowledged intellectual repute. Need it be wondered at, if there is a growing number of people who resentfully suspect that the Church, with its tongue in its cheek, endorses Carlyle's famous indictment? Need the Church wonder why it is losing its hold?

#### Faith or Love?

After this, it is amusing to discover that for all his assurance, this somewhat ingenuous disciple betrays an undercurrent of uneasiness. He cannot refrain from blurt-ing out that "just occasionally the academic mind asserts itself", even with scholarship in its proper place. One of the commentators it seems, has slipped up in saying that there is no excuse in confusing Mary of the ointment episode with Mary of Bethany, blandly ignoring, says Mr. Lloyd, that St. John goes out of his way to say that they were one and the same. But perhaps this is intended just as a warning to the academic mind of the pitfalls likely to beset it. Whether or not, Mr. Lloyd cannot resist a further quibble about the woman whose sins were forgiven because she loved much. Was she forgiven because of her faith as the commentator insists, or because of her love as Mr. Lloyd will have it? We could all, he says, argue on this for ever and a day. We couldn't. We've something better to do. Faith or love, it doesn't matter a rap, especially as it's all fiction anyway. Mr. Lloyd closes with the astonishing specimen of his own gospel truth: "Faith is not easy, but love we can generally manage". How many there are who would say it is the other way about. What, after all, is faith but credulity? And credulity is the bane of far more than so many millions in the British Isles. How many, out of those millions would, for all the current talk about "separated brethren", would be so rash as to affirm that we can generally manage love?

A Freethinker can plentifully produce more glaring examples of the shakiness of gospel truth than those which distract Mr. Lloyd. With regard to faith, we are assured that if we have faith as large as a grain of mustard seed we can remove mountains. Yet all experience proves that unaided, neither literally nor metaphorically will faith as large as a mountain remove a grain of mustard seed.

#### The Prize

As for the meek inheriting the earth, how painfully well we know it is the earth which inherits the meek. Moses for instance. The twelfth chapter of Numbers represents him as being the earth's meekest man. Yet chapter thirty-one describes exploits which could have made him the father of all Nazis. And if "whosoever shall say thou fool shall be in danger of hell fire", it is a pretty grim lookout for plucky old T. Carlyle, who dared to multiply one by nearly forty millions. For saying black is white, gospel truth must be without parallel. John tells us, with indisputable truth, that no man hath seen God at any time, yet several scriptural contradictions of this could be cited. And surely the prize should go to that in Exodus, where God says: "I will put thee in a cleft of the rock and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by, and I will take away my hand and thou shalt see by back parts". Who-ever heard of a concession so elegant.

These examples are of course only a fraction of the ridiculous discrepancies which reverent dupes will swallow and reverend charlatans dispense, as gospel truth. How anybody can possibly swallow them as such is an even bigger mystery than any of the mysteries they swallow. And the biggest mystery of all is that this conglomeration of old wives' tales, old husbands' tales, Old Moore's tales, together with a parade of jungle ethics here, humane ethics there, lies, truisms, obscenities, absurdities, inextricably mixed up with genuine though never super-human insights, often expounded with superb literary skill—all this ruck is being re-translated, being extolled as staging some sort of come-back as the word of God, transmitted by divine inspiration. Freethinkers may at least envy Mr. Lloyd his optimism.

#### Without Substance

But Freethinkers see things very differently. To them, if this holy confusion is the best God can do in the way of revealing himself, he virtually proves that he has the excuse of non-existence. No God, not too appalling to contemplate, would resort to such a way of going about it. God is patently revealed as a hypothesis long overdue for discarding in favour of something humanly amenable. Even to those loth to give up their lip service, he has ceased to be, it seems, up above, or out there, or down below. They can't say where he is. He began as a figment of primitive Jewish imagination, a capricious old brute his creators named Yahweh. Although unchangeable, he nevertheless changed, for Christians at any rate, into a sort of deified clover leaf, incomprehensibly triune, without body, parts (presumably even back parts) or passions, completely inexplicable to anybody because arbitrarily explicable by everybody. To mean everything is to mean nothing. Which is the sum and substance of gospel truth. No wonder that in spite of re-translations and come-backs, gospel truth has lost for ever the prestige of its fabricated authority.

## The Papal Pilgrimage

BEFORE HE began his pilgrimage to the Holy Land, the Pope said he hoped that it would help the cause of "peace and union among all men" (*The Guardian*, 30/12/63). But, as a leader in that paper on the same day indicated, the trip involved many diplomatic and political complications. On his arrival in Amman, Pope Paul was to be welcomed by King Hussein of Jordan but instead of passing through the Mandelbaum Gate from the Jordanian to the Israeli part of Jerusalem, the Pope was to travel north to Megiddo and cross the frontier there, to be welcomed by the Israeli President, Mr. Shazar. To placate Jewish nationalist objections to Mr. Shazar's travelling from the capital, however, the first meeting with the Pope was declared purely formal. Pope and President would meet again at the Mandelbaum Gate just before the former entered Jordan again.

The decision that the Pope would not follow the Way of the Cross that pilgrims tread caused no surprise to Henry Fielding. For this, he said, "is a street of garish souvenir shops" (*Daily Herald*, 30/12/63) There is, he added, a cafe called the Dinky Bar Hinky, and "a red-and-blue banner proclaims 'Viva Il Papa' over the sign 'Handel-Money Changer'". But surely Mr. Fielding exaggerates the Pope's sensitivity. Nobody can outdo the Roman Church where garish souvenirs are concerned. There is, we recall from our last visit, a souvenir (and Coca-Cola) stall on the roof of the Pope's own former cathedral in Milan.

# From Geneva to Woolwich

By F. A. RIDLEY

CHRISTIANITY, AS FAR as can be surmised from the oldest available texts extant in the New Testament, started as a "revivalist" cult, of which the main distinguishing tenet was that: "The end of all things is at hand". On this point indeed, the New Testament is unanimous. For, widely as the teachings derived from them may differ, all the major figures traditionally described as Jesus, John, Peter and Paul, agree in announcing that the end of all things is near. The Protestant modernist, Albert Schweitzer, had an easy task when he set out to demonstrate this fact in *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*.

Obviously if the end of the world is due tomorrow, there is no point in speculating about its past which is nearly over, or its future which is non-existent. Hence, early Christianity had no need of an elaborate theological system. It was only when the world perversely refused to come to an abrupt end that the occasion presented itself for the rise of a theological system. Actually, had the Christian Church which undoubtedly originated due to the unquestioned belief in the early second coming of the Messiah in glory, been guided exclusively by the dictates of pure reason, it would have incontinently closed down. But institutions, including religious institutions, are rarely logical. By this time the Church was a rising and growing organisation, on the threshold of secular riches and power. As such, it postponed the return of the Lord into the far future (where it and he still remain—for after all, tomorrow never comes!), and set to work to evolve a theological system in order to justify the ways of God to man—besides incidentally, justifying its own continued existence.

Christian theology however, has had from its earliest recorded beginnings, to face one central and insoluble problem: that of divine predestination versus human free-will. For theological—that is theistic—logic obviously insists that if God be indeed omnipotent, everything in the universe must be directly and uninterruptedly subject to his almighty will. In every theistic universe logically conceived, "free will" represents a blasphemous absurdity, since obviously, if human wills are free to act contrarily to God's will, then God is not really omnipotent. This pretty obvious deduction was, of course, clear to the major thinkers of the early Church, amongst whom Paul (or whoever wrote The Epistle to the Romans) and St. Augustine (of Hippo) both laid down theories that logically lead to Calvinistic predestination.

However, the Catholic Church itself, though compelled to pay lip-service to these great masters of "the queen of the sciences" (theology) could not accept *in toto* their predestination theology. And again for an obvious reason: that logically divine predestination on the part of God leads directly to *de facto* atheism on the part of men. Obviously so, since what is the conceivable use of praying to a god or asking a priest to pray to a god who has already decided from the moment of your birth both your terrestrial and celestial (post mortem) destiny? Such an admission would put the Church *qua* Church entirely out of business as the effective intermediary between God and man.

Hence, driven as it were by the clash of rival logical necessities, the Catholic Church has continued to assert simultaneously the omnipotence of God and the free will of man. We repeat that it had no option but to do this: for why invoke the services of the Church for which it

often asked extremely high fees, if divine predestination had already settled the matter beyond any possibility of the intervention of the Church? If God had already decided from all eternity who was designed for heaven and who for hell, how could it be believed that the Church held the keys of heaven and hell, as Catholic doctrine has always claimed?

The major contribution of the Protestant Reformation to Christian theology was that it effectively put an end to what we may perhaps term this "double book-keeping" inherent in Catholic theology. For the Reformers, Calvin and Luther in particular, were logical disciples of Paul and Augustine, and they pushed their masters' teaching to its logical conclusion. In the masterpiece of the reformed theology, Calvin's *Institutes*, it is written: "Some He hath predestined to eternal life, others to eternal Death". It is true that Calvin immediately exclaimed: "Truly a terrible decree!" But, he added, "let wagging tongues be still".

All the major Reformers, Lutheran and Calvinist alike, agreed in substance with this teaching. About the only exceptions were the Unitarians of whom it was later aptly said that they represented "a feather bed for falling Christians". Again, obviously this dogma *logically* did away with theism as well as with the Church. For *lex orandi: lex credendi*; people believe in those to whom they pray. And what earthly or heavenly point can there be in praying to a god who has already settled everything in advance and whose decrees are unalterable by definition?

It has often been pointed out that Calvinism leads logically to pantheism, to the identification of God with the visible universe; and has not Schopenhauer classically defined pantheism as "an easy-going way of getting rid of God"? Putting history into a logical harness, one could well dub the Protestant Reformers, Calvin in particular, as the initial Atheists of modern times. For they preached what was in effect a dead god, a god who had already done everything at the moment of creation when he had created the universe, and in the act of creating it had predestined everything and every person in it. From Calvin's Geneva to the "Christian atheism" of the present Woolwich vintage, the road of historical continuity of the evolution of Protestant theology runs clear.

It will, we hope, be clear from the above that the present vogue of Christian humanism (or atheism) the headquarters of which appear to be on the South Bank of Thameside, and the best-known advocate of which is Bishop John Robinson of Woolwich, is by no means a novel phenomenon, but one which can trace its historic roots back to the Reformation, of which indeed, it is the logical culmination.

However, Dr. Robinson, as both a theologian and a *de facto* Christian bishop, has still to solve what appears to be an insoluble problem. For if there is no personal God to respond to man's personal appeals, of what conceivable use is the Church as an intermediary? And if the Church is logically superfluous, what about its bishops, including his "atheistic" lordship of Woolwich? Why continue to preserve—and to pay—them? For from every point of view, whether theological or even financial, atheism—Christian or just plain—appears to be a bad business for bishops, whilst for theologians, it must surely mean eventual mass unemployment.

## This Believing World

Those two eminent Church of England theologians, the Dean of St. Paul's and the Bishop of Woolwich, have both tried their hand at explaining why they do or do not—it is difficult to say which—believe in the Virgin Birth, a subject which our more educated clergy would rather not discuss even at Christmas. To the eight millions of readers of the *Sunday Mirror* (December 22nd, 1963) however, Dr. Robinson did his best to show the story was—or was not—true. For he called it "History or Myth?": and we defy anybody to answer that question from his article. All he admitted was that "a baby called Jesus was born in Bethlehem round about the year we now call 4 BC". And this, after Christians have been preaching the Virgin Birth for nearly 1900 years!

★

On the other hand, Dr. Matthews called this "historical event" the "Wondrous Birth", and then told his readers (*Daily Telegraph*, December 24th, 1963), that "the memory or the imagination of the Church has surrounded the birth of Christ with wonders and miracles as heavenly testimony"—the operative word being of course "imagination". For saying the same thing in other words the "Devil's Chaplain", Robert Taylor served two years in the terrible prisons of William IV over 130 years ago for "blasphemy". Dr. Matthews is lucky to live today.

★

In any case, to be able to write on the "wondrous birth" about as lengthily as the Dean (three half columns) without mentioning the Mother of God is in itself a feat of imagination! And we defy any reader to tell us what it is exactly that the Dean believes? Either Jesus was virgin-born, as Dr. Heenan, for instance believes, or he was *not*. If the birth was only like the birth of other babies, without the Holy Ghost as father, and without a young virgin as mother, it has less meaning for Christianity than the birth of John.

★

Naturally, the Archbishop of Canterbury almost poo-poo's any attempt to belittle the Lord at Christmas, for in his "special message" (*News of the World*, December 22nd, 1963), he tells us—and who could know better than he?—that "God loves and cares for us all so much as to come right down into human life". Some of us think that there is much more glory in *doing* something really practical to help suffering humanity than to say it can be done but never is done. Perhaps Dr. Ramsey thinks God has done his best for us when he produces Father Christmas for little children. The Church has hardly risen above such a sentiment.

★

But parsons are sometimes shocked that little children are still thinking more of the dear old Father—Christmas—than the veritable Father still sitting on a cloud in Heaven. The Rev. J. Clark (St. Barnabas's, Southfields) is most unhappy that the wondrous story of the Babe in the manger is put in the same category as Cinderella. "Our stables, shepherds, and indeed the Holy Family itself", he moans, "have become much too refined. We need to remind ourselves of the poverty of that Family, the wretchedness of Joseph, and the fear of the Holy Mother". Perhaps the wretched Joseph was not too sure of himself after his angelic visitation.

★

A new Swedish law permitting married women to choose their surnames may well lead to complications, as the *Daily Telegraph* correspondent, Peterborough pointed out. He recalled the story of an Anglican bishop who took his

wife to Paris for the weekend and signed the hotel register, correctly, as "John ——— [the name of his seal and Mrs. Smith".

## Should Religion be Respected?

By H. L. MENCKEN

THE MOST curious social convention of the great age in which we live is the one to the effect that religious opinions should be respected. Its evil effects must be plain enough to everyone. All it accomplishes is (a) to throw a veil of sanctity about ideas that violate every intellectual decency, and (b) to make every theologian a sort of chartered libertine. No doubt it is mainly to blame for the appalling slowness with which really sound notions make their way in the world. The minute a new one is launched, in whatever field, some imbecile of a theologian is certain to fall upon it, seeking to put it down. The most effective way to defend it, of course, would be to fall upon the theologian, for the only really workable defence, in polemics as in war, is a vigorous offensive. But convention frowns upon that device as indecent, and so theologians continue their assault upon sense without much resistance, and the enlightenment is unpleasantly delayed.

There is, in fact, nothing about religious opinions that entitles them to any more respect than other opinions get. On the contrary, they tend to be noticeably silly. If you doubt it, then ask any pious fellow of your acquaintance to put what he believes into the form of an affidavit, and see how it reads . . . "I, John Doe, being duly sworn, do say that I believe that, at death, I shall turn into a vertebrate without substance, having neither weight, extent nor mass, but with all the intellectual powers and bodily sensations of an ordinary mammal; . . . and that, for the high crime and misdemeanor of having kissed my sister-in-law behind the door, with evil intent, I shall be boiled in molten sulphur for one billion calendar years". Or, "I, Mary Roe, having the fear of Hell before me, do solemnly affirm and declare that I believe it was right, just, lawful and decent for the Lord God Jehovah, seeing certain little children of Bethel laugh at Elisha's bald head, to send a she-bear from the wood, and to instruct, incite, induce and command it to tear forty-two of them to pieces". Or, "I, Right Rev. ——— Bishop of ———, DD, LLD, do honestly, faithfully and on my honour as a man and a priest, declare that I believe that Jonah swallowed the whale", or vice versa, as the case may be.

No, there is nothing notably dignified about religious ideas. They run, rather, to a peculiarly puerile and tedious kind of nonsense. At their best, they are borrowed from metaphysicians, which is to say, from men who devote their lives to proving that twice two is not always or necessarily four. At their worst, they smell of spiritualism and fortune-telling. Nor is there any visible virtue in the men who merchant them professionally. Few theologians know anything that is worth knowing, even about theology, and not many of them are honest. One may forgive a Communist or a Single Taxer on the ground that there is something the matter with his ductless glands, and that a Winter in the south of France would relieve him. But the average theologian is a hearty, red-faced, well-fed fellow with no discernible excuse in pathology. He disseminates his blather, not innocently, like a philosopher, but maliciously, like a politician. In a well-organised world he would be on the stone-pile. But in the world as it exists we are asked to listen to him, not only politely but even reverently, and with our mouths open.

**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**

Birmingham Branch NSS (Birmingham and Midland Institute, Paradise Street), Sunday, January 12th, 6.45 p.m.: DR. M. McGREEVY (Erdington Abbey), "Christ, The Cornerstone of Catholicism".

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Tuesday, January 14th, 6.30 p.m.: FRANK JUDD, "The Work of the International Voluntary Service".

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, January 12th, 6.30 p.m.: PHILIP HUGHES, BA, "Seeing and Believing".

Manchester Branch NSS (Wheatshaf Hotel, High Street), Sunday, January 12th, 7.30 p.m.: MISS A. BUCKINGHAM, "CND and Education".

Marble Arch Branch NSS (Carpenter's Arms, Seymour Place, London, W.1), Sunday, January 12th, 7.30 p.m.: MARTIN ENNALS, "Civil Liberties, 1964".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, January 12th, 11 a.m.: DR. JOHN LEWIS, "If God is Dead, Everything is Permitted".

Wales and Western Branch NSS (Bute Town Community Centre, Cardiff), Monday, January 13th, 7.30 p.m.: COUNCILLOR GEORGE PARSONS, "Liberalism".

**Notes and News**

THIS WEEK, we reprint opposite a typical piece of irreverence by the late H. L. Mencken, outstanding American Atheist and writer. Mencken was no respecter of persons or parties, and had no superior in the art of debunking. His *American Language* has recently been reissued in this country by Routledge (90s.), and his little piece, "Should Religion Be Respected?" was recently reprinted by the American English-German Freethought paper, *Voice of Freedom* (December, 1963), which, incidentally, reprinted "Akiba's" article on Mormonism from our own pages.

IN A typically refreshing article in the *New Statesman* (27/12/63), J. B. Priestley declared some of his intentions for 1964, when he will reach the age of 70. He would, he said, withhold all his attention from any topic long before it has been flogged to death, and reduce his political reading to a minimum. Nobody need "analyse some wretched little by-election as if it were the Day of Judgment" and "no more of those long pieces lifting the veil

in Moscow, and proving that Kutsatov is coming up and Brassavich going down . . .". As for the arts: it is one thing, Mr. Priestley observed, "to be a critic and to be paid for praising work that reflects your own private despair; and quite another thing to work all day and then pay money to be told that your life is not worth living".

MR PRIESTLEY'S remarks have, we suggest, some relevance to the letter from Mr. R. Smith which we print this week. For that reflects its writer's private despair. What puzzles us is that anyone with such a view of the world should choose to go on living in it. Indeed, we regret that we cannot take the pessimism of Mr. Smith and "Vigilant" (whose too-lengthy letter went on to sound similar warnings of impending doom) seriously. "Vigilant" to our knowledge has been forecasting "imminent disaster" for a good many years now. Frankly, we feel that both correspondents must find life worth living, despite their protestations.

WE LEARN from *The Testing World*, publication of Soiltest Inc., USA (December, 1963) that the United States hopes to launch a moon probe this year. Surveyor, as it is called, will be 8 ft. by 13 ft., and a scientist from Hughes Aircraft Co. has stated that it will literally "feel and chew" the moon's surface with special drills, then televise the results back to earth. Knowledge of the constitution and consistency of the surface is clearly essential if the US is to attempt to put men on the moon by the end of this decade. And at present that knowledge is lacking. Incidentally, the USSR is also said to be preparing a moon probe.

THE DISAPPEARANCE of Mohammed's hair from Hazratbal mosque in Srinagar certainly caused a riot, in the real sense of that word. Two people were killed in clashes with the police in Srinagar, capital of Indian Kashmir, and there were two processions of 70,000 people, mourning the disappearance of the relic. Ten persons were arrested and a curfew was imposed. "Shops and business establishments stayed closed during the day", the *Daily Telegraph* reported (30/12/63) and at a mass meeting of Muslims "it was decided to hold daily meetings until the hair was recovered". On January 4th came the welcome news that the three-inch hair in its silver-capped phial had been found. No details were given but the Kashmir Premier, Mr. Shamsuddin, said that further information would follow.

WRITING ON the woman's page of *The Guardian* (30/12/63), Ann Armstrong told how she had suffered from poliomyelitis in 1955 and had been informed by a Roman Catholic sister: "God must love you very much; it is a privilege to be allowed to bear so much suffering". Mrs. Armstrong didn't think much of that idea of God's love. Nor do we, though it is, alas, all too common. But Mrs. Armstrong ended her article enigmatically, viz.: "There was no golden gate, no new Jerusalem, only the little wooden gate of the Cross".

*Gibbons Stamp Monthly* for December, 1963, contained a reproduction of an Indian stamp commemorating Annie Besant, and bearing a photo of her.

ALL MARRIAGE problems can be traced to a single cause, according to the Rev. Henry V. Satler, CSSR (*The Faith*, Malta, January, 1964) and as a celibate priest, he should know. And the cause? Selfishness, said Father Satler. As simple as that!

# Philosophical Paperbacks

By COLIN McCALL

I HAVE only just seen two interesting philosophical paperbacks from America, *Determinism and Freedom in the Age of Modern Science* and *Dimensions of Mind*. Both comprise proceedings of the New York University annual Institute of Philosophy, are edited by Sidney Hook, Professor of Philosophy at the University, and are published by Collier Books (Collier-Macmillan) at 11s. 6d.

*Determinism and Freedom* was the title of the first meeting of the Institute in 1957, and the subject was introduced by Brand Blanshard, Professor of Philosophy at Yale. "I am a Determinist", he began. "None of the arguments offered on the other side seem of much weight except one form of the moral argument, and that itself is far from decisive." And apart from one strange—and I would say illogical—remonstrance (that if determinism involved either materialism or mechanism, he would renounce it as absurd), Professor Branshard presented the determinist case as well as I have seen it from an Idealist—and adequately disposed of the common objections to it.

He was especially good on the so-called principle of indeterminacy in physics. This is, he argued, one interpretation of recent discoveries and "not the most plausible one". Moreover, even if it were true, "it would not carry with it indeterminism for human choice".

Professor Blanshard was subsequently criticised by Determinists and Indeterminists, as well as by what might be termed the "in-betweens". There was, however, considerable appreciation of what, despite certain criticisms (e.g. overstatement of the determinist case), Professor Hook called "a brilliant essay". Carl G. Hempel of Princeton, who considered Professor Blanshard's paper "admirably lucid and stimulating", offered some equally stimulating reflections upon it. Mr. Hempel agreed that a stubborn feeling of freedom of choice cannot count as evidence against determinism, since the feeling can be deceptive. He thought, though, that the Professor had made use of the same kind of fallacious argument in referring to Sir Francis Galton's discovery of constraining factors in connection with some of his (Galton's) important decisions. I don't support this objection. Galton's deliberate inquiry into his own motivation, though not of course conclusive, surely differs from a "feeling" of freedom. But I do share Mr. Hempel's view that "how a given person is going to act will be determined, not by an ideal standard pertinent to the action, but rather by whether or not the agent has a certain disposition, namely that of acting in accordance with the standard".

Indeed, the weakness of Professor Blanshard's determinism would seem attributable to his idealistic horror of materialism. For it is, I suggest, from modern physiological discoveries, above all, that determinism derives its strongest support; and those discoveries appear to me essentially materialistic.

Paul Edwards, then, in another essay, was right (following William James) to differentiate between "hard" and "soft" Determinists. Among the former he listed Jonathan Edwards, Anthony Collins, Holbach, Freud and Clarence Darrow. Like James, Professor Edwards considered soft determinism an evasion. "You are right in maintaining that some of our actions are caused by our desires and choices", a hard determinist might say to a Hume-Mill soft determinist. "But", the hard determinist would continue, "you do not pursue the subject far enough. You arbitrarily stop at the desires and volitions.

We must not stop there. We must go on to ask where they come from; and if determinism is true there can be no doubt about the answer to this question. Ultimately our desires and our whole character are derived from our inherited equipment and the environmental influences to which we were subjected at the beginning of our lives. It is clear that we had no hand in shaping these".

I look forward to Professor Edwards's promised expansion of his thesis, which (as he acknowledged) was stated rather bluntly because of limitations of time. But his contribution to *Determinism and Freedom* served the purpose for which it was intended: to stimulate discussion of a position which "has not received adequate attention in recent years". In fact, the whole book is stimulating. I have had space to mention only a few of the twenty-five contributors, but I hope I, too, have served my purpose: to whet the appetite.

I have even less space to deal with *Dimensions of Mind*. Like its companion volume it was given a good start with a materialistic consideration of the "mind-body" problem by Wolfgang Köhler (author of *The Mentality of Apes*), which was not, I think, weakened by any subsequent criticism. Diffusion, electric currents, and "a host of fairly simple chemical reactions" are, Köhler said, "the same processes in living systems as they are elsewhere". And he expressed his realist viewpoint that "parts of recognisable nature must more or less resemble some aspects of the phenomenal world".

Parapsychological interests were taken care of by none other than J. B. Rhine himself; H. H. Price of Oxford presented "Some Objections to Behaviourism"; and Howard W. Hintz defended Whitehead's concept of "organism".

Following these and seven other contributions on the mind-body problem, Norbert Wiener of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology gave the first of ten talks on brains and machines, and warned against unplanned automation. There is, he said, "nothing which will automatically make the automatic factory work for human good, unless we have determined the human good in advance and have so constructed the factory as to contribute to it". The papers in this section ended on a pragmatic note by the editor, Professor Hook.

Stephen Toulmin of Leeds then introduced discussion of the third subject, concept-formation, the whole eventually being rounded off by New York University's Razieli Abelson, who argued against the introducers of all three sections, Köhler, Wiener and Toulmin.

So, although it should not be pretended that all the contributors to either symposium are easy to read, they are almost all rewarding. My only regret is that such valuable and attractively-produced paperbacks should be marred by a number of irritating misprints.

## BOOKS FOR HUMANISTS

*The Rationalist Annual 1964*. Cloth 7s. 6d., Paper 5s.

*Pioneers of Social Change*, by E. Royston Pike  
Cloth 15s., Paper 10s. 6d.

*The Humanist Revolution* by Hector Hawton  
Cloth 15s., Paper 10s. 6d.

*Objections to Humanism*, Edited by H. J. Blackham  
Cloth. 16s.

Plus postage from THE FREETHINKER Bookshop

Humanist Group Action (13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W.8), Saturday, January 11th, 7.45 p.m.: "Dance and Wine and Cheese Party". Joint admission, 5s.

# The Religion of Thomas Paine

By H. CUTNER

ALMOST EVERYBODY knows these days that Thomas Paine was a Deist, that is, a believer in a creator of the universe or nature, but no believer in written revelation such as the Bible. In his *Age of Reason* he made his position very clear. "I believe in one God and no more," he said:

I do not believe in the creed professed by the Jewish Church, by the Roman Church, by the Greek Church, by the Turkish Church, by the Protestant Church, nor by any Church I know of. My own mind is my own Church.

Nothing here said by Paine was new. It had been said by prominent Deists for over a hundred years before him. Chubb, Toland, Tindal, Collins, Middleton, and a host of other famous writers were all classed as Deists. In fact, as J. M. Robertson points out in his *History of Freethought*, "deism was the fashionable way of thinking among cultured people". It is of course quite possible that the deism of many cultured people then as now was in reality atheism, but it was never easy at any time to say outright that one was an Atheist.

For Christians everybody was an Atheist who did not believe in the Bible, and its picture of God Almighty. Thomas Paine did not believe in the Bible and therefore must have been an Atheist for them, no matter what he said. And to call a man an Atheist was the worst possible insult. Today a lot of sting has gone out of the word. There are too many scientists and intellectuals who treat the opinions on this matter of true Christians with contempt, and proclaim their utter unbelief in any God.

But if we take the trouble to find out what or who was the creator in whom Paine believed, we are forced to admit that it was the same old deity beloved by Christian, Jew, and Muslim alike. He almost always uses the same terms, for Paine was a thorough believer in the Design Argument. There *must* have been a creator, for we cannot believe that the universe made itself. He says:

The only idea that man can affix to the name of God, is that of a *first cause*, the cause of all things. And, incomprehensible and difficult as it is for a man to conceive what a first cause is, he arrives at the belief of it, from the tenfold greater difficulty of disbelieving it. It is difficult beyond description to conceive that space can have no end; but it is more difficult to conceive an end. It is difficult beyond the power of man to conceive an eternal duration of what we call time; but it is impossible to conceive a time when there shall be no time. In like manner of reasoning, everything we behold carries in itself the internal evidence that it did not make itself . . .

Paine appears to have thought that even if we cannot imagine creation, there must have been a creator, and I do not think I am unfair to him when I say that this reasoning is typical of all Theists, Jews, Christians, Muslims, and the rest. Only today, as I write, a lady Witness of Jehovah angrily dismissing my atheism as a delusion, insisted that I could not tell her how the world was created unless by a creator who was Jehovah himself. Paine left Jehovah out, but like the lady he used the "design" argument. We had eventually, declared Paine, to come "to the belief of a first cause eternally existing, of a nature totally different to any material existence we know of, and by the power of which all things exist; and this first cause, man calls God".

But, "it is better not to believe there is a God than to believe of him falsely", by which Paine meant that the Bible God who was responsible for the paltry "tales of the Old and New Testament", could not be compared with his own God who was responsible for "the eternity of space, filled with innumerable orbs, revolving in eternal

harmony". Bible or no Bible, Jews and Christians alike have addressed their God in much the same terms as Paine did his—and in fact, it is the standard way used by all Theists. Sometimes, it is true, the all-believing Theist will turn from God Almighty and give exactly the same praise to Jesus, premising of course that the Son is really the Father, as I heard a parson joyously declare on TV this last Christmas.

Declaring disbelief in the Bible as Paine did in the *Age of Reason* should have meant disbelief in the story of Jesus, but here, like so many Deists before him, Paine did not do that. Jesus "was a virtuous and an amiable man. The morality that he preached and practised was of the most benevolent kind . . .". This view persists to this day. Paine, when he wrote it, had no Bible by him, so he simply repeated what he learnt as a small boy—and probably hoped for the best. But he did realise that the "history" of Jesus was written by other people, and that, in actual fact, as he admitted in Part Three of the *Age of Reason*,

without entering into any discussions of the merits or demerits of Matthew 1, 18, it is proper to observe that it has no higher authority than *that of a dream* . . . I have examined the story of Jesus Christ and compared the several circumstances of it with that of revelation . . . the result is that the story of Christ has not one trait . . . that bears the least resemblance to the power and wisdom of God as demonstrated in the creation of the universe. All the means are human means . . . and undeserving of credit.

Thomas Paine certainly changed some of his opinions about Jesus as he grew older. In fact, three years before he died, in a letter to Andrew A. Dean, he said: "As to the book called the Bible, it is blasphemy to call it the word of God. It is a book of lies and contradictions and a history of bad times and bad men. There are but a few good characters in the whole book. The fable of Christ and his twelve apostles, which is a parody on the sun and the twelve signs of the Zodiac, copied from the ancient religions of the Eastern world, is the least harmful part. Every thing told of Christ has reference to the sun . . .". But even though the story of Christ is based on the sun, I believe that Paine always thought of Jesus as an "amiable" man.

The truth is that the religion of Deists was always a mass of contradictions even if God was looked upon as the creator of nature. But 170 years or so ago, it was very difficult to argue about God in any other way than that of a creator.

This must have been felt by Moncure Conway in his classic biography of Thomas Paine. He devoted a splendid chapter to the *Age of Reason* and Paine's religious beliefs. But he admitted that, just as Paine's ideas on government were his own, his "religion was of a still more peculiar type". He cannot, added Conway, "be classed with deists of the past or theists of the present". In short, "Paine was an exact thinker, a slow and careful writer, and his religious ideas, developed through long years, require and repay study".

Again, Conway insisted that though the *Age of Reason* was a "product of its time", its "intellectual originality is none the less remarkable". Of course. When he procured a Bible at last, and had time to analyse its contents, he set to work to demolish its authenticity, and he did this so thoroughly that only in our own days have some of our bishops the courage to agree with him, and are now

trying to popularise some of his conclusions.

Let me insist that as an Atheist myself, I cannot agree with the deism of Thomas Paine—but my admiration for all his work in freeing man from the thralldom of the Bible, and the Divine Right of Kings, has never wavered. He fought for our liberty in many spheres, and his name and work can never die.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### HUMANIST LETTER NETWORK

If there are any isolated Humanists (Secularists, Agnostics or Atheists) who would like to correspond with someone sharing their beliefs and possibly interests, would they please write to me in Cuckfield.

If they will enclose 1s. 6d. for expenses (stamps, stationery, advertisements, etc., profits to the British Humanist Association), and brief details about their interests, hobbies, sex, age and work and the approximate correspondent hoped for, I will do my best to put them in touch.

Please forgive what may be an inevitable delay of a few weeks at the beginning of this experiment. (Mrs.) KIT MOUNT,  
Mercers, Cuckfield, Sussex.

### THE WAY TO UPROOT ATHEISM!

Atheism, we are told, must be uprooted. The best way to do it is to uproot theism, an evident superstition. There are people who deny God, because there are people who insist there is a God. Nobody will deny God if nobody believes in God. Rational, empirical atheism is the unwitting effect of superstitious theism!  
GONZALO QUIOGUE (Manila).

### BIRTH CONTROL

Mrs. Margaret McIlroy, in her article "A Catholic Doctor on Birth Control" (27/12/63), describes Dr. John Rock's book, *The Time Has Come*, and concludes that "the gap between the churchman who tests the rightness of a line of action by an appeal to traditions and texts attributed to Jesus, and the social scientist... remains unbridgeable".

Whilst heartily concurring in this conclusion, it must be pointed out that those few words display a lamentable ignorance of the real aims of the Catholic Church. For nearly 2,000 years people have been falling into this same error, supposing, like Mrs. McIlroy, that Catholic opposition to birth control stems from mistaken ideals, faulty reasoning, obstinacy, and so on. Such may be true of the lesser lights, but it is most certainly not true of the Catholic hierarchy.

The Catholic Church is, first and foremost, a financial organisation. The poor, and perhaps sincere, vicar who sometimes manages to extract a few sous from his equally poor parishioners; the hypocritical shopkeeper whose prosperity and son's good school reports depend on his attendance, and donations, at Mass; the politician, bought and paid, who aspires to be head of the state; criminals whose criminality can be purchased to remove other people not sufficiently right-thinking: all these and many more, have their places in the system, the basic aim of which is the subjugation of all mankind (including the aforesaid dupes) to the power lust (not mere material gain) of a small minority.

Once this is realised, the official Catholic manoeuvring on birth control becomes immediately apparent.

All financial undertakings, in order to remain successful, require an abundance of consumers to buy their goods. This is true of the Catholic Church. It has religious illusion for sale, and for this illusion people are prepared to pay hard cash—the lever which later enables the Catholic hierarchy to make or break governments.

The demand for illusion, however, is not constant. It varies inversely with human happiness which, in turn, depends on the procurement of adequate creative occupation leading to satisfactory nutrition, clothing, housing, sexual relationship, and so on. All misery and disaster stimulates prayer.

It therefore follows that the demand for illusion is enormously stimulated by poverty, undernourishment, overcrowding, unsatisfactory sexual intercourse, solitary sexual practices and other evils—all of which follow overpopulation as the night follows day. And it is *this* (not "an appeal to traditions and texts attributed to Jesus") which is the real motivation of Catholic opposition to birth control.

"VIGILANT" (Brussels).

Margaret McIlroy's attitude towards family planning is typically humanistic, but not, in my opinion, humanistic enough.

Why have a family at all? Surely she must be aware of the fact that children of small families have to suffer out the tragi-

comedy of human existence as well as those of large families.

Family planning, if practised on a world-wide scale would only raise new problems, and then perhaps the purposeness of human existence would become more glaring to the masses of people who do not yet realise this.

I wonder if Margaret McIlroy believes that it is humanistic to bring children into a world which is making giant strides towards annihilation.

R. SMITH.

### F. A. RIDLEY TESTIMONIAL APPEAL

I should like to thank Freethinkers for their response to the above appeal, and I must confess to being emotionally affected by the warmth of your letters and the generosity of your donations, proving as was suspected that the secularist prefers a useful action to a sycophantic sound of approbation.

Although a personal acknowledgment is being sent to everybody there is an unfortunate delay and meanwhile I would like to thank the following:

J.B. £1; R.U. £1 1s.; Mr. & Mrs. C. £5; L.H. 5s.; Mr. & Mrs. A.W.L. £5 5s.; F.O'D. £2; A.W. & D.C. £2; A.O.S. 5s.; R.J.McC. 10s.; E.H. £2; Mr. & Mrs. F.H. £2; H.M. 10s.; W.G. £2 2s.; R.S. £1; W.M. £5; A.O. £1; W.H. £10; O.K. 10s.; J.D.H. £1; L.E. £5 6s.; W.M. £1; R.D. £1; H.J. 10s.; North London Branch £20; Kingston Branch £5; Birmingham Branch £5; Leicester Secular Society £5 5s.; NSS Executive Committee (Members personal donations) £7 17s. and B.M.A. (Toronto, Canada) for a personal donation of £100,

for their magnificent response which including many anonymous donations totals £205 14s. 6d.

It is proposed to formally terminate the appeal on February 14th, 1964, and an informal presentation ceremony is being arranged, the date and venue of which will be announced immediately it is practicable.

Meanwhile, it would be greatly appreciated if those members, branches and friends who wish to join us in making this gesture of goodwill to a man who has been no less generous of himself in our cause, would send their donations, large or small, as soon as possible to myself at the address below and preferably crossed and made payable to the "F. A. Ridley Testimonial Appeal A/c".

J. A. MILLAR.

27 Muybridge Road, New Malden, Surrey.

### PENGUIN CLASSICS

Aristotle:	Ethics, 5s.
Homer:	The Iliad, 4s. 6d.
Homer:	The Odyssey, 3s. 6d.
Lucian:	Satirical Sketches, 3s. 6d.
Lucretius:	The Nature of the Universe, 3s. 6d.
Machiavelli:	The Prince, 3s. 6d.
Montaigne:	Essays, 7s. 6d.
Nietzsche:	Thus Spoke Zarathustra, 5s.
Rabelais:	Gargantua and Pantagruel, 7s. 6d.
Stendhal:	Scarlet and Black, 6s.
Tacitus:	Annals of Imperial Rome, 5s.
Voltaire:	Candide, 3s. 6d.

### UNWIN BOOKS

Political Ideas, by Bertrand Russell, 4s. 6d.
Mysticism and Logic, by Bertrand Russell, 8s. 6d.
Bertrand Russell: The Passionate Sceptic, by Alan Wood, 8s. 6d.
The Essential Trotsky, 8s. 6d.
Philosophical Aspects of Modern Science, by C. E. M. Joad, 6s. 4d.
Fifty Poems, by Boris Pasternak, 5s.

Please add 6d. per volume for postage

### AN ANALYSIS OF CHRISTIAN ORIGINS

By GEORGES ORY

(President of the Cercle Ernest Renan, Paris)

Translated by C. Bradlaugh Bonner

Price 2s. 6d., plus postage 4d.

### PELICANS

#### ORIGINALS

Educating the Intelligent, by Michael Hutchinson and Christopher Young, 3s. 6d.

Personal Values in the Modern World, by M. V. C. Jeffreys, 3s. 6d.

#### LITERATURE

Aspects of the Novel, by E. M. Forster, 3s. 6d.

The Triple Thinkers, by Edmund Wilson, 6s.

#### PSYCHOLOGY

The Psychology of Perception, by M. D. Vernon, 5s.

Plus postage from THE FREETHINKER BOOKSHOP