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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Calvin's God Migrates to Africa

IN the year 1536, that is, 19 years after Martin Luther had first fired the mine of the Protestant Reformation at Wittenberg, there appeared a small work at Basle by a French author, Jean Calvin. This little work, subsequently much enlarged in succeeding editions, bore the title "Institutes of the Christian Religion," and it quickly became the official text-book of the religious revolutionaries of the day.

Unlike Luther, who was a man of moods and primarily a religious demagogue, Calvin's was a cold intelligence and that of a clear systematic theologian renowned for his merciless logic. Furthermore, he was a classical scholar and a master of lucid French prose.

He began his career as a humanist and an opponent of religious persecution. But that was in France when his views were still those of a persecuted minority. Later on, when once in power in Geneva, it is common knowledge that he changed his views (and his actions) upon this question.

The "Institutes" cannot be said to have been a very original work. Calvin introduced no new ideas into Christian theology. All that he did was to develop in modern form and a systematic manner those ideas of predestination and divine "election" which had been the hard core of the theology of St. Augustine in the fifth century, and which are to be found in the "Pauline" Epistle to the Romans. A doctrinal sequence which its French exponent summed up in the famous formula: "Some he hath predestined to eternal salvation, and some to eternal damnation." This was the essence of what Calvin himself described as the "horrible decree" of predestination.

However, the grim theology of Calvin took on. In particular, what we may term in modern language as the revolutionary "Left" of the day, were convinced that they were predestined to victory over their great enemy and persecutors, the Church of Rome and its secular allies. Consequently, Calvinism soon became the accredited gospel of the religious and social reformers of the day. Geneva, Calvin's headquarters, became (again in modern language) the "Moscow" of the sixteenth century, the totalitarian theocracy of Calvin clashed head on with the totalitarian theocracy of Rome, the "Institutes" became the "Das Kapital," and Calvin himself the "Karl Marx" of the Reformation.

A modern publicist has aptly summarised the historical effects of Calvinism as follows:—

"It was Calvinism that founded a republic in Holland in the teeth of savage Church hostility implemented by Alva's cruelties, it was Calvinism that created Scottish intransigent Presbyterianism and the Covenanting spirit, it was Calvinism that created the republican spirit in England of the seventeenth century." (Cp., J. C. Hardwick—"Totalitarianism," page 13.)

However, once in the saddle, a subtle change came over Calvinism. From an iconoclastic, it became a conserva-

tive movement. This obviously follows logically from the nature of Predestination itself. When once victory has been finally achieved, perfection has been reached and obviously, one cannot improve upon perfection: the world looks so different *after* dinner. As a necessary result of this logical process, Calvinism in recent times has become the very synonym of, not only religious, but of social and intellectual reaction.

Two examples of the above must suffice: we recall the witch burning, heresy-hunting, sex-obsessed, New England Calvinists of Nathaniel Hawthorne's great novel, "The Scarlet Letter." Our second example is taken from the English Calvinistic regime of the mid-seventeenth century, where even the generally sympathetic Macaulay was constrained to admit in an immortal epigram: "The Puritans objected to bear-baiting, not because it gave pain to the bear, but because it gave pleasure to the spectators."

To-day, Calvinism has fallen from its ancient seat. In America, a weak-kneed survival still exists precariously in the Middle West. And in Europe only the old fear of "Rome Rule" across the border preserves the precarious rule of the still largely Orange and Calvinistic Protestants in Northern Ireland; "Six counties elevated to the status of a nation" as it has been aptly termed. Incidentally, three of the counties have just returned Catholic majorities in the recent Ulster General Election.

However, when at its last gasp in Europe and America, Calvinism has discovered a final stronghold, where predestinarian theology is now put into operation in a manner that Calvin himself never surpassed. We refer, of course, to the Union of South Africa, now ruled by Dr. Malan, the Calvinist ex-minister, who is putting into force with a vengeance, a racial theory based logically upon predestination and Divine Election which recalls the palmiest days of the Calvinist theocracy in Geneva and Boston.

It is, perhaps, to the point, to recall in the above connection that Calvin himself began his literary career with a commentary on the Roman author Seneca: the author, one may recall, of the historic adage "out of Africa something new is always coming." Only now the "something new" is already rather ancient.

Ever since the Boer War (1899-1902) the defeated Boers, the descendants of the first Dutch Calvinist colonists of the seventeenth century have been attempting a "comeback" at the expense both of their English conquerors in that war, and the Negro majority in South Africa. The Dutch Calvinists, inspired by the "Chosen Race" theories expounded in their infallible code-book, the Hebrew Old Testament, have always treated the native races with an arrogant racial brutality that recalls and even surpasses that of Hitler and his unlamented *Herrenvolk*.

The victory of Dr. Malan and his Ultra-Nationalists last April has successfully completed this racial and religious revival. Unlike his also Dutch predecessor,

General Smuts, Dr. Malan is a backveldt Boer, a fanatical adherent of the Chosen Race theory, and a dour Calvinist. Whereas General Smuts, despite his deplorable racist legislation, was at least a man of culture and a statesman of world outlook, Dr. Malan represents the narrowest outlook of seventeenth century Calvinism at its worst. Under his rule South Africa has stepped back to the days of New England under its Calvinist theocracy depicted in Hawthorne's novel. The spirit which committed Servetus to the flames in Geneva now rules a Sovereign State of the British Commonwealth.

This antediluvian fanaticism is most glaringly indicated in the current attitude of the Dutch Government of South Africa to the Native question, both Negro and Indian. For Dr. Malan is an adherent and ex-minister of the Dutch Calvinist Church of South Africa which, not so long ago, went on record with the historic declaration that negro slavery was an institution of Divine origin.

The whole present practice of Dr. Malan's Government constitutes a current sermon on this theme, for the two million whites in South Africa rule the eight million negroes and the half million Indians upon strictly Biblical lines: the slave races are merely "hewers of wood and drawers of water" for the Divinely elected white rulers. The whole practice of the Government affords a spectacular demonstration of predestinarian theology. "Some" (the White Rulers) "He hath predestined to eternal salvation," and others (the Black helots) "to eternal damnation."

In short, the God of Calvin has migrated to South Africa, the last refuge of Calvinism.

F. A. RIDLEY.

MIRACLES

SHAKESPEARE said the age of miracles is passed. But, for the B.B.C., we live in the Age of Miracles. Many tame scientists have spoken, over the air, of modern scientific miracles. Following Prof. Andrade's assertion that science is in search of the Unknown, others have said that science achieves the impossible. This recalls Father MacNab, who once put us a poser; that you cannot deny the possibility of miracles.

Questioned about a mistake in his dictionary, old Dr. Johnson replied "Ignorance, madam, sheer ignorance." Such was Spinoza's explanation of miracles. Exhaustively reviewing Biblical miracles, he argued that they were misinterpretations of natural phenomena. Miracles are possible to ignorance for these are synonymous terms; possibility is only another name for ignorance. God comes in where knowledge ends; so, as the explanation of what is not understood, of the unknown, God is the asylum of ignorance. The belief in God rests upon the belief in miracles and miracles are based upon the belief in God. The believer is running around in circles.

If possibility is ignorance, what appears as a positive, is really a negative term; and impossibility is a double negative—that is, a positive assertion, based upon knowledge. As knowledge is the opposite of ignorance and impossibility, of possibility it is true to assert that science, in acquiring knowledge, achieves the impossible. But if this is so, and miracles are possible, how can there be scientific miracles? Old T. H. Huxley asserted that anything is possible. Anything is a general term that refers to nothing in particular, so if possibility refers to nothing, its negation, impossibility, necessarily refers to something in particular. So that, if one can not deny the possibility of miracles it is because no particular

reference is made. But one can assert the impossibility of any particular miracle, with positive knowledge.

But we are playing with negative terms. The belief in miracles is a positive fact. To the ignorant, not only can anything happen; to them anything does happen. As Chapman Cohen said, miracles happen for those who believe in them. To them, anything is possible, but for a scientist only one thing can happen under a given set of circumstances. So long as there is ignorance, belief in miracles will continue. Only the propagation of knowledge will dispel it. But such argument is still based on the negative. A more positive assertion is that such beliefs are inherited from the past; that people believe in miracles because they have been so educated.

They are being so educated, and by the B.B.C. even to the extent that the acquisition of scientific knowledge is itself acclaimed a miracle. And the B.B.C. not only emphasises the difficulties of educating the world's two thousand millions; especially the more primitive; but also argue that such is the tempo, and the extent, of scientific development that only specialists can keep up with it. So that, though a specialist may have knowledge in his own department, he is ignorant in others. Knowledge and ignorance are relative, and the removal of ignorance relatively impossible. So, if the belief is based upon ignorance, miracles will continue. The B.B.C., therefore, is only reconciling itself to the fact.

But these are merely excuses. It is not just a clever play on words. It is a case of inversion; of the type of the old myth about Isaac Newton in the orchard. This story was first told by Voltaire in his Letters on the English, so as to show, with Newton's theory, that the movements of the planets is no more wonderful than apples falling off a tree. The story is retold as if it were true, but with the exact opposite moral, that a falling apple is just as marvellous as the movements of the stars in their courses. So the normal or usual is taken as an example of the unusual or exceptional, and the known as an instance of the unknown.

In the same way here, ignorance is perpetuated, for no explanation is given, and the verifiable and usable "Know how" of science is stressed as being marvellous. Whereas miracles were evidence of the supernatural, now physical science is evidence of miracles. But a catalogue of scientific achievement is not science. In the absence of explanation we are in the realm of emotion and not reason, and the so-called science survey is more than an emotional appeal. Nor is it sufficient to attempt to counter the fear of atom bombs, rockets and poison gas with the possibilities of atomic energy, plastics, penicillin and nylons.

It is an appeal to irrational hopes and fears. The question of desire and emotion; the desire to believe, the so-called religious feeling of awe, or the mystical sense of the marvellous; takes us into the realm of psychology. In the same way, the conditioning, the suggestibility, the credibility, the devotion to Christian "Truth," as with the criteria and symbolism, are matters of cultural development; that is, come within the realm of sociology. But, although the B.B.C. has some tame psychiatrists and anthropologists, never by any chance do these ever make subjects for a science survey talk.

For the B.B.C., science is simply physical science with perhaps some concession to biology. From being "trained and organised common sense," science has become the very essence of the marvellous. And theologians still argue that science cannot be applied to human affairs, for the B.B.C. its application in psychology and sociology is doubtful, and in morality the theologian

reigns supreme. Yet in both these fields of inquiry there has been extensive research, with surprising, even astounding results. In actual fact, the scientific method is being applied.

Although miracles clearly come within these classes of knowledge we only hear of scientific miracles in physics. To the psychologist the difference between the normal and abnormal is one of degree; the unusual is an exaggeration of the usual, and the marvellous is by no means unusual. None of our leading psychologists talk of miracles, and even the "faith healing" Cope made no claim, except in discovering scientific law. It is as Freud said, "it looks as though people did not expect from psychology progress in knowledge, but some other kind of satisfaction."

H. H. PREECE.

A CATHOLIC PHILOSOPHER

MANY readers will doubtless remember the broadcast discussion, a few months back, between Bertrand Russell and the Jesuit, Father Copleston. If that discussion, like so many others on controversial subjects, tended to peter out in an agreement to disagree, it was none the less stimulating to the majority of listeners, because here were two men of obvious intellectual power, talking about a great problem, admitting each other's eminence and at the same time realising that there was something to be said on each side.

Since I listened to that broadcast I have often wondered what sort of a man Father Copleston was; I had never read anything written by him, but I felt sure that what he wrote (though I should quite certainly disagree with whatever he said) would be interesting and far more intellectually adult than the usual apologetics of the Roman Catholic Church's popular writers, like Mr. Belloc or G. K. Chesterton. The slight essay which Father Copleston has published under the title "Existentialism and Modern Man" (Blackfriars, Oxford; 1s. 6d.) certainly bears me out.

The new philosophy of Existentialism has been already discussed at some length in these columns; I myself have written of it more than once. This article will therefore be in no sense a review of Father Copleston's pamphlet, but rather a brief appreciation of the Jesuit philosopher and his position. What emerges from his pamphlet, which was originally delivered as a lecture to the Aquinas Society of London, is that, while a Theist, as every good Roman Catholic must, of course, be, he is at the same time prepared to admit that the group of Existentialists who are Atheists—e.g., Sartre and Camus—are in their way as effective in argument as the Christian Existentialists, like Gabriel Marcel and Karl Jaspers. To get that admission—though it is, of course, not admitted in as many words but rather implicitly in the wording of the general argument—from a Catholic is no small feat, and it is good to know that at any rate one group of Atheists are regarded by a leading philosopher of the Roman Church as being intellectually respectable.

There is, however, one complaint which has to be registered. When Father Copleston quotes from the Catholic Gabriel Marcel he almost invariably gives chapter and verse, so that the reader, if he so desires, can go back to the original book in order to amplify his idea of what Marcel has said. But when Jean-Paul Sartre is quoted his words appear without any exact reference so that one cannot find the original statement and confirm that it was originally intended to bear the meaning that Father Copleston gives it. I am not suggesting that there is in the pamphlet I have considered, any deliberate mis-

quotation or misrepresentation; I am merely pointing out that the scales are deliberately weighted in favour of the Catholic.

Whether this is due to the fact that the works of Sartre have recently been included on the Vatican index of prohibited books I do not know. That probably has something to do with it. And in this connection I must tell a story about a young lady of my acquaintance who is interested in the development of literature on the continent of Europe. She thinks (as many people at the present time think) that Sartre is the most important figure to emerge from the muddle of post-war France, and she was, I think, horrified when his works were put on the Papal Index. But, being a good Roman Catholic, she went to her priest, pointed out that she thought a study of Sartre was part of her education, and inquired whether there would, in his opinion, be any harm in her continuing to read the works of this man, now officially banned by the Holy Father in Rome. The priest's answer, I think, was amusing. He said: "There's no harm, provided you bear in mind that he is theologically unsound."

Father Copleston, too, thinks that Sartre is theologically unsound, but he really does not make it very easy for his readers to track down that theological unsoundness to its source. Yet it is quite easy for the reader to follow up a study of Marcel. That, as I say, while there is no deliberate distortion, is in a way quite typical of the unfairness of Roman propaganda. The bias is, to some extent, concealed; but it is clear for all who can penetrate beneath the surface to some extent.

JOHN ROWLAND.

"THE BLAZING TOWER"

A STRANGE new subtle work, which should make a particular appeal to Freethinkers, has just been published. Dramatically described by the publishers as "a romance of the spirit," "The Blazing Tower," by R. B. Marriott (Quadrant Press, 10s. 6d. net), deals with the unusual spirit world so rarely featured by the Church; in this case the spirit is that of a woman of deep intellect, a Freethinker if ever there was one, who undertakes a pilgrimage of the mind to reach the destination marked out for her by an incorruptible heart and conscience. Mr. Marriott can write. He has a fearless mind, the mind of one who is unfettered by the spirituality of religiosity. The spirituality here is in a prose akin to poetry which opens up large horizons of the heart and mind. He x-rays with an alarming effect and these fine, deep and penetrating chapters precede a sort of shining loveliness in the latter part of the book. We have imagination and warmth allied to a passionate sincerity. Sometimes the style would appear obscure and there are moments when it becomes specialised reading, but like "Ulysses," "The Blazing Tower" is a connoisseur's book; being neither a happy story book nor a contented one it will probably appeal to all too few at a first reading but I shall be surprised if this first novel by a writer of unusual significance is not returned to again and again in the world of to-morrow.

PETER COTES.

THERE WAS ONCE

AN ADVENTURER. He had sailed the Seven Seas and he had been ship-wrecked six times. He had traversed arid deserts and explored dense, tropical jungles. He had fought wild animals to the death and had escaped from man-eating savages. He had survived all the deadly fevers of malarial swamps and the rigours of the Frozen North.

One day he caught a chill in Peckham and died.

ACID DROPS

The Bishop of Southwell has discovered that the Garden of Eden is a myth. Of course, a "lesson" can be learnt from it—but that does not alter the fact of the myth. And if Eden is a myth—alas, the Fall of Man is also a myth; and therefore Jesus Christ as a Saviour is also a myth. The Bishop must have sensed something of this, for instead of calling Jesus the Saviour he calls him the "Reconciler and Liberator." Poor Jesus—we wonder what he will be called when some other Bishop discovers that Jesus is neither a Reconciler nor a Liberator. Even Jesus himself may one day be reduced to a myth by a live Bishop.

A picture exhibited by the Birmingham Photographic Society of a man working in a carpenter's shop has caused consternation and horror all over Britain. It is entitled: "Following the Master" and as the model had long hair and a beard and looked like Christ—or rather like pictures of Christ—it has "offended the religious susceptibilities of church people." This crime would have been punished no doubt with the thumb-screw and the rack in the glorious Golden Age of Christianity, but fortunately Freethought civilisation has intervened since then; and we are glad to see the photograph still stands, as the Secretary says, "It will remain on show"—and we hope will confound the bigots.

The Mindszenty case has come as a godsend to the promoters of the anti-Communist campaign, and the emotional tirade to which the world has been subjected, acts as an efficient smoke-screen to the real question. That Mindszenty's sentence was harsh, is a matter of opinion, but it would be as well to bear in mind that the Cardinal was charged with treason, a *political* offence, and not because he is a Roman Catholic, but because he opposed and was actively concerned in trying to destroy the Government. We could applaud his action were it in the interests of Freedom (after all, freethinkers have opposed tyranny throughout the ages); but, knowing something of the history of the Catholic Church, we can guess the outcome if Mindszenty had been successful.

The Epistle to the Ephesians, says the "Life of Faith," represents the ideal balance of the Christian life. Personally, we think the Epistle a little more than somewhat unbalanced. It is in this Epistle that is found the following passage: "For by grace have ye been saved through faith, and that not of yourself, it is the gift of God, not of works." If this passage is "balanced," it cuts out effectively quite a few of humanity's benefactors, and can include murderers, black marketeers, and criminals in general as long as they have "faith in the Lord." Well, well, Heaven for health, but Hell for company.

Durham City Licensing Justices should go down to history as champions of the Lord, for they have again refused to allow opening of cinemas on Sunday. Full credit, it appears, should go to the Rev. J. W. Wenham, representative of the Durham Council of Churches, whose membership is put at (note the figures) 2,500. The City's population is 18,900. Besides the usual pious jargon about the "deeper meaning of the Sabbath" the very much hackneyed assertion that Sunday is a God-given ordinance of one day's rest in seven, was trotted out, which is so childish, that we are amazed that it can be treated so seriously, or solemnly.

That Oliver Cromwell, was, in some instances as intolerant and bigoted as only a Christian could be is well known. But that he was tolerant in some things, considering the age in which he lived, can hardly be denied. He passed on the torch of liberty and freedom in his fight against the Monarchy and Popery, culminating in the execution of "Saint" Charles, King of England. Yet, my Lord, the Bishop of London, dismisses Cromwell's undoubted contributions to freedom of thought acclaimed all over the world, by condemning him in a sermon at St. Paul's in which he said, "Cromwell in destroying the King, intended to destroy the religion which the King professed." So what?

As is well known, the Prime Minister of South Africa, Dr. Malan, has always had the reputation of being a most orthodox Christian; it is therefore doubly interesting to follow his "legislation" with regard to the native question in his country. As a good follower of Jesus, he always preaches that in Christ all men are brothers—at least he used to. Now his text excludes African natives, and it is his intention to re-introduce the colour bar as ferociously as the Ku Klux Klan. Some of the Christian bodies in defence of the natives have been refused a deputation and Dr. Malan, through his secretary, insists that his text, "in Christ all men are brothers," must now hold a totally different interpretation. The fact is, of course, that however much a few bishops or missionaries may protest, the colour bar has always been upheld by the majority of Christians, and no doubt Dr. Malan feels he can courageously carry on the good work with genuine Christian support.

But while Dr. Malan is having trouble with his Christian brothers over the colour bar, Dr. Barnes in England is having no end of a row with his superiors over what he calls "liberal theology." This liberal theology goes back to the early Deists and was made popular 170 years ago by Thomas Paine; so it is rather intriguing to find a bishop defending now what is obviously complete disbelief in God's Holy Word—or at least to considerable portions thereof. Of course, we know that Dr. Barnes is right, and do not in the least mind his stealing our thunder; though we doubt whether many of his followers know that his brave words can be found in Freethought literature at least for 200 years.

All the same we are glad to see the Bishop of Birmingham thus bearding the orthodox lions in their den. His is a necessary fight for freedom of speech and thought in the Church itself, and may indeed mark the beginning of the end. Heresy in the Church can mean either, that the heretics will be chased out for good, or that the Church must swallow the heresy and adapt itself to unbelief. There is another alternative for the English Church—it can go bodily over to Rome and there make a desperate stand for more and more religious reaction. And that means that the issue will be fought out eventually between Roman Catholicism and Atheism as Bradlaugh prophesied. It is up to us to see that the ultimate victory will be to Freethought.

Another case of God's mysterious purpose. While attending a funeral, Patrick McDonnell of Athlone was fatally injured through a tombstone falling on him. One could understand an Atheist getting killed at a crematorium especially if the defunct had no divine service offered for him—but why a fully believing Catholic? Personally we give it up.

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

C. BUDGE.—The question as to whether the "Daily Worker" or "The Freethinker" has a "better mass appeal" is surely not the question. We try to give all opinions equality.

BENEVOLENT FUND N.S.S.—The General Secretary N.S.S. gratefully acknowledges donations: £1 1s. from Mr. H. A. Lupton; 10s. from Mr. R. H. S. Standfast; 2s. 6d. from Mrs. Kurash; 3s. from "E.K."; £1 1s. from P. A. Bick.

For "The Freethinker."—T. Nibloe, 3s.; D. Behr (South Africa), £1.

D. HOWARD, "E.H.S." A. TROWBRIDGE, R. MASON.—Thanks, will be useful.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1, and not to the Editor.

When the services of the National Secular Society in connection with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, R. H. Rosetti, giving as long notice as possible.

THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, 17s.; half-year, 8s. 6d.; three-months, 4s. 4d.

Lecture Notices should reach the Office by Friday morning. The following periodicals are being received regularly, and can be consulted at "The Freethinker" office: THE TRUTH SEEKER (U.S.A.), THE FREETHINKER (U.S.A.), THE LIBERAL (U.S.A.), THE VOICE OF FREEDOM (U.S.A., German and English), PROGRESSIVE WORLD (U.S.A.), THE NEW ZEALAND RATIONALIST, THE RATIONALIST (Australia), DER FREIENKER (Switzerland), LA RAISON (France), DON BASILIO (Italy).

SUGAR PLUMS

On Saturday, March 26, The Glasgow Secular Society will hold its Annual Dinner in The Grand Hotel, Charing Cross, Glasgow. Tickets, 11s. 6d., may be had from Mrs. M. Whitefield, 351, Castlemilk Road, Glasgow S. 4. Early applications for tickets will be very helpful to those responsible for the arrangements, and avoid the possibility of being crowded out. Mr. R. H. Rosetti will be the guest of the local saints on the Saturday, and will lecture on "An Evening With the Gods" on Sunday, 27th inst. in the McLellan Galleries.

Thursday evening, March 17, is the date upon which Professor V. Gordon Childe, D.Litt., B.Sc., F.B.A., etc., lectures in the Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, W.C. 1. His subject, "The Evolution of Culture in the Light of Archaeology," is one that should interest every citizen, religious or non-religious, and it is hoped that Freethinkers in and around London will induce friends to join the audience. The Executive of the N.S.S. are responsible for the arrangements.

Readers in the Newcastle-on-Tyne area are informed that Mr. J. T. Brighton and the Rev. Chas. A. Haig, of St. James Congregational Church, Newcastle, will debate the question, "Does God Exist?" in the Socialist Hall, Pilgrim Street, Newcastle, on Monday evening, March 21, at 7-30 p.m. We understand that admission is free, and those who know Mr. Brighton will be there. He has a good following in and around Newcastle.

SPIRITS—BOTTLED AND OTHERWISE

I CAN very well understand that W. H. Wood anticipates his article dealing with Spiritualism is likely to be severely criticised and whenever I read about spirits I call to mind the saying of Scrooge to Marley, "There's more of the gray than the grave about you." It is characteristic of religious people that their morbid beliefs can best be combated by humour and indeed all mention of spirits (except those of the "bottled" variety) can best be dealt with in this way.

Despite the fact that Spiritualism is presented as something different to the Christian religion and, indeed, to all the other religions, it has one characteristic of Christianity which is the belief that some part of the human framework survives death. Presumably such survival only applies to the human animal and not to the rest of the brute creation. Why this should be I certainly do not know but primitive man was certain that his "spirit" horse and his hunting dogs would follow him to the Never-Never land and, indeed, in some religions provision is made for the spirits of his wife or wives to go along with him by the brutal process of killing them off upon his death. Presumably we are so much more civilised that the widow to-day hopes to get in touch with the spirit of her husband, though what consolation that may be I hesitate to say. Personally, I think it probable that he would prefer to pass his time quietly.

It is as well to remember that in the time that separates man from the beginnings of religion, things have changed considerably. Heaven is no longer above the clouds with angels running up and down to communicate with mortals and neither do people believe the devil lives in hell under the ground and comes up from time to time to seize the body (or spirit) of those who have sold themselves to him. The Earth is a planet revolving once in 24 hours at a distance of over 90,000,000 miles from the sun and separated by an immensity from the nearest star. Therefore, if there is any home for the spirits, even at the rate of light it will take them some time to get there and return when called for and the only alternative seems for them to be wandering about (a la all the old ghost tales) clanking chains and opening doors and generally making themselves a nuisance until they are reminded, as Dickens did to one ghost who haunted some set of chambers, that there were much better places on the earth to spend their time.

Surely it must be admitted, if we are to have any regard for the meaning of words, that "Life after Death" is a contradiction and from a legal point of view mankind has always been certain that the "deceased" was dead and done for and his property all down the ages has been divided up among his descendants. Probably we shall be told that the spirits do not want anything but if this is so, what on earth (or heaven) do they want to keep on worrying us for, that is if we admit the implication that there are any spirits at all?

All gods are spirits and mankind has always been afraid of dreams so vivid that they believed in a separate dreamland existence. I suggest, as an Atheist, that the "little bit of undigested cheese" is a much more reasonable explanation. All the hosts of Heaven are also spirits and whatever religious people call them they have no more existence than the fabric of a dream.

Therefore, when Atheists are asked to give some attention to Spiritualism we are justified in asking, why? If it is a natural phenomenon like gravitation, then whatever we say against it will not alter it in the least. On the other hand, if it be an illusion like all the other religions, then it is sheer waste of time to debate it. Nobody has ever suggested that the spirits have ever offered at any time special first-hand information to a world which has had to struggle painfully to discover such natural phenomena as we are conversant with. May I ask if the spirits knew anything of electricity before Volta or Edison? Anything of the petrol engine before Benz? Had they any knowledge of atomic physics before our present scientists? Is it suggested for one moment that they know anything of the future, that is, can they tell us the result of the Cup Final? Have they special medical knowledge which would lessen the toll of human suffering and the earlier passing of humans to the spirit world?

Atheism is not only concerned with refuting the claims of the believers in all religions but in so educating the human race that they will give up their age-long beliefs in nothing and devote the time given to Religion to something worth while. It is not the money that is diverted from people by the parasites which is to be condemned but the claim that mankind is only here for a brief space (which we admit) but is destined for a brighter Second Round (and perhaps other rounds) in the Land beyond the Sky. As I have already pointed out the Sky is an illusion and, therefore, the old conception of a "Home for Little Children" (as we used to sing) is absurd. It is "Pie in the Sky" and "Dope" of the worst kind because it is based on fear. Needless to say, the belief still pays good dividends. When it ceases to pay dividends then the money will be invested to better purposes.

I am not at all amused at the suggestion that the spirits can bang tambourines and cough up yards of some textile substance even when tied up. I believe it was Houdini who exposed these conjuring tricks as an illusionist. It was Mark Twain at a seance who asked for a pul of his and was told that he had not turned up in heaven, and despite the number of people with my own name I very much question whether the cleverest mediums could get one of them to reply and give a sensible answer.

If the spirits are those of all who have "passed over" (though where they have gone over to I do not know and am not interested) then there must be a mighty crowd, and if we add to these all the living things that have died on this old planet, then they must be having a good time dodging the pterodactyls and other pre-historic animals. Seeing that the Australian animals were missed out of the Ark because they were unknown to the Jewish writers of the Old Testament, I wonder if our mediums know anything of the duckbill?

The kindest thing that can happen to the Spiritualists and their mediums is that people will refuse to believe in people who obtain money under false pretences but to ask an Atheist to waste his time in investigating the spirits is to insult our intelligence. T. D. SMITH.

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CORRESPONDENCE

POLITICAL CATHOLICISM

SIR,—With reference to your correspondent Mr. Francis Gould's criticism of my article "Political Catholicism on Trial," which dealt with the recent trial of Cardinal Mindszenty.

Mr. Gould appears to get so excited when Communism is mentioned that he either did not trouble to read my article, or if he did so, he evidently failed to grasp its purpose.

I hold no brief for totalitarianism, whether of the Left or Right, of the "Church of Moscow" or of the older "Church of Rome," as I have, before this, actually termed them in the columns of "The Freethinker." These are hardly expressions which an orthodox Communist would use, so if Mr. Gould thought that he detected the "hidden hand" of Moscow behind my article he had better think again.

May I, Sir, point out to your contributor what I actually said in the article in question. All that I was concerned to deny was the charge of religious persecution—that is, of persecution of religion as such—which has been directed against the Hungarian Government by the press and pulpit of World Catholicism and its secular allies.

In rebuttal of such a charge I quoted the Hungarian Lutheran Bishops—Christians, and not Communists, Mr. Gould—who declared specifically that the Cardinal was in the dock solely because of his activities in connection with political Catholicism, and not upon any religious charge, and in that connection, I relevantly drew attention to the fact that several months before the arrest of the Cardinal, the anti-Communist English weekly "East Europe" had been boosting the Cardinal as anti-Communist Number One in Eastern Europe. (In point of fact, though I did not mention this in my article, "East Europe" then actually boasted that the Cardinal owed his then immunity from arrest to his American connections.)

If, accordingly, the Hungarian Government regarded Cardinal Mindszenty as (in Mr. Gould's own words) a "political opponent," this is scarcely surprising.

One can only gasp at my critic's weird conclusion that Communism is "in final analysis (whose analysis?) only Militant Christianity brought to its logical conclusion." One can only conclude that the colour red has the same effect upon Mr. Gould as upon the proverbial bull, in that it blinds him to reality. How a creed based avowedly upon Dialectical Materialism can be the "logical conclusion" of an anti-materialist creed like Christianity, does not, to put it mildly, appear to be exactly self-evident.

I am glad to observe that Mr. Gould is kind enough to accept my brief analysis of Hungarian history. Incidentally, the appearance in the dock, along with the Cardinal, of Prince Esterhazy, the former richest landlord in feudal Hungary, serves to point the moral of the close link-up between the Hungarian Church and feudal reaction, to which I drew attention in my article. And I still think the Hungarian Government is to be congratulated upon standing up to both the secular and the "spiritual" reaction.

In conclusion, I do not see why Mr. Gould should gratuitously go out of his way to insult the readers of "The Freethinker" by suggesting that they are incapable of checking my statements upon Hungarian history, which can be found in any text book on the subject. And seeing that Mr. Gould can hardly know the majority of your readers personally, I would like to know how he obtained his information?—Yours, etc.

F. A. RIMLEY.

LIFE AFTER DEATH

SIR,—Mr. Wood throws Rationalism overboard in his article for how can a Rationalist have irrational ideas, or a Freethinker be a really free thinker until he has set aside all influence upon his thoughts but the desire for truth? Only thus are his thoughts free.

Of all irrational notions the theory that life exists after death is the most senseless. And it isn't simply because it hasn't been proved that we disbelieve it, Mr. Wood! We disbelieve it because such a notion contradicts science, reason and human experience; and also because we know how such a foolish notion gained adherents.

It gained them because, like Mr. Wood, they were disappointed with the idea that when they were dead they were really dead, so they invented a way out.

Freethinkers and Rationalists are a minority of intelligent humans who set truth before everything. The average human does not.

That is the reason we find such difficulty with religionists. They find in religion a consolation on which Rationalism cannot offer, therefore they stick to it.

Not long ago, Dr. Joad and J. W. Poynter returned to religion for this very reason, and now we find Mr. Wood on a slippery slope of his own. But it finishes up in the same camp, the camp where the occupants put consolation before truth!

There are several baffling points about Mr. Wood's article, and if he considers that the discovery of a life after death would discredit the religion which has been claiming this all the time, I can only say I shall be amazed if he finds a single supporter for his weird notion.

I really think Mr. Wood's article was in the wrong part of your paper. It should be dealt with under "Acid Drops."—Yours, etc.,

W. O. BOWER.

OUT OF DATE?

Sir.—The case of the pot calling the kettle black to which you draw attention in your editorial of February 27 is, of course, a fine example, but there is an even finer one, curiously enough, in Mr. Archibald Robertson's letter in the same issue.

Surely it is very inconsistent for a self-confessed Marxist like Mr. Robertson, i.e., one content to stick in the well-worn rut ploughed by Marx a hundred years ago, to criticise Freethinkers for sticking in the well-worn rut ploughed by Bradlaugh only sixty years ago? Surely, on his own reckoning, the world stood still for him forty years before it stood still for them?—Yours, etc.,

W. E. NICHOLSON.

OBITUARY

PATRICK LAWRENCE SMYTHE

With sorrow we announce the death of Patrick Lawrence Smythe, which took place on February 28 following an operation. He was a man of strong character and well defined principles; in fact an all round striking personality well known in progressive circles. In accordance with his wish his remains were cremated, and in the South London Crematorium, Streatham Park, on Friday, March 4, sorrowing relatives and friends listened to a Secular Service read by the General Secretary of the N.S.S. R. H. R.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Report of Executive Meeting held March 3, 1949

The President, Mr. Chapman Cohen, in the Chair. Also present Messrs. Hornibrook, A. C. Rosetti, Seibert, Griffiths, Ebury, Woodley, Morris, Taylor, Barker, Mrs. Quinton and the Secretary. Minutes of previous meeting read and accepted. Financial statement presented. New members were admitted to Merseyside, Birmingham, Nottingham, Glasgow, North London Branches and to the Parent Society. On the votes from the Branches the Annual Conference will be held in Nottingham during the Whitsun week-end. Arrangements to date were reported, and April 5 given as the time limit for the receipt of resolutions for the Conference Agenda. A very successful dinner in the Criterion Restaurant after a lapse of ten years was reported and taken as the first step in reviving the Annual Dinner, and arrangements ordered to be made for next year. The Brains Trust in the Stratford Town Hall under the auspices of the Executive N.S.S. was reported as undoubtedly a successful evening. If possible arrangements will be made for holding more in different parts. The religious activity of Roman Catholics in the Trade Unions was noted, and the importance of exposing the menace as widely as possible emphasised. Progress in the arrangements for the International Congress in Rome next September was reported. The next meeting of the Executive was fixed for Thursday, April 7, and the proceedings closed.

R. H. ROSETTI,
General Secretary.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon: Mr. L. EBURY.

LONDON—INDOOR

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, March 15, 7 p.m.: Goethe Bi-Centenary. "The Significance of Goethe To-day." A Symposium arranged by the British-Goethe Festival Committee. LANCELOT L. WHYTE, Dr. KARL WOLFF, Dr. ELIZABETH W. WILKINSON and WILHELM UNGAR. Chairman: Prof. L. A. WILLOUGHBY.

Rationalist Press Association (Alliance Hall, Palmer Street, S.W.1).—Monday, March 14, 7 p.m.: The Body-Mind Relationship. 3rd Lecture: "The Effect of 'Body' on 'Mind' and vice versa," J. A. C. BROWN, M.B., Ch.B.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "Are Rationalists Unfair to Christians?" Mr. ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON, M.A.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: "Alternatives to Freethought," Mr. P. V. MORRIS.

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barkers Pool).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. A. SAMMS and others.

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m.: "Why I Left the Church of England," Mr. J. STANLEY DAVIES.

Glasgow Secular Society (East Hall, McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: A Lecture.

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "The Lesson of Czechoslovakia," Dr. J. W. BRUEGEL.

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Coopers Hall, 12, Shaw Street, Liverpool, 6).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "The Meaning of Freethought."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: "Some Aspects of Liberalism." A Liberal Candidate.

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CHRISTIANITY ON CELLULOID

THE cinema is probably the most potent propaganda medium yet devised. As Irving Howe, one of the younger American critics, pointed out: "The movie theatre is like a dark cavern, a neutral womb, into whose soothing and dissolving blackness we can escape from our frayed selves . . . it is a kind of psychological cloakroom where one checks one's personality." When an audience is partly stupefied, as most cinema audiences are, it absorbs what it sees like a sponge. The conscious mind is lulled to sleep by skilful cutting and cinematic rhetoric, and the path cleared for the highly paid technicians of suggestion to work directly on the sub-conscious.

This propaganda potency was demonstrated in its most dangerous form in the Fascist dictatorships. But Hitler and Mussolini were not the first in the field. Not by a long chalk. The dreary sentimentality of the Christian myths was being put over on the screen long before the Nazi and Fascist cameras began to grind. It is still possible, in remote corners of the world, to see that turgid mythological epic "The King of Kings," a film which made so much money for its producer that he ground away at the same subject for years.

The great D. W. Griffith was the first major entrant in this field. After making "Birth of a Nation," in which he prostituted his talents in the interests of racial prejudice (thus establishing, incidentally, another Hollywood tradition) he took a dive into the swamp of religiosity with "Intolerance." This film, recently revived in London, was a remarkable technical achievement. But it stank of religion.

There is no reason to list its successors. De Mille's "King of Kings" started a depressing procession of cinematic inanity which culminated in those two masterpieces of unconscious comedy, "The Sign of the Cross" and "The Last Days of Pompeii." After that the celluloid evangelists woke up to the fact that their naive epics were making less and less of an impression on cinema-goers.

There is the story of the little boy whose mother took him to see the "Sign of the Cross." He started to cry bitterly as the Christians were being thrown to the lions, and his mother, who had probably gone in to see Claudette Colbert taking a milk bath anyway, tried to pacify him. But the little fellow was too upset. "It's a shame," he sobbed, "There's one poor lion there without a Christian to eat."

Cinema-goers did begin to laugh in the wrong places. Nor were De Mille and his imitators helped by news items from the film city itself. Hollywood, it appeared, was sadly lacking in piety. Its standards were those of a badly regulated Port Said brothel, and it hardly seemed the place from which the "Light of the World" should be flashed on ten thousand cinema screens. The era of super-spectacles of the ancient world, with Christ and Pontius Pilate thrown in, was over.

But the religiosity remained, leaving its fingerprints on film after film. All American producers had to pay lip service to Christianity, even in their sophisticated comedies. Otherwise they ran the risk of having their films put on the filmic index by the Catholic League of Decency, an organisation so powerful that it can make or break a film by approving or condemning it.

Hundreds of workmanlike films were ruined beyond repair by the injection of Christian dope. "Tortilla Flat," for instance, had its saints running around the

woods. What C. A. Lejeune calls "the M.G.M. celestial choir" was worked to death. No clergyman was ever shown in a unfavourable light. Heroes and heroines, villains and villainesses all brought their troubles to the altar by the fourth reel. And nobody was allowed to die without the appropriate Christian clap-trap.

Then the Hollywood disciples found another formula. They made a film called "Boys Town," showing how the Catholic Church reformed young delinquents. It made money. It also paved the way for Leo McCarey—a prominent adherent of Rome—to harness Bing Crosby's talent to the cause of obscurantism in "Going My Way."

Since that film's success, we have had the Catholic Church and its allegedly selfless servants pushed into our eyes every time we give our brains a rest by going to the cinema. And the worst part of the whole business is that these pieces of nauseating propaganda are often technically superior to more worthwhile films. The photography in "Song of Bernadette" was fine; the acting in "Bells of St. Mary's" was good; and the background of "Power and the Glory" was exceedingly well done. Nor are these films completely devoid of entertainment value, as were the earlier essays in filmic Christianity. Barry Fitzgerald fully deserved the award he got for his cantankerous little priest in "Going My Way."

Therein lies the great danger of this new Catholic onslaught on the emotions of the cinema-goer. It is put over as entertainment. This has always been one of the techniques of Rome. G. K. Chesterton, for instance, spiced his entertaining Father Brown stories with theology and thereby did more for the Church than all the wordy dissertations of Cardinal Newman ever accomplished.

No wonder the Pope decorated De Mille. The Church is steadily losing its congregations to the cinema. But it cannot be unduly alarmed at the kind of rubbish they are absorbing there. Celluloid Christianity is as great a menace as the pulpit variety.

L. R. FLETCHER.

SAINT FERDINAND!

ROME.—A bull broke loose while being blessed at St. Anthony's Day open-air Mass. Children and parents ran for cover, the bull was cordoned and given a blessing on its own.

East is East and West is West
But take me where the bulls are blessed!
Where one, more *Rational* than others,
Chases children, charges mothers,
Little dogs laugh to see such fun
As priests pick up their skirts and run.
For Mass—read *Mass*, I wouldn't miss
For anything a sight like this!
St. John turns out to give first-aid;
Police, bull-fighters, and fire-brigade,
Pat Cardinals turn record-beaters
Dashing for safety to St. Peter's.
But when he's caught, for thus transgressing,
The bull receives a *special blessing!*

A strange affair—but here's the point—
Don't grumble at your Sunday joint;
Enjoy your *blessings* to the full—
You may be eating *Holy Bull!*

W. H. WOOD.