

**The Humanist World Weekly**Registered at the  
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FOUNDED 1881 by G. W. FOOTE

Friday,  
August 30, 1968**THE FREETHINKER'S FUTURE**

IT is a sad fact, but one I feel we should squarely face: for many years the FREETHINKER has run at a considerable financial loss and, if this persists, its days are numbered; it cannot continue to incur such losses indefinitely. If it is to survive, major changes of sorts must be introduced.

Each FREETHINKER makes about 7½d (taking donations to the Freethinker Fund, etc., into account) but *each costs about 1s 2½d to produce*. This approximates to receiving £1 for every £1 17s 6d we spend. The average sum gained each year from donations are about equal to one seventh of the annual loss.

So far, Secular Society Ltd. have subsidised the FREETHINKER—but it cannot continue to do this indefinitely. It is important that the general position be radically improved, and it is reasonable to recognise that radical changes may be necessary.

Over the past decade, the flux in circulation has been within about ten per cent of the mean circulation; for the FREETHINKER to break even, the circulation would require to be increased many, many times. As things are, to expect such increases may be unrealistic.

There is no cut-and-dried solution to the financial problem, though certain proposals may deserve serious consideration. As outgoing editor, I would like to put my own recommendations on record.

For the circulation to greatly improve a great improvement in the FREETHINKER itself is, I believe, necessary. At present, it is a flimsy paper desperately needing more substance. I would suggest the FREETHINKER be doubled in thickness (16 pages instead of the present 8), be doubled in price (1s instead of 6d), and be issued only once fortnightly. The annual subscription for a fortnightly of double thickness would be the same as for a weekly of present thickness.

This may seem drastic, but I suggest it is also realistic. Consider the advantages: there would be less expense in printing; postage to each subscriber would be reduced by half (at present, two FREETHINKERS can go through the post for the price of one); cost of all wrappers, labels, envelopes, etc., as well as dispatch-labour costs would be reduced; finally, the FREETHINKER would be a more substantial journal, able to accommodate long articles as well as a wide variety of shorter articles. At present, various factions jealously guard the available space; with twice as much space, a variety of material could be included, thus appealing to a wider readership.

It may be difficult to understand, but, though the editor would be handling twice the amount of material for each issue, he would have more time in which to give close

attention to the presentation of each. A weekly deadline is a real hindrance to radical improvements.

It may be objected that this is the first step in a monthly-quarterly sequence, but this obviously doesn't follow. It may be objected that it is an admission of the FREETHINKER'S gradual collapse, but it could also be interpreted as a realistic determination to cope with the deterioration. It may be objected that many readers have come to depend on a weekly FREETHINKER and would resent such a change; this we need not question, but it would be an absurd conceit to visualise the change bringing about serious 'withdrawal effects' in any reader. It may be objected that the FREETHINKER could no longer publish topical news items and comments; in fact, the change would mean that the copy would be topical once every two weeks instead of every week (the time-lag between deadline and publication date need not change).

Would such a change be a betrayal of the trust handed down by earlier editors who worked so hard to maintain a weekly? Is it very important to maintain this tradition? Our answers must depend on our interpretation of the founder's real hopes, and upon our individual respect for tradition. Personally, I have not found it desirable to care too much about tradition, though I recognise its importance to others. But, surely, the FREETHINKER'S founder, G. W. Foote, would have been more anxious for future editors to adjust to the times and circumstances (excepting ideological changes) in order to ensure the journal remains alive, than to let it die for the sake of any tradition he unconsciously initiated?

Foote, of course, had a weekly of 16 pages, and it is worth noting he would not have liked the 8 pages which appeared in 1942. On considering the alternatives before him (when an adjustment was necessitated by the first world war) he wrote (October 10, 1915) '... to reduce it to eight pages would make the paper look insignificant'—precisely the criticism most frequently levelled at the FREETHINKER!

If we cannot maintain a weekly journal of 16 pages, is it any more outrageous to change its frequency than its thickness? If there must be a tradition, why not one of bulk and quality rather than of frequency? But the real issue, as I see it, is to cope with the problems effectively and realistically; if necessary, letting any traditions go hang!

Whatever plan may emerge from a realistic appraisal of the situation, fear of change, and veneration of tradition (an odd feature in secularism), should not be permitted to obstruct its implementation, however radical the changes that are required.

# FREETHINKER

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

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## A REVIEW FROM FOREIGN PAPERS

Otto Wolfgang

### From the Canadian monthly magazine "Saturday Night"

IN the May issue, the Reverend Gordon Baker gets the 'impression that behind all the precious and pious talk about the "will of the Lord" there is an impious hope that such a gesture might salvage whatever prospect is left for the once honoured and powerful Christian Church'. What, he asks, do the churches expect from such a merger?

Is it some vague dream for the rebirth of an institution that will again grant prestige to its adherents and power to its leaders? Is it a last resort against an erosion of faith, at least in its traditional meaning, and for which the evidence is overwhelming? Perhaps it is simply for the very pedestrian reason of cold hard cash.

Church membership dwindles visibly and, left alone, the churches 'will pass out on a wave of synodical and conciliar resolutions designed to protect themselves from the winds of change'. So, at present, one can only hope for non-establishment—

... those voices that speak out without support of any official 'Christian' sanction and that seek to communicate love in their relationships with all men regardless of their so-called orthodoxy.

The March issue reviews a new book by a Jewish theologian, *After Auschwitz* by Richard L. Rubinstein, who cries out in agony because of the death of God. If it is true that God rewards those who obey him and punishes those who flout his commands, then six million Jews who died a cruel death in the camps were being punished by their God. 'God really died at Auschwitz' because in our time men have done to their fellow human beings what no god could have permitted to happen.

In the January issue, co-editor Peter Desbarats reviews the flood of 'smut press' in the pious parts of French-Canada where only a few years ago *Playboy* was still banned.

In 1968 not only are French-Canadian bunnies hopping all over *le Club Playboy* in downtown Montreal but many urban newsstands carry at least a dozen varieties of cheap made-in-Quebec tabloids to sex, crime, sadism, drugs, perversions and most of the other activities on the *verboten* list of the Holy Roman Catholic Church.

Yet to mention them is taboo. 'Even the priests have almost stopped talking about them. The powerful League of the Sacred Heart, which made a last-ditch attempt to stem the tide in 1958, seems to have given up'.

The writer then makes a most pertinent remark—

A living culture must produce, among other things, a certain proportion of smut. All great cultures have. . . . Therefore the fact that Quebec now produces its own smut in evidently viable forms indicates that Quebec is the home of a distinct culture; a popular culture rather than a thin layer of ballet companies and new concert halls.

No matter how deplorable this flood of obscenity might be in itself, the fact vouches for a cultural development of hopeful significance from the days when the Archbishop of Rimouski could threaten people who confessed to reading sexy articles and novels with the 'public penance' of Sunday exposure in the choir stall of his cathedral.

(Continued on back page)

## TO HELL WITH THE POPE

Peter Crommelin

IF I really believed in Hell, I certainly would not say that. While I am thankful to have escaped from his clutches, I regard the Pope as a most unfortunate individual. Moreover I would not choose to condemn anyone, however bad, to everlasting torments. But the Pope, who presumably does believe in Hell, feels it necessary to warn his subjects that there is danger for them in the use of contraceptives. It is difficult to understand why believing Papists should object to this solemn warning from the head of the Church.

The secular objection to religion will be neither increased nor diminished by the current controversy within the Roman Catholic community. As militant unbelievers we are eager to strike at the very heart of religion the existence of God. Until this existence has been fully verified, we are not prepared to subject our conduct to any authority that claims to have a divine origin. Until the existence of God has been verified beyond the shadow of a reasonable doubt, any authority that claims to have come 'from above' must be dismissed as a bogus authority. It may well be that the contraception issue has caused many Catholics to entertain doubts about the nature of that authority that hitherto they have accepted as infallible, supernatural and divine in origin. The *Times* of Tuesday, August 13, reporting on the International Congress on Mental Health, quoted Professor G. M. Carstairs, president of the World Federation of Mental Health, as addressing the meeting in the following words: "Recently the Pope has told his followers that it is legitimate to practise family limitation by using our medical knowledge in order to exploit the so-called 'safe-period' but not to use other medical knowledge that permits much more certain control of fertility". The Professor goes on to say that he personally shares "the concern of many people both within and without the Catholic Church about the adverse effects this teaching may have both upon world-wide campaigns for family limitation but also upon personal relationships within the family".

None the less, in spite of these 'adverse effects' the Pope has given immense publicity to the fact that there are far more effective ways than the 'safe period' to enable the sexes to enjoy sexual intercourse without compelling the female partner to endure the labours of childbirth, and without contributing to a disorderly reproduction of the species.

Thanks to science, sexual intercourse can become one of the most innocent of the simple pleasures of life, and there seems no convincing reason why this pleasure should result in any physical or psychological damage to the individual or to society. Far from having too much sexual self-indulgence, a great many (perhaps even a majority) are sex starved. Certainly the rules of the Roman Church are 'holy men and women' headed by a 'Holy Father' who are all of them sex-starved individuals, whose barren lives are far more 'unnatural' than those who enjoy a happy sex life assisted by contraceptives. Since the Pope has appealed to the Natural Law\* let him stand condemned by the facts of nature. Pious homilies on the nature of pure and holy love seem totally irrelevant to the actual physical facts of life as this must be lived by the generality of mankind here on earth. The basic fallacy that destroys the truth of all Christian teaching whether catholic or protestant is the division of human nature into soul and body, the soul being venerated as a thing immortal, while the body is treated with utter contempt as a thing of no importance. As a

consequence of this division of our nature, the full enjoyment of mortal life is made inaccessible to the divided individual.

Most certainly the time has come when a moral distinction must be made between the rightness of enjoying a free sex life and the wrongness of adding to an already overloaded economic system by ill-considered reproduction. It is no act of kindness to bring children into the world unless proper provision can be made for their physical well-being. It would be infinitely better for Roman Catholics to commit 'mortal sin' by the use of contraceptives than permit such cruelty to children. Even celibacy would be better than that. But there is no real reason why there should be either celibacy or children. Sex pleasure can now be placed on exactly the same level as eating, drinking or physical exercise.

And so once again I say 'to hell with the pope' which means simply that I regard the papal teaching on birth control as completely damnable, but no worse than his teaching on many other subjects including his own infallibility.

Perhaps the worst danger of the Pope is that he may exert a corrupting influence on secular governments, ever eager to find pretexts for restricting the liberty of the individual. I hope that this will not happen. The secular hope still remains very strong that science will grow wiser and stronger, and that religion will perish from the earth.

\* NOTE: The Papal concept of 'Natural Law' is derived not from any direct study or observation of any natural process. It is derived from the study of theology, i.e. the opinions of theologians—a queer basis indeed for the formulation of any natural law.

### CORRECTION

THE Obituary which appeared last week to Mr C. H. Smith, was followed by the signature 'W. Miller, Vice-President, NSS'. Mr Miller is not, however, a Vice-President of the NSS, and we apologise for any embarrassment this may have caused him.

## END OF TERM

THIS ISSUE marks the end of my term as Editor of the FREETHINKER. The next issue (September 6) will be under the capable guidance of the new editor, David Reynolds.

On the whole, I have thoroughly enjoyed my term with this journal, partly because it is wholly involved with the freethought movement, partly because this particular editorship has a number of exciting challenges for each new editor, and very largely because it has brought me into contact with the contributors and with you readers. An editor is absolutely lost without support from contributors and readers, and for your valued and indispensable support I am wholeheartedly grateful. Thank you all. I don't need to remind you that David Reynolds will need your support as much as every previous editor (and, in the early days especially, will need your contributions as fast as you can get them to him) nor, I am sure, will you let him down.

I have had the pleasure of working for two weeks with David (while I prepared my final issues he was preparing his first) and, through personal contact with him, am more than ever assured that the FREETHINKER will be in good hands. I think his editorship will herald new and exciting changes which will gladden all those who wish the FREETHINKER a viable future.

KARL HYDE.

## THE SOLAR SYSTEM—THE UNIVERSE & MAN

Bernard T. Rocca, Sr.

LET us review what we have learned about ourselves our surroundings, our past as available to us in the written word, and our far greater past made available to us by our geologists, paleontologists and anthropologists studying the vast sedimentary deposits which are, to them, the book of life of millions of years ago. Let us call on our astronomers to tell us of our solar system and the vast universe beyond so that we may see ourselves in proper perspective. This is so necessary for we know that until Galileo and Copernicus' time men had the mistaken idea that the earth was the centre of all things and he was the chosen one of creation.

Later let us call on the zoologist, the men of all branches of science so that we may get a clear picture of not only the past but our present.

Starting with our earth, we know it is nearly eight-thousand miles in diameter, it revolves on its tilted axis every twenty-four hours to give us our day and night and it travels through space at the great speed of 18 miles per second on its nearly circular orbit of the Sun—some 93 million miles distant. We also know that the Moon is a satellite of the earth, orbiting about the earth at a distance of 238 thousand miles every four weeks.

Between us and the sun are two smaller planets, Mercury at a distance of 36 million miles from the sun and Venus, almost as large as the earth, orbiting the sun at a distance of 67 million miles.

Now, going beyond the earth we find Mars, a planet about 4,200 miles in diameter, at a distance of 142 million miles from the sun. The length of its yearly orbit of the sun is 687 days. Going still further out in space we next come to enormous Jupiter, 87,000 miles in diameter with a year equal to twelve of our years. It is 480 million miles from the sun and has an estimated temperature of minus 250° F.

Then we reach Saturn, out 886 million miles, which is also a large planet, 22,000 miles in diameter with its three concentric rings and a year equal to almost thirty of our years.

The three remaining are Uranus, Neptune and Pluto, the latter 3 billion, 670 million miles from the sun with an orbital period of 248 years. This planet is so far out that it was only discovered in 1930.

The distance out to Pluto is far beyond human conception but what is beyond Pluto? More inconceivable distance until we come to the first star in our galaxy, Alpha Centauri, at a distance of four light years, or, roughly 26 trillion miles. Light travels 186,000 miles per second, or almost to the moon in one second but it takes four years at this speed to reach the first star! And beyond that distances become even more inconceivable. The larger the telescope the greater number of stars become visible at distances out to hundreds of millions of light years, and the estimated number of the stars is at least *one hundred thousand million billion*—and many of these thousands of times as large as our sun, which in turn is one-million times the size of our earth!

Now that we have a proper realisation of our size and place in the universe let us return to a more detailed study of our earth.

The physicist has determined the weight of the earth and much of its internal structure by the study of shock waves. The gravity of the internal core is equal to that of iron, many times as heavy as the rock layer of which we are familiar. This rock layer is as thin as an egg shell is to an egg, in comparison. We also know that below the rock layer the heat is sufficient to reduce the rock to a viscous state and the centre is, undoubtedly, molten.

The geologists had studied the deposits of sedimentary rocks laid down in the oceans, and these often uplifted into mountain ranges and had estimated the age of the earth as, perhaps, two to three billion years. Now it has been discovered that uranium minerals through radiation, disintegrate at a known unchanging rate, so these minerals give us an accurate time scale. The oldest rocks yet discovered in North America are approximately three billion years old. Since much time must have elapsed before these minerals were formed it is now estimated that the earth is probably over four billion years old.

One final word about the planets in our solar system. Since the orbits of all of them are nearly in the same plane it surely indicates a common or related origin the nature of which is open to speculation. One theory is that a wandering star from outer space passed so close to our sun as to draw out into space a large amount of material from the sun by its great gravitational force—and this material was later condensed into the nine planets in our solar system. Another theory is that there was a violent explosion in the sun, sending out long filaments of incandescent gases which cooled to form the planets in our solar system. Certain it is that the birth of these planets was a violent cataclysm of nature.

Due to stresses in the earth's crust caused by its great internal heat, mountain ranges have been forced up from ocean depths; have been eroded and after deposition in the oceans, uplifted again and again. The geologists and paleontologists have studied and classified the rocks of these mountains and have been able to tell us much of the world's history.

The oldest rocks show no evidence of any living plant or animal. Later the sedimentary rocks begin to show evidence of life on our planet—very simple forms. The later rock show more complex creatures lived in those distant times and so on until a complete history of life forms—many now extinct—tells us the story of the ever upward evolutionary progress of living creatures. From the simple unicellular plant and animal (hardly distinguishable one from the other) the animal chain produced simple crustacean, complex crustacean (cartilaginous boned fish) true fish, amphibian, reptile and finally warm blooded mammals to one branch of which, the primates, man belongs.

How life began will, of course, never be known though our scientists are getting ever closer to the creation of life in the laboratory. It probably began by some fortuitous happening—in an atmosphere very different from that of today, where heat from volcanoes, or lightning, created from the primordial sea, simple life forms with the power of replicating themselves. Surely no supernatural power would start life in such primitive forms, requiring hundreds of millions of years to reach the life forms we know today. The lifetime of man is measured in thousands of years which

is as nothing compared to the 75 million years that the giant reptiles ruled the world—only to disappear. Surely no all-powerful, omniscient god would waste 75 million years in the creation of the various dinosaurs and then wipe out his handiwork. Common sense tells us this is not the answer, so we must turn to evolution as the guiding force in the development of all living things. The principles of evolution put forward so ably over a century ago by Charles Darwin, including survival of the fittest, natural selection and the effect of environmental forces, have been sustained by rigorous study of the past century.

And now it has been discovered that man first evolved from a branch of the anthropoid line in Africa where fossil remains of apes were followed by those of protomen and then *homo sapiens*, as we know him today.

Scientists and thinkers of today tell us much of man's development along purely mammalian lines and our inheritance of characteristics that reflect our past. Time does not permit going into detail on the above but if one has any doubts, reading the books given at the end of this article, are most convincing.

Now we look at our western world of today with this background. One would expect all civilised man would look at the picture in a rational, logical manner. He has seen the wonders of evolution working for hundreds of millions of years; he realises that he is mammalian, is related to all other animals, but most closely to the primates. The scientists point out this relationship so succinctly by stating that all vertebrate animals have forelimbs that may be used for running, jumping, swimming or flying and that the bones from the tip of the extremity to the body may be matched bone for bone whether the animal be frog, seal, turtle, bat, rabbit or man! The only logical explanation of this homologous bone structure is that all are descended from a common ancestor, aeons ago. Few there are who realise the almost infinite time it has taken life forms to reach their present state of development. A century is a long time to us, but our earth has been here at least 40 million centuries and the development of life forms have been in process for, perhaps, half of this time.

White man has inherited many characteristics of his carnivore ancestors, he has, nevertheless, developed far due to his brain development, his inquisitive nature, his erect posture freeing his hands for useful work. His power of speech, the development of a written language, has led to great technologic progress. He has learned much of the laws of nature and how to use them for his benefit. He is master of his environment. He has developed machines for his many uses; has learned to fly through the air and ply boats on, and under, water. He is master of all other species of living creatures—his only challenge from others of his own species.

Despite all of this great progress the vast majority still cling to a belief in the supernatural as evidenced by belonging to this or that religion.

In the distant past, of several thousand years ago, religions developed in Egypt, Babylon, Carthage, Sumeria, Rome, Greece, India—in fact everywhere. All had many gods to whom they offered sacrifices to appease them and gain their favour. Evil happenings were ascribed to devils. Still later when Cortez conquered Mexico he found worship of pagan gods very strong, and terrible human sacrifices were offered up to these gods. Still later, when Captain Cook discovered the Tonga Islands in 1773, he found the

typical South Sea religion of worship of many natural phenomena—and the fear of the devils who were all supposed to live on one island named "Taboo".

According to what has come down to us a wandering tribe of Israelites, headed by Abram, or later Abraham, nearly 4,000 years ago, was approached by a God who claimed to be the one and only God. He proposed to Abraham to enter into a covenant whereby Abraham was to forsake all idols, all pagan gods and forever remain faithful to the one God, and he and his forbears were to be the "Chosen Race" for all time.

The story of the enslavement of the Israelites, or Jews, and their exodus from Egypt is well known—but historically the time is unknown and what is truth and what is myth or legend is an open question.

The coming of Christ is very much in the same category. Historical facts are completely lacking and all we know of him comes from the Gospels which were written much later. It is claimed that these later detailed writings of the life of Christ were "God-inspired" and are referred to as "Revelations". Why the supposed son of God would leave no records is a mystery that the Christians are still trying to explain. Albert Schweitzer stated he could not reconcile truth and honesty with Christianity so gave up Christianity for a religion based on "Reverence for Life".

The idea of a God, Creator of the vast universe, having a personal, fatherly interest in each and every human seems utterly preposterous especially when we see a Hitler take millions of innocent men, women and children to the gas chambers without God doing anything to save the innocent.

Reason tells us that such a God just does not exist. Thousands of similar happenings can be found to further this view. The great loss of life in the volcanic explosions from Pompei, Krakatoa to Palee cannot be rationalised as the work of a compassionate God.

The Bible—the so-called 'word of God' is in many instances utterly impossible. The story of Noah and his Ark, the Garden of Eden, the Tower of Babel; the exorcising out of the bodies of the ill of devils, bespeaks the ignorance of the times. There are some parts of the Bible that may be uplifting, but there is far more than is utter filth. That many of today could believe in such writings as the 'word of God' is unbelievable, particularly when we know the story of the evolution of man. Man is conceived, is born, he breathes, eats, drinks, develops and finally dies, just as do all other mammalian forms of life. We all have an intelligence, soul or spirit, if you wish, while we are living—but when the life processes cease so does that intelligence, soul or spirit.

We must recognise this—that we only live once—that we must do all possible to make this a better world for all of us.

Contrast this with what the so-called "Great Religions" of today are teaching and doing. The Jew proclaims his God and worships Him for freeing him from slavery—completely forgetting that He permitted the Jew to be enslaved in the first place. The Jew has been the object of untold persecution by the Babylonians, the Egyptians and finally by the Christians. Despite this persecution the Jew still worships his God, builds temples in His honour and worships as he did two or three thousand years ago.

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## ROBERTSON AND THE NON-HISTORICITY THEORY

Miriam Allen de Ford

OURS is an age of extreme specialisation. Especially in science, but to an appreciable extent in every branch of scholarship, we tend to day to know more and more about less and less. The time has gone by when, with Francis Bacon in the 16th century, or Pierre Bayle in the 17th, a man could "take all learning to be his province".

John Mackinnon Robertson was almost the last of the universal experts, the encyclopedists, the synthetic as opposed to the analytic thinkers. Such men have not a mere superficial patina of information on various subjects; in the many fields they undertake to cover they are profound and speak with authority. John Mackinnon Robertson was of their tribe. Only to list his published books would vindicate this claim for him: they ranged from literature to economics, from sociology to history; and in all these fields they plunged to the depth of his subject-matter. As Harold Laski said: "It is difficult to know what field of humanism was outside his competence". ("Humanism" in this context does not mean today's scientific or religious Humanism . . . though indeed Robertson was a master in this area above all—but is used in the older sense of the study of the humanities, as in Robertson's own *Modern Humanism*, which deals with Carlyle, John Stuart Mill, Emerson, Matthew Arnold, Ruskin and Spencer.)

As is not altogether unusual of one who became so universal a scholar, Robertson was practically self-educated; and as might almost be expected in the Britain of his era, he was a Scotsman—born (on November 14, 1856), the second son of a family whose financial circumstances necessitated thrift and austerity, but to whom cultivation of the mind and the practice of thought were vital. Poor though they may have been, they managed to send John away to school at Stirling, "the Key to the Highlands", between Edinburgh and Glasgow. He left school at 13 and that was the end of his formal training, but it had laid the foundation for the massive education he gave himself.

His birthplace was the village of Brodick on the Isle of Arran, a mountainous island, 11 by 20 miles in extent, at the mouth of the Firth of Clyde—a place full of memories and remains of Viking raiders who stayed on, and of the great Robert Bruce. Though for exactly one-half of his life Robertson lived in London, and died there, he never lost either his Scottish burr or his Scottish nature; its forthrightness, integrity, and candour, and it may be added its occasional contentiousness.

He was only 22 when his first writings attracted enough attention and admiration to secure him a post on the *Edinburgh Evening News*, not as a cub reporter, but as a leader (editorial) writer. The paper apparently valued the freshness of youth; the other leader writer was William Archer, the Scottish-born critic who introduced Ibsen to English readers, and who, only two months Robertson's senior, had preceded him on the *Evening News* by a year.

Already Robertson had become an avowed free thinker, and the next important person to be attracted by his writing was Charles Bradlaugh, who in 1884, when Robertson was 28, invited him to join the staff of his *National Reformer*, the leading spokesman for Rationalism in England. When Bradlaugh died in 1891, Robertson took over as sole editor, and when the journal itself expired two years later, he founded the *Free Review* as its successor

and edited it until 1895. He also wrote Part II of the authorised biography of Bradlaugh (Part I being the work of that pioneer's daughter, Hypatia Bradlaugh Bonner).

Bradlaugh did not win his long struggle to be sworn in as a member of Parliament until 1886 (it had started in 1880), and Robertson, of course, was closely associated with him during the last years of that famous fight for religious freedom. He himself ran unsuccessfully from Northampton as an Independent in 1895, but in 1906 he was elected as a Liberal from the heavily industrial Tyneside division. He remained in the House of Commons until he was finally defeated for re-election in 1918, in the general upset at the end of World War I. From 1911 to 1915 he was parliamentary secretary to the Board of Trade, appointed by Herbert Asquith (later Earl of Oxford and Asquith), the then Prime Minister. After Robertson retired from this office he was made a member of the Privy Council.

Robertson, with his experience and ability as a public speaker, and with his reputation as a man of marked erudition and strong convictions, could hardly have failed to become an influential Member of Parliament. By the time of his election in 1906, he was known as a lecturer, for from the ending of the *Free Review* in 1895, he had earned his living by free lance speaking and writing. He lectured on literary, economic, and sociological topics all over the British Isles, and in 1897-98 made an extended lecture tour in the United States, which was one of the high points of his career, he had a special interest in this country, for his wife, born Maude Mosher, was a native of Des Moines, Iowa; they were married in 1893 and had a son and a daughter.

In 1900, during the Boer War, Robertson was sent to South Africa by the London *Morning Leader* to investigate the operation of martial law there and the scandal of the 'concentration camps' in which captured Boers were incarcerated. That, however, was his last newspaper assignment; thenceforth books, pamphlets and articles poured from him at a dizzying speed—yet every one of them was founded on long, intensive study and research. To quote Laski, his disciple and good friend: "He wrote the two classic histories of Free Thought (1899 and 1929). He was recognised as one of the leading scholars of Shakespeare of his time. He was a literary critic of distinction. . . . He did work of great importance in social science. . . . It is, indeed, difficult to know in what field he did not excel". A simple list of his books even outside his own special province of religious history and criticism would be astonishing in its variety.

But it is his labours in the field of religion and related topics that concern us here—Robertson's *Short History of Christianity* is a true classic. He wrote also *Studies in Religious Fallacy*, *The Dynamics of Religion*, *Essays in Ethics*, and an expository book entitled simply *Rationalism*. But the cream and crown of his achievements were four volumes in two related parts: *Christianity and Mythology and Pagan Christs*, and *The Historical Jesus and The Jesus Problem*.

These four books gave J. M. Robertson his outstanding position as perhaps the greatest of the proponents of the 'non-historicity theory' which claims that the Jesus of the New Testament never existed, and that Christianity itself is a direct descendent of, or close kin to, other Near East religions and mythologies.

Robertson was far from the first to adopt the non-historicity doctrine; in both Great Britain and Germany, and to some extent in France and the United States, it already had a literature of its own when he first approached it. But Robertson, it is generally conceded, was the first to discern the startling fact that (in his own words) "the central narrative of the Gospel biography . . . is neither a contemporary report nor a historical tradition, but the simple transcript of a mystery drama".

Elsewhere he says: "It was only after generations of scrutiny that modern Rationalism began to doubt the actuality of the Teacher it had unhesitatingly surmised behind the impossible demigod of the records. The first, indeed, to see in him sheer myth were the students who recognised the astrological matter in the story. . . . The older portions of the Pauline epistles show no knowledge of any Jesuine biography or any Jesuine teaching. We are thus left facing a MYTH, not a history, a Jesus who compares not with Mohammed but with Dionysos and Osiris".

It is this thesis, based on enormous research and convincing argument, that forms the heart of these four seminal and crucial volumes. Robertson is objective, logical, dispassionate (except in refutation of bigoted or superficial opponents), and profoundly convictive. Later discoveries, such as the revelations of the Dead Sea Scrolls, only tend to confirm his findings. He died on January 5, 1933, but his work has not dated and though often attacked has never been satisfactorily controverted.

Not all contemporary students of the subject, even those who are Humanists or Rationalists, accept the non-historicity view, of course. The argument still continues; but I venture to prophesy that in the end John M. Robertson will be recognised as one of the great founders of what will be then the generally accepted understanding of the origin and history of the Christian religion. Such commentators as Indro Montanelli (*Romans without Laurels*) who states blithely: "For a couple of centuries the authenticity of this event [the birth of the Gospel Jesus] was put in doubt by a school of critics who tried to deny the existence of Jesus. Now all doubts have been removed", simply display their ignorance of the evidence. There may yet be cogent arguments to upset some of Robertson's conclusions; but

if so they will be found among scholars like himself, not among those unwilling to follow the counsel of Thomas Henry Huxley to "sit down before a fact as a little child, and be prepared to give up every preconceived notion". Thanks largely to Robertson, the non-historicity of Jesus should no longer be considered merely as a theory: it is at least a hypothesis, and some day it may be a certainty.

There is no need to outline here Robertson's reasoning or his reasons: he can speak for himself. His concept is his own, but far from being offered as simple personal opinion only, bolstered by data from Biblical mythological and archeological sources from Africa, North and South America, the Pacific Islands, and Asia, as well as from the more familiar Israel, Rome and Greece, and is further sustained by citations from other modern scholars. Seen in this fresh context, throwing new light on old pictures, the sheer volume of evidence is overwhelmingly persuasive.

I suggest that anyone who has read little or nothing in this field open his Bible and read the familiar narratives in Matthew 26, Mark 14, and Luke 22: after he has read Robertson, he will never view them, or the following chapters in each of these Gospels, with exactly the same eye again.

I hope that newcomers to Robertson may also read his *Short History of Christianity*. Most of his books, unfortunately, are now out of print, but the more important ones are in any well-stocked college or public library.

Since Robertson has never been forgotten by students of the history of religion and of Biblical criticism, or by dedicated Secularists in general, he cannot be called one of the great forgotten thinkers, either in Britain or elsewhere in the English-speaking world. But he has been unjustly neglected in recent years (and unreasonably attacked by some critics, e.g. Joseph McCabe), and some of his most original deductions have been mistakenly ascribed to others. He deserves better posterity.

In his own words, "The two problems, 'What really happened?' and 'How came it to happen?'" must be faced with the same loyalty to truth". He did so face them, and in my opinion, he found the true answers.

(Acknowledgments to *The American Rationalist*.)

## THE SOLAR SYSTEM—THE UNIVERSE & MAN

(Continued from page 276)

The Christians joined the Jew in the worship of one God and added to this, belief in a supposed Saviour, Christ, son of God, with a human mother! The story of Christ's life and crucifixion, to, in some mysterious way, "save" all mankind, is well known—but cannot be substantiated historically.

One cannot but wonder at the leaders of the Jews, the Catholics and Protestants preaching religious "truths" which are simply unproven myths that have come down to us from the ignorant, superstitious and fearful past. If God does not exist these religions become a sham and disgrace. To build tabernacles, churches and basilicas in honour of an unproven God is hard to reconcile with the known facts. And to solicit funds to assure the contributors' entrance into an imagery 'heaven' is far from honest. Men who call themselves 'holy men' in their regal vestments have much to ask themselves. After all they are

mere humans and the assumption of the powers of forgiveness and blessings is an affront to one and all—until they have some proof of the truth of what they are preaching. Any person with an objective questioning mind simply cannot accept the so-called 'Revelations' giving details of Christ's supposed life, any more than he could accept the mythical stories of Abraham and Moses given us by the Jews. Let us stick to facts and honesty always.

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(Acknowledgments to *Progressive World*, April, 1968.)

## Letters to the Editor

### Influence and circulation

WHILST I do not wish to become involved in a drawn-out controversy within your columns I feel I must clarify my position following M. J. O'Carroll's criticism of my letter of August 2.

I agree, of course, that we as Humanists should fight to abolish religious indoctrination in schools, the influence of the Church on the lives of non-Christians and that we should do our utmost to eradicate superstition and irrationality in society.

I believe one important way to effectively achieve these aims is to increase the influence and circulation of the FREETHINKER and, thereby, indirectly, the influence of Humanist thought upon society. I do not believe that the FREETHINKER is carrying out this objective as effectively as it should. For the most part it 'preaches' to the converted by informing its readership, usually confirmed freethinkers, of the evils of Christianity.

The FREETHINKER, in my opinion could influence many more people by adopting a more flexible editorial policy. It should of course still be edited from the Secular Humanist viewpoint and be deeply involved in publicising Humanist action on a local, national and international scale. In addition to this I think it should carry articles of a more general and radical nature which may only indirectly mirror the Secular Humanist philosophy.

By throwing its weight behind battles for a new and more humane society (humanistic) it will, I think attract not only an increased Humanist and Christian readership but, more important, readers with no definite philosophy or affiliation.

I believe that the only way the influence of the FREETHINKER and the Secular Humanist viewpoint can be increased is by attracting and influencing this type of readership. This cannot be done by publishing a paper with a staple diet of anti-Christian propaganda.

CLIVE H. GODFREY.

### Religious education

ALTHOUGH as a liberal Christian I often disagree with certain Humanist views, I enjoy reading the FREETHINKER in my local library, and I thought the article by Ray Bott on Religious Education in schools (August 16) absolutely first class. I remember with pleasure the address Mr Bott gave at the BHA 'open day' on this subject last autumn when, together with Edward Blishen and others, he used impeccable educational arguments to demolish the vague and delusional reasoning employed by many Christians to preserve the *status quo*.

As a student of educational theory and practice I do not think Mr Bott's case can be faulted. He has a Humanist bias, obviously, but it does not obtrude into his educational points in the amazing way that a Christian bias overloads such presentations of the opposite view as that of, say, May and Johnston. I should like to think that many Christians would come to adopt the kind of open-ended view advocated in this article, but when I think how many blindly reject the implications of what Goldman's researches have clearly exposed and how many clergy with a maximum of dogmatic intolerance and a minimum knowledge of educational theory have considerable influence in high quarters, I do not feel very hopeful.

With thanks for this article and best wishes for your efforts to clarify thought on issues like this.

RICHARD COLLEDGE.

### Rev. J. J. Thompson

THE Rev. J. J. Thompson alleges (August 16) that 'the Humanists' implied that they had a monopoly on independent thinking when approached with his idea for a secular, Philosophian Church.

He did write to the British Humanist Association. I have not got my reply to hand, but can assure FREETHINKER readers that its tenor was just that there were quite enough humanist organisations already. If I did not jump for joy when I heard of his project, it was because I remembered that Stanton Coit had tried to do the same thing sixty years ago.

I think that we can leave the reform of the churches mostly to their dwindling adherents; the humanist movement needs to address itself to that vast body of citizens to whom churches no longer mean a thing.

MICHAEL LINES,

General Secretary, BHA.

## A REVIEW FROM FOREIGN PAPERS

(Continued from page 274)

### From the Swiss "Freidenker"

After the Munich verdict confiscating copies of *Fanny Hill*, the Chief Lector of the *Suhrkamp Verlag*, Frankfurt and Main, requested the confiscation of the Bible as highly pornographic literature likely to pervert the young.

Papers in the French-speaking part of Switzerland reported that, in Geneva, 22 students of theology and novices refused to be ordained as clerics. Church attendance fell to a mere 6-7 per cent, and the refusal of many to pay church taxes resulted in mounting deficits for the Church in Geneva. The more people come to rely on science, the more they find that there is no longer any room for God in our modern life.

A special article deals with the confessions of an active missionary (in *Kirchenblatt für die reformierte Schweiz*):

We no longer come to the heathen from the 'pure' and Christian West; our own world has gone to pieces and would require the same missionary activity which we offer to the people abroad. However, what right have we to preach in lands where people have come to suspect us to be not so much interested in extending the borders of Christianity but rather those of Capitalism and Exploitation.

### From the Austrian "Freidenker"

In Jena (East Germany) there exists a Chair for Scientific Atheism at the Friedrich Schiller University. From their Report, April 1967, the paper extensively quotes Professor Dr Olof Klohr on the attitude of Socialism towards Religion and Atheism.

Atheism, he writes, as a reaction to religion, cannot exist independently from it and therefore will disappear together with the religious illusions. Consequently, it is not enough to disappoint religious people with a purely negative propaganda without, at the same time, showing them our positive attitude of thinking and acting in a better society. Only by showing them the dialectical unity of Atheism and Marxism can we prove why Religion is unable to solve the real problems of society in modern life. Apart from the vested interests there exist within the bonds of religious indoctrination people who are prepared to fight for peace and progress not of religious doctrines but their sober apprehension of science and social facts if we can prove them the reactionary class character of their beliefs. This is the task of Freethought organisation, not of the State (notably the Socialist State, since the Capitalist State is interested in Religion as a means of perpetuating the *status quo*). Administrative coercion cannot extinguish the popular *want* for religious comfort. For a long time to come, Christianity and Marxism will coexist in socialist countries, but in the end social necessities will give Atheism the undisputed victory.

## OBITUARY

JOHN SALISBURY RUSSELL, freethinker and atheist, a member of the Workers' Educational Association and of the Manchester Astronomical Association, died, aged 75 years, on August 4.

Mr Russell and his wife regularly attended the meetings of the Manchester Branch of the NSS. He was a man of wide interests and held pacifist views which led him, during the first world war, to a term of imprisonment.

The committal was at Brackley (Manchester) Crematorium on August 7, when a tribute was paid to his memory by William Collins, Vice-President of the NSS. We extend our sympathy to his widow.