

The Freethinker

Volume LXXXIV—No. 36

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Sixpence

THE WORD "religion" is used in a greater variety of senses, perhaps, than any other word in the English language. For example: "Religion is a sense of the mysteriousness of the Universe" (W. A. Sinclair), "Religion is the total response of man to all his environment" (C. A. Coulson), "Religion is what the individual does with his own solitariness" (A. N. Whitehead), "Religion is an active enthusiasm for a fine quality of life" (Delisle Burns).

Clearly, there can be no question of morals without religion if religion is defined in any of the ways just quoted. But these definitions have no real authority. Those who coin them are behaving like Humpty-Dumpty, who said, it will be remembered,

"When I use a word it means just what I choose it to mean, neither more nor less."

To find the "real" (i.e. the generally accepted) sense of the word "religion" we must turn to the dictionary; and the dictionary definitions, though their wording varies, all make it clear that the essence of "religion," in its primary sense, is the belief in a supernatural power or powers. Thus Chambers's Dictionary gives "The recognition of supernatural powers, and of the duty lying upon man to yield obedience to these." It is in this primary sense that the word "religion" will here be used; by "morals without religion" is meant morals without supernatural sanctions.

Moral Training and Religious Instruction

The belief in the necessity for such sanctions is, of course, widespread. Eminent persons repeatedly tell us that morals depend on religion, and that any decline in Christian belief must lead to a moral landslide. This claim, indeed, is now one of Christianity's main lines of defence; for today the case for Christianity—at any rate Protestant Christianity—is frequently argued on the grounds of utility rather than truth. It is not suggested that the Christian dogmas are credible, but rather that any reference to their incredibility is in poor taste; that it is the duty of right-thinking people to endure a certain amount of intellectual discomfort for the sake of their morals—or perhaps more often for the sake of other people's morals and, especially, for the sake of the children.

Because of this widespread feeling, many people who are themselves only nominally Christian still want their children to be brought up in Christian belief, and to be given religious instruction in school. They argue that the Christian stories appeal to the child and are suited to his stage of development, and that though he will probably cease to believe in the stories when he grows older, the moral training that has been based on them will be likely to stick.

But there seems little evidence for this optimistic view. If moral training is tied up with religious instruction—to be more specific, if the child is given the impression that the obligation to be honest and truthful and kind is somehow bound up with believing what he is taught in "RI"—then there is an obvious danger that if he later casts off

his religious beliefs he may throw out the moral baby with the mythological bathwater.

Though it does not conclusively prove anything (since many factors contribute to causing delinquency) it is surely a striking fact that in this country those who receive the most intensive religious training, and for whom moral training is most closely tied up with religion—i.e. the Roman Catholics—have a delinquency rate two to three times that of the population in general. When this unwelcome fact is forced on their notice, Catholics usually argue that most of the delinquents are not "true" Catholics, but men and women who have lapsed from their faith. This may be so; but it has to be

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Morals without Religion

By MARGARET KNIGHT

explained why lapsed Catholics are more prone to delinquency than lapsed members of other religious groups.

As will now be clear, Humanists do not deny that the current increases in delinquency may be connected with the decline in Christian belief. But they wholly reject the implied conclusion that the best way to reduce delinquency is to step up religious indoctrination. What is needed is to base moral training on a less precarious foundation than myth—in other words to replace a religious by a Humanist ethic. There is considerable evidence that convinced Humanists—as distinct from those who merely "couldn't care less"—are the most law-abiding group in the population. As Havelock Ellis long ago remarked "it seems extremely rare to find intelligently irreligious men in prison" (*The Criminal*, 1895).

Christian and Humanist Ethics

The essential difference between Christian and Humanist ethics is that while on the Christian view morality is concerned with the relation between man and God, on the Humanist view it is concerned with the relation between man and man. To the Christian, acting rightly means obeying divine commands; to the Humanist, it means acting so as to promote human well-being. To put it yet another way, the Christian regards morality as something that has been imposed on man from above by a supernatural lawgiver, whereas the Humanist regards it as something that has been worked out—and is still being worked out—by men themselves, in the process of learning to live happily together in communities. In brief, Christian morality is largely authoritarian, while Humanist morality is social.

On the Humanist view, authoritarian morality is, quite literally, childish. It is like the morality of small children, to whom "right" means simply "what pleases the grown-ups" and "wrong" means what makes them angry. As Professor Nowell-Smith has said, to the small boy the reason he must not pull his sister's hair is that mummy will be angry, or mummy will punish him. He has made a great step forward towards maturity of moral judgment when he realises that the fundamental reason why he should not pull his sister's hair is that it hurts her. And there is a similar step forward in the morality of communities, when they pass beyond the idea that virtue

consists in blind obedience to the arbitrary commands of some inscrutable authority, to the realisation that, basically, to act rightly means to act for the common good—in other words when they pass from authoritarian to social morality.

The Basis of Social Morality

Christians frequently ask what motive the Humanist can have for behaving unselfishly if he does not believe in God. The Humanist answer is that the mainsprings of moral action are to be found in the altruistic, co-operative tendencies that are fundamental in human nature.

Humanists do not share the depressing Christian view that we are all "miserable sinners" and that there is "no health in us." But, equally, they reject the starry-eyed notion that human nature is entirely good. They realise that our nature is mixed, and that we are often selfish, aggressive and cruel. But there is ample evidence that we have also native, inborn tendencies towards co-operation and altruism. Man, after all, is a social animal, and no social animal lives for itself alone. To look at it from the evolutionary point of view: as Darwin long ago pointed out, one of the qualities most conducive to the survival of a species is a high degree of co-operation and mutual aid. So, inevitably, certain tendencies towards altruism have been built into us in the course of our evolutionary history. Darwin called these tendencies "social instincts"; a modern psychologist might prefer some term like "built-in group-survival responses." But whatever term is used, the tendencies it denotes provide an adequate basis for morals. There is no need to postulate a God to account for social behaviour. To quote Darwin himself: "The social instincts—the prime principle of man's moral constitution—with the aid of active intellectual powers and the effects of habit, lead naturally to the Golden Rule ['do unto others', etc.] and this lies at the foundation of morality" (*The Descent of Man*).

But obviously we do not always feel like helping our neighbour; there are times when we feel more like knocking him down. Humanists do not deny this self-evident fact, but what they do reject is the distorted Christian view that if we attack our neighbour we are behaving spontaneously, whereas if we help we are curbing our spontaneous impulses because we want to please God or to earn an eternal reward. After all, the social animals behave altruistically without (presumably) the support of religious belief, so why should we deny that man can do likewise?

Moral Training

It would be unrealistic, however, to suppose that the "social instincts" alone are enough to keep us morally on the rails. They have constantly to pull against the selfish, aggressive tendencies that are also part of our biological inheritance, and in a straight fight they would often prove too weak unless they had been reinforced by training and discipline, and were upheld by public opinion and, in the last resort, by law.

So moral training, on the Humanist view, has a twofold function; first, to foster the social tendencies, and to encourage the development of warm-hearted and generous natures that will spontaneously want to behave co-operatively; and second, to instil habits and principles that will reinforce the social tendencies, and make us behave kindly and justly even when a good many of our spontaneous impulses are pulling us the other way. How best to achieve this is of course a large question; but on the Humanist view it can be done, and far better done, without the aid of supernatural sanctions. As Einstein said "A man's ethical behaviour should be based effectively on sympathy, education and social ties; no religious

basis is necessary. Man would indeed be in a poor way if he had to be restrained by fear of punishment and hope of reward after death" (*The World as I See It*).

Thomas Cooper

By L. J. FISCHER

IN THE YEAR in which we have had the pleasure and privilege of commemorating one of Britain's greatest sons, Thomas Paine—the stay-maker, writer, politician, engineer and above all fighter for the rights of man and champion of reason—by being present at the unveiling of his statue, it is appropriate to remember another British champion of Freethought, who was practically a contemporary of Paine, namely Thomas Cooper. Our friends the German Freethinkers, have already given Cooper's life story in an article in *Der Freidenker*, the organ of the Deutschen Freidenker-Verbandes (volume 23 No. 1 January 1946).

Thomas Cooper, born on October 22nd, 1759, was the son of a well-to-do London family. He graduated in 1779 at University College, Oxford, having studied medicine, natural history and law. Yet his well deserved academic degrees were never conferred on him, as he refused to repeat the dogma required by the university. However, he was called to the Bar from the Inner Temple in 1787, and as a member of the Liberal Party, he was deputed, together with James Watt, to congratulate the French democrats in Paris in 1792. But he had to flee from France and the wrath of Robespierre.

Moreover, when Cooper returned to England, he was accused of conspiracy against the Crown, and he therefore decided to follow his friend Joseph Priestley to Pennsylvania. There he set up as a doctor, editor, chemist and lawyer. As editor he was fined and imprisoned by the conservative federalists. In 1806 when the Democratic Party came to power, he was appointed president judge in one of the districts, only to be removed in 1811 on the Republicans' return. He was made Professor of Chemistry at Dickinson College the same year, but in 1816 he had to leave, being accused of working with students in the laboratory on the Holy Sabbath. He was thereafter appointed Professor of Mineralogy and Chemistry at the University of Pennsylvania, but once more compelled to leave. In 1820 he was made President of the South Carolina College, Columbia, where he stayed thirteen years, but again the pious won the day. After his retirement he reviewed, together with Dr. McCord, the statutes of South Carolina.

Thomas Cooper was a scholar of many disciplines: he was a natural philosopher, a lawyer, a politician. As a philosopher he was a materialist, as a politician a democrat, and he was, of course, a Freethinker. Among his many friends he counted Lavoisier, Priestley, Davy, Galton, Cavendish and Watt.

The anonymous author of the German article, from which the above details are taken, concludes his biographical notes on Cooper by saying that nobody commemorated the 100th anniversary of his death in 1839, but that he has not been forgotten.

The German author and the Encyclopedia Britannica give the year of his death incorrectly. The Encyclopedia Britannica, the Dictionary of National Biography and J. M. Wheeler's *Biographical Dictionary of Freethinkers* (Progressive Publishing Co., 1889) provide some interesting biographical data.

At least we are still in time to commemorate the anniversary of his 205th birthday in October.

King Christ versus King Cromwell

By F. A. RIDLEY

THE ENSUING excerpts from the Venetian archives are taken from a Venetian despatch dated April 27th, 1657, just after the Lord Protector, Oliver Cromwell, had refused the crown, vacant since the execution of King Charles I. This despatch is of a twofold interest; firstly because it provides a novel and apparently entirely convincing explanation for the refusal of the crown by Cromwell, which subsequent English historians have sought to explain on much less convincing grounds, and secondly, because it gives a vivid contemporary account of the Shoreditch conspiracy of the Fifth Monarchy men, the followers of "King Christ" (their Fifth Monarchy).

Had this conspiracy succeeded, it would have marked the final instalment of the Reign of the Saints of a millenarian theocracy founded, like so many religious sects before it, on the Apocalypse of St. John. Since the men of the Fifth Monarchy—like their historical predecessors the Anabaptists who had set up a kingdom of the saints in Munster during the preceding century (1534-5)—seem to have combined a Utopian communism of distribution (a communism in production was obviously impossible before the industrial revolution) their victory would have opened up intriguing possibilities for the England of the Commonwealth. One need only add that the violent overthrow of Cromwell at that precise juncture seems to have been prevented solely by the efficiency of the Protector's secret service, which led a contemporary royalist historian to declare that Cromwell "knew the secrets of every government in Europe."

The despatch to the Doge and Senate of Venice read as follows:

"This consideration [i.e. the difficulty of raising money which the writer had just referred to] prevents Cromwell from dissolving Parliament, and the practical certainty of awaking some sleeping dog by assuming the crown prevents him from placing it upon his head. [The rest of the paragraph is in the author's own italics]. I have been confidently informed on good authority that if this should take place the army is disposed to make unexpected advances to Charles [i.e. Charles II then in exile on the Continent] promising strong support to place him on the throne, and I have also been told that more than one letter has been sent to his majesty to assure him of support if he succeeds in landing at any of their ports here, to the success of which they would contribute. If this information is not erroneous and if Cromwell is aware of the particulars, that alone would suffice to prevent him from accepting the throne as being the sole means for unseating and destroying him.

"It is a very extraordinary thing that all the plots contrived against the present government are found out at the very moment when they are to take effect. I have already reported one which was miraculously discovered and now have to inform the Senate of another discovered a week ago today which aimed not only at the destruction of Cromwell, but of all the people and was the work of the millenarists, one of their diabolical sects [N.B. the Venetian author was, of course, a Catholic—F.A.R.] with whom are joined the Anabaptists, Quakers and some others who are possessed of such detestable opinions. Over 60 of these conspirators discussing how to fire a mine which they had made and to settle the date of their rising which was to be two days later, i.e. Monday last. They had bought arms to equip 25,000 combatants,

whom they hoped to assemble in a moment. They proposed to seize all the horses in the city, to cut the throats of the Protector and of all the nobility scattered about the country, without regard to sex and not even sparing the children. They proposed to remove the taxes laid on the people and to maintain the army from the goods of the slaughtered nobility. The tenets of these folk which are derived from a passage from Holy Scripture in the Apocalypse, which they interpret after their own fashion, consist in demolishing every sort of dominion to establishing the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. They call themselves 'soldiers of the Fifth Monarchy' and, as the empires of the Chaldeans, Medes and Persians, Greek and Romans have passed away, they entertain the belief that Christ will come down to earth to be emperor of the world, continuing his rule over men for the space of a thousand years [The Millenium! F.A.R.].

"With this expectation they detest and despise every kind of dominion in order to dispose the world to receive what they say is to come and, so that, when it arrives it may find none to compete with it. As this faction is very numerous in England and its professors are fanatics in their behaviour, there is good reason for fearing that in the end they will break out in some cruel and bloody way and carry out their execrable designs regardless of the method. At the place intended as a rendezvous for their troops the Government immediately sent some companies to secure the men found there and to prevent confusion and disorder. They had already raised their standard, which bore a red lion couchant on a white ground, with a device taken from Genesis reading 'who shall rouse himself.' The lion being intended for that of the tribe of Judah. With the persons arrested were also seized their papers and letters from which their evil intentions appeared. [About 20 conspirators, who were arrested at a house in Shoreditch, had intended to be at the rendezvous at Mile End Green, Whitechapel—F.A.R.]. They also found over 2,000 copies of a declaration which had been printed to scatter among the people announcing their designs and promising security to all who should join their party and enrol under their banner.

"This important affair is placed in the hands of Parliament but so far they have not delegated judges for the examination owing to the multiplicity of affairs that keep them busy. But it is expected that many will be severely punished after being tried and when their designs are fully revealed, although these seem sufficiently disclosed by the captured papers. Among the persons arrested are many of rank and standing including Major General Harrison, a great sectary, Captain Lawson, formerly Vice-Admiral of this Republic, Colonel Rich and Major Danvers, all four men of mark who have fought for this state in former years. It is contended that all these people are those intended by Sindercomb, who was condemned for the preceding conspiracy, when he said that the plot would be carried out though he had not the good fortune to execute it, as I reported at the time."

General Harrison, it may be remarked, was one of the judges of Charles I, and was later executed for regicide after the Restoration, when he established a gruesome record in the annals of executions for High Treason, by striking the executioner *after* he had been hanged, cut down alive and his bowels had been drawn in accordance with the then ghastly legal ritual.

This Believing World

We note—not without amusement—that the Editor of *Psychic News* does not like our pointing out the undoubted fact that, while mediums never have any difficulty in inducing uncle George or aunt Martha to come up from the mighty deep—particularly if there is a lost will somewhere—they never solve an unsolved murder. Mr. Maurice Barbanell is very angry, and insists that “mediums have solved murders” which is very easy to say. He never produces any proof—which is not surprising. There is none. However, he does insist that “the real aim of mediumship is not to supplant Scotland Yard but to prove life after death”—an aim which it has signally failed to achieve, except for those people unable to see how they were being bamboozled. In return, Mr. Barbanell roundly tells us, not for the first time, that “our old-fashioned materialism” has been “exploded by science.” But what is modern science but materialistic?

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Perhaps no Christian has been so much in the news as Archbishop Makarios. He has taken the limelight away even from such a formidable rival as Archbishop Heenan. Makarios has been the subject of large numbers of cartoons, leading articles, and news items—but somehow or other nearly all the writers about him, for or against, appear to be most chary of calling him a true Christian. His divine authority, received from “our Lord” himself—otherwise he would never have been an archbishop—is, alas, kept back as thoroughly as possible. Now, is not this a little unfair to Christianity? Are not all his deeds part and parcel of his profound love for his Church and its glorious and immortal founder? Here we have a great Christian—and we find hardly one of his critics or his supporters, referring to the deep Christian faith which moves all his actions. Are not *all* Christians proud of him?

★

It is surprising that such a simple thing as unity in the Churches is so very difficult to attain. Sporadic attempts are made to bring at least some of them together, but there occurs in consequence some beastly snag which puts unity out altogether. For example, there was to be a combined Churches exhibition at Willesden, London (*Daily Express* August 21st), but the Free Churches refused to co-operate with Roman Catholics. It appears that “the extreme Evangelicals,” according to the Rural Dean of Willesden who is “very distressed” about it, are “not prepared to give a little more trust to the Catholics.”

★

The difficulty is of course a very old one. Evangelicals have never entirely trusted Roman Catholics. Perhaps this is not so much due to the Holy Inquisition and its murders and tortures but because “unity” would not mean sharing the spoils *with* the Vatican so much as letting the Vatican *take* the spoils.

★

“TV Times” some weeks ago gave three portraits of Redifusion’s religious advisers, an Anglican, a Roman Catholic and a Methodist all smiling happily, and Mr. Kenneth Harris gave us a candid appreciation of them and their work. What surprised him most, however, was that none of them, when he spoke to them, seemed “particularly surprised, let alone dismayed, by the doubts and misgivings, and unorthodoxies which sincere Christians or would-be Christians have expressed in the series.” Why should they be? Their best answer to unbelief is *boycott*—to smile it off.

The 39 Articles

I WAS EXTREMELY interested in one implication contained in the study of present-day controversies concerning the 39 Articles. The Articles themselves are anomalous. They are only binding upon the clergy and it is uncertain how far “the general assent” demanded by the Clerical Subscription Act, 1865, goes. It has never been defined in a court of law, though *Ellison v Voysey*, (1871), goes far to suggest that it does not cover direct contradiction of the statements in the Articles so far as their general implications be concerned. But the more far-reaching implication of the controversy is that of the curious attitude taken up by Anglo-Catholics and Evangelicals towards the sixteenth century Reformation. The former adopt a view of the Church of England which the great F. W. Maitland scouted as implying that it was Protestant before the Reformation and Catholic afterwards.

Recent researches of Sir John Neale, the Elizabethan parliamentary historian, have done not a little to shatter Anglo-Catholic interpretations of Reformation history. The Evangelical group stress the work of the Reformation as creating the Protestantism of the later Church of England but adopt a curious, fossilised approach, implying that whatever was done in the sixteenth century is of final authority. Of course, such a view reaches a *reductio ad absurdum* unless one also accepts the Erastian Biblicism of the reformers. Yet, two implications related to traditional views must not be overlooked. The first, rightly stressed by the late Dr. G. G. Coulton in his *In Defence of the Reformation*, is that of the deplorable moral and economic state of the Church in the period from the thirteenth century onwards, whilst the other is that outlined in the *Hibbert Lectures for 1883* by Charles Beard. The Reformation was not an event but a movement which opened floodgates of criticism leading on in this country to Puritanism, the ejection of 1662, the rise of deism and the critical movement in religion generally.

For the Freethinker, a battle between Catholic and Protestant over the Reformation will appear somewhat irrelevant. There were certainly faults upon both sides and the early Protestants as a whole had not much to learn in intolerance from the Catholics. Both were wedded to theological views of the universe hopelessly outmoded since the scientific renaissance of the last century. The Reformation was an answer to abuses as Coulton well showed, though, in some ways, it was a stultification of the wider culture of the classical Renaissance which had preceded it. It was likewise an important theological facet to a wider economic revolution, as Tawney stressed.

But neither Reformation nor Counter-Reformation are authoritative for the present day. They are milestones of history which have long since been passed. The dangers of Catholicism are contemporary and sociological in their implications; they are not met by the sort of argument concerning transubstantiation which was beloved in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Protestantism of the Reformation type is a cultural hangover leading to the utter irrationalism of Karl Barth, Reinhold Niebuhr and other pillars of modern Protestant theology. The literary and theological Reformation was followed three centuries later by a scientific Reformation, applying scientific methods to all areas of research and casting aside theological ideas of causation. It is this Reformation with which the cultural progress of the twentieth century is concerned rather than with the details of some four centuries ago.

F. H. AMPLETT MICKLEWRIGHT.

THE FREETHINKER

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

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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.

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Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

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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, September 6th, 6.45 p.m.: K. A. DAY, "The Motley Beast."

Notes and News

MORE THAN a decade has passed since "The Unholy Mrs. Knight"—as the *Sunday Graphic's* huge front-page headlines described her—gave her "Morals without Religion" talks on the BBC. And what a change has taken place during that time. Who, then, could have visualised TW3? Humanism still gets nothing like its fair share of radio and TV time, but it does get some, and it surely isn't unduly optimistic to predict that it will get more. And it was Margaret Knight who—in the true sense of that much-overworked word—made the breakthrough. It was she, too, who received the abuse of the Christian press and priesthood. Now, eleven years later, Mrs. Knight returns to the outrageous subject, "Morals without Religion," in our Views and Opinions this week.

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"THE PERILS OF GUIDANCE"—a strange title, one might think, for an article by a Roman Catholic. Yet Brian Wicker chose it when dealing with the International Planned Parenthood Association's disappointment over the recent encyclical of Pope Paul VI. The Association's disappointment was, Mr. Wicker said, "oddly inconsistent for a progressive-minded body" (*The Guardian*, 21/8/64). But was it? The Association regretted the Pope's failure to give guidance on such urgent problems as world peace, world hunger and overpopulation. To Mr. Wicker, however, and—he thought—"to most Catholics who try to take an intelligent interest in what is going on around them, the absence of such 'guidance' is precisely the most encouraging thing about the present Pope's

attitude." Supposing, however, Pope Paul had given "good" guidance; wouldn't Mr. Wicker have found it more encouraging? What sort of moral leadership is it that opts out? Mr. Wicker is, we believe, making a virtue out of necessity.

★

"A STEP towards atheism and communism." That is one of the accusations made by US funeral directors against the efforts to bring a little sense and reason—and a considerable reduction in cost—to what Jessica Mitford has called the "American way of death". Miss Mitford's book on the subject has become a best-seller and, on August 24th, the BBC presented a CBS programme, *The Great American Funeral*, in which opponents and defenders of the expensive ritual had their say. What was once a funeral parlour is now a "slumber room," and what was once a cemetery is today a "memorial park." But, best of all, the undertaker is now a "grief therapist". This, as commentator Robert Trout remarked, was enough to make H. L. Mencken spin in his crypt—he had he not been cremated!

★

A WOMAN WHO—we read in the *Daily Mail* (25/8/64)—"predicted President Kennedy's assassination," has said that "three of the Beatles will be killed and the fourth maimed during their American tour." She is, of course, Jeane Dixon, whose Presidential assassination prediction was the subject of some discussion in our columns between H. Cutner and *Psychic News*. Well, here is a chance to check Mrs. Dixon's prophetic powers. The fatal day for three of the Liverpudlians is—according to the *Daily Mail*—September 3rd, when they appear at Indiana State Fair, Indianapolis. By that time this column will be printed and on its way to readers.

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"WE ARE NOT superstitious really, but this leaves a nasty feeling, commented Paul McCartney, when he heard of Mrs. Dixon's prophecy. The group had done so much flying that "you'd think it would mean nothing to us," he added. "But when you look out of the window and see all that nothing underneath, it makes you think." The wide publicity given to the prophecy also makes you think. Mrs. Dixon, we are told, "once" warned her husband to get off a plane because it was going to crash." "He did—and the plane did crash." "She told a girl to leave Washington as she foresaw an overwhelming disaster for her. The girl went to California but returned to Washington, where she was murdered"—so nobody can check up with her. What surprises us, though, is that Mrs. Dixon doesn't go far enough. Can she not tell us precisely how the Beatles' accident is going to happen? Can she not offer a way out—a different car, a different plane, a different route—or is the die indelibly cast? If so, does she know which three are to die and which one is to escape with maiming? Questions like these are rarely asked of course.

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THE REV. Norman Macleod, clerk to the Free Kirk Presbytery on Skye, has complained that the island's tourist industry is making a mockery of the Sabbath, and has told of an answer to his prayers against violators of the Lord's day. He warned the owners of a shop in Portree that "if they didn't close on the Sabbath, we would pray to God to close their shop" (*The Sunday Post*, Glasgow, 23/8/64). "Our prayers were answered," he went on. The shop was burned down and hasn't reopened since. Alas, though Mr. Macleod and his wrathful God seem to be fighting a losing battle against the tourism that "is largely to blame for the breakdown of Christian morality on Skye."

Answering a Correspondent

By H. CUTNER

AS SOME readers may remember, a few years ago I pointed out, that, we Freethought writers had constantly to restate our case for the benefit of "new converts." One of these has recently written to me detailing objections to my own views, and I think he deserves an answer—though of course, in a few years, somebody else will have to meet similar arguments as if they had been first stated. Most children, indocrinated with the virus of a religion, a God, and a Bible, later hold fast to beliefs which were current in an age of ignorance, superstition and credulity, and find it difficult to shed them altogether. We give up all miracles, they insist, all supernaturalism, all credulity—what more do you want?

I have, since I began to write for THE FREETHINKER, taken up the mythicist position towards Jesus, in the hope of making a convert here and there. For me, the views of Dupuis, Robert Taylor, and John M. Robertson, seemed the best approach to an understanding of, and a reply to, Christianity, but naturally I never expected more than a few readers to agree with me.

In general, many of the Freethinkers who oppose the myth theory appear never to have read Dupuis or even Robert Taylor—though this may be due to the extreme difficulty of getting hold of their books. But it is a fact that, broadly speaking, Dupuis, 170 years ago, anticipated many arguments still used by believers in "a man called Jesus." I concentrated on the Jesus problem because Jesus is depicted as a God, and I am against the God idea. And I very rarely troubled myself with Jesus as a "man" because there is *nothing anywhere* in contemporary secular history which provides evidence for anybody named Jesus Christ going about "doing good." In other words, the only Jesus we can or ought to discuss is the one presented to us in the New Testament and in the Apocryphal New Testament—and he is a God.

On the other hand, though I was early convinced that Paul and Peter were equally mythical, they were never meant to be Gods; and if Agnostics and Rationalists believed these apostles lived and are faithfully depicted in New Testament literature, I did not think it particularly worthwhile to disturb their faith. But just as I am convinced there never was a Jesus Christ—that he is a literary invention—so I am convinced that Peter and Paul are also literary inventions. Why?

In the first place, *nowhere* in contemporary secular history has anybody found a trace of them. Considering that they regularly preached in Jewish synagogues, why is it that Jewish historians never heard of them? Why is it they never head of Saul and Stephen and know nothing of anybody called Saul (or Paul) writing "Epistles" to the "Churches" he is supposed to have visited on his "missionary travels?" If he was, as depicted in the Epistles, preaching "Christ crucified," why is it he *never* mentions Jesus of Nazareth, who is the Gibraltar rock of all opponents of the myth theory? And what about the Mother of God, that is, Mary the mother of Jesus—am I to understand that he never met her? This revered figure is, like Jesus of Nazareth, completely unknown to Paul. And where are—or were—the "Churches" to which were addressed the celebrated letters of Paul? Did they really have any existence at all?

Actually, there are two highly detailed accounts of Paul in the New Testament—one in Acts, and the other in Paul's own words in the Epistles, and they exclude

each other. Considering that they are both vouched for, not only by all the Christian Churches, but by the fact that they appear in Holy Writ guaranteed by God himself, how is anybody to account for the fact that one or the other must be false?

Let me quote an anonymous work entitled, *The Four Gospels as Historical Records*, published in 1895—a brilliant analysis, and one which has not (as far as I know) been answered by Christian scholars—they prefer to ignore it. (Incidentally, I think the author was the Rev. Sir G. W. Cox, who probably helped Thomas Scott when the latter was writing his *English Life of Jesus* in 1869).

He points out that :

Paul flatly contradicts the narrative of the Acts in the following particulars: He says that he did *not* preach to the Damascus Jews immediately on his conversion; and the Jews had no opportunity of expressing in his presence their astonishment at the change which had come over him. He did *not* at this time go up to Jerusalem. He did *not* make any attempts to introduce himself to the missionaries there, and these missionaries did *not* express any fear or suspicion of him, *nor* did Barnabas vouch for the reality of his conversion. Paul did *not* at Jerusalem address himself to the Jews, and the Jews did *not* seek to kill him. He was *not* taken to Caesarea. He did *not* preach throughout the coasts of Judea. He did *not* go from Palestine to Tarsus, he was *not* brought back from Tarsus by Barnabas to Antioch. He was *not* sent with alms to Jerusalem during the famine said to have been foretold by Agapus (i.e., according to the chronology of Acts, about nine years after his conversion); and he was *not* set apart in the following year by "certain prophets and teachers" for a joint mission with Barnabas to the Gentiles.

I am fairly certain that many of the champions of Paul in the Rationalist and Humanist camp would not say that they know all this. Indeed, except for a few parsons and specialist writers, I have not met anybody who has really read the Epistles in their entirety; they are far too boring and unintelligible. My correspondent should go to the *Encyclopedia Biblica*. He will find that Professor Van Manen calls *all* the Epistles "pseudepigrapha" of the second century. My own opinion is that *all* of them, including the four "authentic" ones, have been heavily interpolated and edited out of all recognition.

"The tradition is that Peter was put to death in AD 64," says my critic, and I am sure he believes in this tradition. But what exactly is a "tradition?" There are plenty of traditions in Holy Writ. Not only have we traditions that Peter and Paul were voluminous writers, we have many of their writings. We have a Gospel of Peter, and an Acts of Peter, and an Acts of Peter and Paul, and an Acts of Paul and Thecla, and even an Acts of Pilate. Does he believe in them? We have also a Gospel of Paul, and a Gospel of Matthias, and a Gospel of Mary, and dozens of similar examples of Holy Writ not in the canon. Finally, my correspondent also refers to the church built over Peter's *grave*, and if he really believes this, I am quite sure he will believe anything. I think, however, apart from Paul, an article on Peter may prove entertaining, and I hope to do one some day.

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Agnosticism and Atheism

A written discussion between G. L. SIMONS (England) and GONZALO QUIOGUE (Manila)

From G. L. Simons to Gonzalo Quiogue :

I AGREE with a lot that you say about agnosticism, but I still think that we are not entitled to say dogmatically "God does not exist." Similarly I don't think we are entitled, philosophically, to say that anything does not exist, unless, if it did exist, there would surely be evidence for it. In other words, even though there is no evidence for God, he may exist somewhere in the universe. This is a remote possibility which must be acknowledged if our outlook is to be quite sound and strong against the attacks of clever religious thinkers.

But I thoroughly agree with you that the Christian God is impossible, because of the existence of suffering—a loving God who is all-powerful would not permit pain and misery in the world he had created. Because of this I think atheism is quite justified when it is directed to the Christian God, or any other god that is incompatible with an aspect of the world that we know to be factual. I am simply opposed to a *general atheism*, that says that all gods are impossible. A cruel god may exist, or an imperfect one. We have no evidence for them, but that may be just a limitation on us. In the future we may be able to detect such a god, but they may exist now also. I am sure you will agree with this. It means, of course, that atheism is justified for the practical business of living our lives and behaving in a moral and responsible way. We both agree that religion is superstitious and not at all relevant to life in the modern world.

Very best wishes, Yours sincerely,

G.L.S.

From Gonzalo Quiogue to G. L. Simons :

THE MORE we argue about the god question the more interesting it becomes. In your first sentence you said: "I agree with a lot that you say about agnosticism, but I still think we are not entitled to say dogmatically, 'God does not exist.'" Only affirmative statements can be asserted dogmatically. These statements are asserted without proof or evidence. Hence they are dogmas. Dogmatic statements, the affirmative ones, have the burden of proof. In broad daylight John Doe tells me a dogmatic statement: "An apple is on that table right now." Since I know there is no apple on that table, I simply deny his statement by replying: "There is no apple on that table right now." His affirmative statement is dogmatic; my denial is not; I'm simply stating a fact—a self-evident truth. I know damn well there is no apple on that table. John probably has a hallucination of an apple on that table.

Another angle. You and I know that the term God and its meaning were inventions of primitive men who knew nothing about nature, life, and the universe. If we know that "God" is a mere invention of the mind or a figment of the imagination, why can't we say that it does not exist as a reality anywhere in the universe? Why consider the possibility of its existence elsewhere when we know that it is an idea invented by primitive men? We become irrational if we persist in considering a possible existence of this invented idea. In this light, the denial of God is not only cogent and tenable, but it is a plain statement of simple fact. The god-believer is the dogmatic one; the atheist is simply stating a self-evident truth that "the thing is not in our empirical world" and it is nonsensical and superstitious to imagine its possible

existence in an unknown part of the universe. If we persist otherwise, we have a will to doubt without knowing it and thus we become irrational. If we have a will to doubt, we should doubt our doubting attitude. And if we doubt our doubting attitude, we become rational and logical.

Another angle. The unknown exists as a reality—an infinite reality—as infinite as nature or the universe. Human knowledge is finite and limited by the boundary of the unknown, although from time to time we push back this boundary and thereby enlarge our knowledge and our known world. Considering the possible existence of an unknown entity in the unknown is tantamount to theistic thinking or irrational thinking in our empirical world. This kind of thinking will take us nowhere and will bring us nothing. This attitude is akin to that of the superstitious theist who believes that "Something" exists in the unknown. It is irrelevant to consider the possible existence of an unknown something in the infinite unknown in terms of our empirical knowledge of the known world.

Sincerely yours, G. Q.

From G. L. S. to G. Q.:

I STILL THINK that you are missing the point on the question of God's existence. If someone says "There is an apple on the table" and there isn't one there, we are entitled to say that he is lying or that he is having a hallucination. This is only because if there were an apple there we could all see it. Now this is the key to the whole problem. It may be summed up in the following principle: Lack of evidence for a proposition is only proof of the negation of the proposition if, were the proposition true, there would be evidence for it. In other words, if we can't sense something it only means that it doesn't exist if we necessarily could sense it if it did. Thus we cannot see the apple that the man signifies is there, and we conclude that he is lying or having a hallucination. This is right, because we would see the apple if it were there. *But we cannot assume that we could sense God if he existed.* Negative propositions are only self-evidently true when there is a limited field of reference. We can categorically say "There is not an elephant in this room" because if there were we would know about it. But we cannot say "There is not a god in the universe" because *we would not necessarily know about it if there were.* There may be a god in the universe, but we have never come across one. We cannot always assume that lack of evidence means that something does not exist. It may just be that we are very ignorant at the time. We may find out more later.

Your next angle. Of course primitive men invented the god idea, *but this fact does not mean that we can conclude that there is no entity that corresponds with the idea.* H. G. Wells invented the idea of people living on other heavenly bodies. This does not mean that there cannot be such people anywhere in the universe. H. G. Wells invented the idea—this does not necessarily mean it is false—it may be true; we'll have to wait and see. Belief in God is a superstition, because we have no evidence, but eventually we may discover the evidence and then it won't be a superstition any more.

Your next angle. Of course the universe is infinite, and we may never be able to understand the infinite, but this

cannot mean that God cannot exist. If a god exists and is infinite, we may never be able to understand him or know him. But his existence, if there is such, is not dependent upon the smallness of our minds. God may or may not exist. We cannot prove it either way. Lack of evidence doesn't prove it, and the fact that the idea of god was invented doesn't prove it either.

Very best wishes,

Yours sincerely, G.L.S.

From G. Q. to G. L. S.:

IN YOUR letter of June 29th, 1964, you said that even if there was a god in an unknown part of the universe, we would not know it. Hence the absence of proof of God, you said, would not necessarily show there was no god.

We are talking about some unknown god which we may call x-god for convenience. Both of us agree that the Christian God cannot exist, because His principal traits cancel one another. He cannot at the same time be all-powerful, all-kindness, and all-knowing. If God is all-kindness and all-knowing, He cannot be all-powerful, because He cannot abolish all the sufferings of humans. And if He is all-powerful and all-kindness, He cannot be all-knowing, because if He knows all the miseries of mankind He would abolish them.

Now let us return to the x-god. The questions: Why and how can we consider the possible existence of a so-called god with unknown traits in an unknown part of the universe? Tell this to a Spaniard and he will ask: "Have you gone loco?" An American will say: "Are you nuts?"

Our world is not the infinite universe; it is the finite planet Earth. It is absurd and irrelevant to consider the possible existence of an unknown entity with unknown traits in an unknown part of the universe. As empirical beings we are expected to be concerned only with empirical truths in our empirical world, planet Earth, by empirical means and in empirical terms. From day to day we push back the boundary of the unknown to enlarge our known world. We can be rational and logical only if we express ourselves in terms of and within the realm of present knowledge.

Sincerely yours, G. Q.

THEATRE CENSORSHIP

"It is a bit much that public money is being spent on employing a lot of serious gentlemen to cut cut words like 'Christ' and 'Pee' from plays in order to protect people who don't exist. Or if they do exist they don't have to go to the theatre and hear them."
—Peter Hall, Director of the Royal Shakespeare Company (*Daily Herald*, 27/7/64).

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and

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CORRESPONDENCE

"THE FREETHINKER"

Mr. E. O. James is disappointed with THE FREETHINKER and I, for one, am sorry to read this. He wonders why we exist at all. Let me try to tell him.

We are certainly aware of the "failure of religion." The point in publishing a specialised weekly paper is that although religion has "failed" it is still Established, heavily endowed and so outrageously supported by the BBC and the press that, although it is dead, it *appears* to be alive; and the general masses, being somewhat intellectually lazy, can scarcely tell the difference. THE FREETHINKER will justify its existence in its present form until organised religion is swept away.

Mr. James is entitled to his opinion about its qualities. I hold a different view, perhaps because I have read more than one sample copy. I have a feeling that he is seeking another kind of paper altogether but, although I read a great many, for the life of me I cannot think of one which would meet his demands. Perhaps there isn't one?

JESSE COLLINS.

EDUCATION AND MORALITY

Nigel H. Sinnott's article "Rights for Children" is pretty far fetched. For instance, how could it be possible for children to hear all points of view, and weigh them up objectively? Assuming this were possible it would most probably throw the children's minds into a state of confusion, rather than helping to educate them.

It would be very interesting to know what sort of morality Mr. Sinnott would have the children taught in schools.

Does he think that there exists a superior morality in the world which can transform character and redeem mankind?

IAN FRASER.

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