

THE

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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

## God and All

FROM time to time we have offered suggestions that might be of use to the clergy. We have even gone so far as to suggest to the clergy that they might make a real attack on Freethought if they took the precaution of really understanding what modern "Freethought" means, and to that end invited a representative Freethinker to speak in their churches. At present the clergy seem to be divided into two classes. A very small class that does know what "Freethought" actually is to-day, and a much larger class that have obviously taken their account of Freethought from other parsons who have never advanced beyond the eighteenth or early nineteenth century. Their shots never really damaged the enemy because they never reach him. The fight that is supposed to occur never happens. The ordinary Christian attacking modern Freethought is like a man-of-war of Nelson's time fighting a modern battleship.

I have gone even so far as to suggest that the weapon of the strike, which has played so large a part in the disputes between capital and labour, might also be utilised to deal with the troubles of the clergy. It occurs to me that there are two ways in which this might be done. One is in relation to God, the other in relation to man. In the first instance it is clearly the duty of the clergy to see that certain natural things occur in their proper, and in their due, order. The securing of proper harvest, of a desirable quantity of rain, and of the expulsion of disease, have, from very ancient times, been the chief functions of the priests of all denominations. So much so, that there is not an official prayer book in the world, Christian or otherwise, there is not a single tribe of believers, that have not strossed the functions enumerated above as belonging peculiarly to the priesthood. Even in modern England, when there is a marked and prolonged shortage of rain the priesthoods of the various sects make it their business to remind the Lord that he has not paid attention to one of his principal duties. And the efficacy of the intervention of the priesthood is shown by the fact that in every instance, provided we have patience, and leave the matter in the hands of God, rain does come—usually in a very generous measure.

The other matter I have in mind is in relation to Church attendances. If God is to do his part in the world, as ex-Dean Inge and many eminent preachers have told us, man must do his. Man lives by the grace of God, but gods live by the service of man. Anyone who studies the history of religion must have observed that the greatness of God, any god, depends ultimately upon the number of his worshippers and the continuity of their services. Hundreds of gods, probably thousands, that were once powerful are now dead. The great gods of ancient Egypt, Babylon, and Greece are now no more. They did all that later gods have done, and did their job with much greater publicity. But, as the number of their worshippers declined, so did their might and majesty, and many an ancient and once mighty god can now be traced lurking

in some backwood catering for a mere handful of superstitious peasants or figuring in fairy tales that are published for the entertainment of children. But these, in their day were real gods, doing their job themselves, prompt in both service and punishment. They did not hide in the background, leaving things to be run by such deputy agents as "natural laws." They were great because they did something, they did something because they were great.

But one after another they passed from the scene. Why? There is only one answer—the number of their worshippers declined. The modern educated believer would indignantly deny that gods eat or drink by way of sustenance. Their food is of a more impapable but not less important kind. He becomes great only in proportion to the number of his worshippers and is able to grant them greater favours. If man would have favours from his gods he must nurse their strength by his prayers and sacrifices. It is not that God would not help man in the absence of prayer and service, it is simply that he cannot. A decline of worship that moves to his complete neglect is a condition of the passing of every god that has existed and it is a fate which threatens every god that still exists.

It is in connection with these aspects of the existing situation that I think the weapon of the strike might be used. In the first case it is obvious that God does not carry out his job as many simple and sincere believers think he ought to. Every now and again, the priesthood has to call the attention of God to the fact that he has sent too much rain, or too little; that he has permitted some deadly disease to ravage the land; that one army has asked for victory and the opposing one has won the battle. Of course, these complaints are camouflaged somewhat, but the plain fact is that all petitions for rain, or fine weather, or for the removal of disease, is a polite way of saying that something is wrong with God's management. But why not let it be known, plainly and in set terms, that whenever, and for so long as the land is suffering from want of rain, whenever there is an epidemic raging, and so forth, all churches, chapels and places of worship will be closed, no prayers will be offered, no Divine Service will be rendered. That would certainly call God's attention to his carelessness. He would feel the consequence of the strike exactly as a man who has been accustomed to three square meals per day would feel if he was suddenly reduced to one meal of bread and water per day. God would find himself just as his predecessors found themselves—fading away owing to the withdrawal of the "food for the gods." Either God would have to mend His ways with regard to man, or the ways of man would end Him altogether.

The situation is a very curious one. If God withholds His benefits from mankind, man may reason that he has nothing to thank or praise Him for, and this will mean that the food upon which gods live will not be forthcoming. It will not be a case of "night-starvation" but of continuous starvation. And, if God goes on as usual, and gives to man whether he praises him or not, then man will find no particular reason for praising, and the process

of starving God out of existence goes on. Here is the situation in a nutshell. If gods are to live they must be regularly fed on the belief that man has in them. If that worship and belief fades—and it is fading—the gods have less power, and they will pay the price of their feebleness by men ceasing to believe altogether.

As usual, when one looks at this question from a strictly rationalistic point of view, one realises that it was the first step that mattered. When the gods kept everything under control, the stars, the earth, the fruitfulness of the harvest and the multiplication of cattle, the cure of disease and the incidence of good and bad fortune, the gods were fine lusty fellows living royally upon the food supplied by their worshippers. But the gods took the fatal step of surrendering one bit of their power after another. They left off punishing the ungodly by striking them with thunderbolts, or with disease. Man was left to manage for himself. The gods began to starve. Some of the gods died soon, others lingered a little. To-day most gods are suffering from chronic ailment.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

### THE VATICAN AND THE COMMUNISTS

THE dispute between the Czech communists and the Catholic Church may seem to many a quarrel in which neither party evokes feelings of sympathy. To such, therefore, it may appear to be a case of "a plague on both your houses" and they may be inclined to pass on their way without more ado. Yet the struggle has far wider implications than its local *ambiente* and merits our objective study.

The assertion of the Czech communists that they are not interfering with the people's religion is, of course, as false as the new found anxiety of the Vatican for the ethical freedom of the individual. Quite simply, what the Czech communists are seeking to compass is the destruction of Catholicism in their country and the setting up in its stead of a new Protestant church as the permitted "dope of the people." In these circumstances it is mere hypocrisy to pretend that vital Catholic interests are not involved; its very existence in Czechoslovakia is in jeopardy.

The difference between Catholicism and Protestantism does not lie in outward trappings and ceremonies, nor in obtruse metaphysics, such as transubstantiation. To grasp the difference between the two sects one must look at the history of early Christianity and its evolution into the Catholic Church. Such works as F. A. Ridley's *Julian the Apostate* or Loisy's *Birth of the Christian Religion* are the best sources I know of in which this development is shown, and it is in its early environment that we must look for enlightenment, for the Catholic Church, like other things, is the product of its environment.

From such a study we shall perceive that the Christian or Catholic Church is an organisation founded on tradition and authority. It did not base its claims on the written word, as the Protestants later did theirs as the Bible; on the contrary, it produced that book only after it had firmly established itself, selecting and, in cases, doctoring the texts which it then pronounced as the approved "inspired" writings. The environment in which the Church grew up was that of the autocratic Caesarian Empire, and when that secular institution collapsed, its mantle fell on the shoulders of the spiritual organisation, which also followed its system of non-hereditary succession. And at the height of its brilliance and power

these spiritual Casars ruled an empire more extensive than ever their secular predecessors did.

As the Catholic historian, Hilaire Belloc, has pointed out, the history of the Catholic Church is not one of an authority unchallenged up to the point in time when, suddenly, it was assailed by the Protestant revolt. Schisms and heresies battered at its portals from early times, and the only difference between them and the Protestant was that the latter had economic and military support which enabled it to survive. Even so, Catholicism recovered a good half of what had been lost in the first surprise, besides gaining a whole new world in the Latin America discovered about this time.

The history of the rise and establishment of the Protestant "reformism" has not the same importance. Here the significant factors in the situation were not the internal theological disputes but what was going on in the world outside. The growth of the towns and of commerce had brought ascendancy to the new middle classes and a corresponding decline in the power and influence of the aristocracy, the main supporters of the Catholic Church, itself the largest of landlords. Protestantism was the product of the revolutionary change from a feudal to a capitalist economy. The need for a "free" labourer, that is, one not being a serf tied to the land, and of the loaning of money at interest brought the new class into conflict with feudal Catholicism. Change in the people's religion became, therefore, a necessity, deriving from the change in the economic and social order. Private enterprise in trade demanded private judgment in religion.

Here is the essential difference between the two schools of Christian thought. The Catholic Church was the traditional inheritor of the word of God and its hierarchy the sole administrator of God's estate. By its very name it claimed to be the one and only, the universal Church. For an individual or any group of individuals to assert the right to exercise private judgment in matters of "faith and morals" was to strike at the very roots of Catholic pretension.

For private judgment and the substitution of the Book for tradition were the moral armaments wherewith the Protestants were able to seize Catholic property and, above all, to deny authority to their hierarchy. The Christian religion, Protestant brand, became a facet of secular authority. That political instrument, the Church of England, shared with the other offices of State the functions of the government to which it was subordinated.

A book which contained so many contradictions, which comprised so many conflicting views of its heterogenous authors, was bound to give rise to a diversity of creeds, according to the number of persons exercising the sacred right of private judgment. But, while the splintering of the Protestant front into so many sects was in marked contrast to the unity of the one and only Catholic Church, the effect was not mortal to the former as it was to the latter. A private enterprise, based on a philosophy of *laissez-faire*, could afford individual diversity!

For reasons, which would take us outside the matter under review, the bitter rivalry of Catholics and Protestants has softened. The Catholic Church in England, for instance, is no longer a danger to the stability of its constitutional monarchy and capitalist democracy; rather it is a prop to that State's more conservative institutions. Nowadays the various churches are like trade competitors, who, while carrying on a lively rivalry in advertising and sales, all belong to the same Employers' Federation.

The action of the Czech government, then, is an historical repetition of that "protest" against Vatican

authority, which Luther and Hus inaugurated. For even if the communist-ordered "Czechoslovak Church" retains every belief of the superstition and every ceremony of the Catholic canon, it will still be a Protestant sect, and in the eyes of the authoritarian Vatican a damnable heresy. Indeed, the Protestant Reformation of the XVI century changed little of the major trends of the Christian faith, evolved by their Catholic predecessors. The belief in the personal Trinity, in the immortal soul and free will, in sin and its remission through confession and repentance in the other world of Heaven and Hell, were all retained in their entirety. Only the authoritarian intervention of the priesthood and its centralisation at Rome were eliminated. Even the candle, vestments and censer, put away during the period of "austerity" while the new class were busy saving up for their accumulation of capital, have been creeping back in such bodies as the Church of England.

There is, however, a difference between the protestantism of Luther, Hus and Co., and that of the Czech communist government. While they share an identity of purpose in their "protest" at Catholic pretensions of an *imperium in imperio*, the struggle is no longer between authoritarian and private judgment. The communists are no more enamoured of private judgment than the Catholics. They deny only that authority shall rest with anyone outside or above themselves. The Catholic Church claims that it is the fount of all authority in "faith and morals"; but it is precisely this claim which the Communists refute. The Catholic way of life is in direct conflict with the "Marxist approach" both in private lives and in social relationships.

The struggle, therefore, is implacable and irreconcilable. Either the Catholic Church must cease to exist where Communism reigns, or Communism, under a Catholic "approach," must remain a stunted growth.

What are the prospects of victory for one or the other of these mortal enemies? Can this rusty sword of excommunication, now drawn from its medieval scabbard, be wielded effectively in an age of the Tommy gun and the atom bomb? If history is a pointer, that of Czechoslovakia does not augur well for the Vatican. As the Czech historian, Lützwow, has written: "It is untrue that persecution and oppression cannot destroy a people's religion; Bohemia is an example of a country once wholly Protestant which has by such means been converted to one wholly Catholic."

On the other hand the Catholic Church is our oldest and most enduring European institution. In its two thousand years of existence it has survived all the assaults on its spiritual battlements, and still remains in this XX century one of the strongest organised forces in the world. And, despite Lützwow, it was Engels (anti-Dühring) who said that "Dühring cannot wait until religion dies a natural death. He decrees laws for its suppression and thereby helps it to martyrdom and a prolonged lease of life."

And for us atheists, where do we stand in the controversy? Communism claims to be atheist and insofar that should incline us to sympathise with the Czech communists in the struggle. But their claim is spurious, like Roman Christianity, it allows no private judgment as to what is or is not atheism, laying down that must derive from the Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist approach, the sole road to enlightenment on faith and morals.

P. C. KING.

## THE THEATRE OF TOMORROW

THE arts do not attract enough attention from Freethinkers. After all, the attitude of mind which we call Freethought is not merely a matter of science, though science has a good deal to do with it. Indeed, I have long suspected that scientists and artists can both have what I may call a Freethought attitude—and the greater the stature of the scientist or the artist the more readily he shares, if not the views, at least the understanding of the Freethinker.

I have no doubt that this will seem to be a curious beginning to an article. But the fact is that I have just been reading Mr. Peter Cotes's "No Star Nonsense" (Rockliff; 12s. 6d.), a challenging book on the theatre; as a result I have been driven to considering the rôle of Freethought in the arts.

I think, indeed, that Mr. Cotes would probably be found to stand for many of the views which this journal exists to advocate. He believes in freedom of thought and action; he holds that the art of the theatre should be freed from many of the restrictions which at present bind it.

Indeed, Mr. Cotes has a good reason for disliking restrictions in the theatre. With a first-rate company of actors and actresses, he staged in 1946 at the little Lindsey Theatre a play—"Pick-Up Girl" by Elsa Shelley—which was a really important one, and which nevertheless very nearly escaped production on an adequate scale, because of the danger of the Lord Chamberlain's objections. It was demanded by the Lord Chamberlain that the words "syphilis," "abortion," and "miscarriage" should be deleted from the dialogue. The author, who lived in the U.S.A., rightly said that she saw no reason to alter a word. Eventually, when the play had been almost unanimously praised by the critics, and visited by Mr. Chuter Ede, the Home Secretary, and by Queen Mary, the Lord Chamberlain withdrew his objections, and the play received a West End production. (The theatre where it had been originally staged was a theatre club, where licensing restrictions did not apply.)

That such a censorship, which does not apply to books, is still a menace in the theatre, obstructing the easy staging of serious, important plays, while cheap pornography gets past the censor, is beyond dispute. Mr. Cotes deserves to be thanked for making this clear. And that freedom of expression is a very important part of the Freethought case cannot well be gainsaid.

Equally important from the point of view of the stage is Mr. Cotes's protest against the star system—something which, in his view, is ruining the theatre. His company was a group which worked as a group, without the hysterical worship of individual personalities that has spoiled so many fine actors. And no one who has seen pictures of the crowds waiting outside a West End theatre (often all night) can have any doubt that the worship of "stars" is a form of collective hysteria on a par with the similar queues that assemble outside the Albert Hall for a Promenade Concert or outside Lords for a Test Match.

Freethought, in other words, involves freedom of reason from over-stress on emotion. And Mr. Cotes deserves the praise of us all because he has shown how this can be applied to what is often regarded as one of the most emotional of the arts—the art of the theatre.

JOHN ROWLAND

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## ACID DROPS

The Lord's Day Observance Society strikes yet another blow for the Lord, and we record another victory in their efforts to make Sunday a day of gloom and holiness, for that it what their continued successful efforts against what they term the "desecration of the Sabbath" really means. The Welsh Sunday is bad enough, but the L.D.O.S. Organiser, Mr. Wilmot, that natural descendant of the Puritans — who objected to bear-baiting, not because of the cruelty involved, but because the spectators derived pleasure therefrom—objects to any attempt to brighten it, and his protests resulted in a sports meeting being cancelled. The strength of the L.D.O.S. lies in the fact that this energetic, bigoted minority takes every advantage of an antiquated law, and the majority of the people, whose only leisure day is Sunday, are so apathetic where their liberties are concerned. Until the majority organise and demand the repeal of the Sunday Observance Act, so long will the Holy Willies make Sunday a day of misery and boredom.

The visit of the "Viking" ship encourages a Catholic writer to point out that "our most Catholic Alfred" beat the Vikings of his day at their own game. This may well be true but it surely was not because Alfred was a Catholic. The same writer in the same column points out that another King, Edward IV, prohibited the playing of cricket under heavy penalties of fines and imprisonment. But he does not add that Edward was just as much Catholic as Alfred. Was it his Catholicism which made him hate cricket?

After attending one of the meetings of "Little David's" miracle campaign in the Kingsway Hall, our opinion is still the same as that expressed last week in these columns, and we still agree with the *Sunday Pictorial* writer's description of David as an "unpleasant American brat" and should, in the same writer's inelegant phrase, "have his pants kicked." Hundreds of pathetic cripples lined up to receive "Little David's" ministrations, and all the well-known phraseology of revivalists such as "Hallelujah," "Praise the Lord," etc., which we have heard so often, punctuated the proceedings. In fact, we feel certain that many of the "afflicted" were old hands at the game, at least they all seemed to know their "drill." Up to date, no miracles have been reported. It will, however, be a miracle if David and Co. carry on; we understand that the campaign is a "flop" and the Kingsway Hall is not exactly cheap to hire.

Either God is on holiday, or "peradventure He sleepeth," or can it be that he has retired from his godship, and now confines himself to sparrow-watching only? We can think of no other reason, except that he is just "fed up." In any case, allowing two of his houses to be badly damaged by fire within a week will not do his stockholders any good. However, his carelessness resulted in impartiality, for one of the churches was a Catholic and the other a Protestant, and both were prevented from being gutted by materialistic firemen.

The Rev. O. A. Osborne has the right idea and it should be extended. He has asked his parishioners to ignore him if they see him in the street this week because he is having a holiday at home. Apart from the conceit of this parson who really thinks he counts for something in the scheme of things, we are bold enough to state that the people of Bedminster will live, get married, have babies, grow up, and die, just the same as usual. In fact, the idea of even a longer holiday for parsons has our "blessing" and we commend it to all clerics.

From Tokio comes the news via *The Register* (U.S.A.) that the relic of St. Francis Xavier figured in some way in the death-bed conversion of a man in hospital. The man, states *The Register*, had shown no inclination towards religion, but hearing that the right arm of St. Francis was being shown in the hospital requested that he be allowed to see it. On the same evening, he asked to be baptised, and the next day he was dead. There must be a moral here—but unfortunately the only gentleman concerned, being dead, cannot tell us.

God must be losing his grip, or he is becoming more civilised, for consider the case of the two youths of Columbus (Ohio) who ripped open the tabernacle in a Catholic Church, and scattered the sacred host over the floor. In the days when God was a "Jealous God" he would have struck down dead immediately such sacrilege. All that happens now is that the priests are put to a lot of work performing ceremonies of reparation and purification for the desecration, and the two youths will be put on probation. Verily, the great Pan, if not dead, is dying.

Catholics are not a little jubilant over the ease of a Methodist minister getting the sack for having the impudence to get married. After all, one of the great counts against Popery is the celibacy of its clergy and no other sect of Christians has condemned celibacy more than Methodists. So the picture of a Methodist being expelled for refusing celibacy as a heaven-born state is quite amusing to all good Catholics—and to other people as well.

According to Bishop Ellis (R.C.), "as religion goes cruelty enters the modern state." A glance at the history of his own Church especially during the Dark and Middle Ages might have shown the Bishop that even the modern State could never quite catch up to the horrible cruelty which characterised Roman Catholicism then. Torture, imprisonment, and burning alive were the normal practice of the Church appointed by God to rule the world. It was totalitarian then, and its mantle is now being worn by various states who are simply repeating the old formulas. God save the State!

Although the *Church Times*, much as it wants to cannot stomach the drivel by the Roman Church on the "assumption" of the Virgin Mary, yet it puts in a plea for "the feast of the Repose of the Blessed Virgin Mary." Really, if one wants to swallow drivel, why not swallow it without wasting time on substituting some thing else which is stamped with the same drivel? The "Assumption" yarn is like the Resurrection yarn, just Christian nonsense, but it appears that the Pope is about to make the childish legend a "dogma." Well, if devout believers can swallow the "dogmas"—one more or less doesn't matter. But a Feast of the Repose . . . !

## THINGS WE WOULD LIKE TO KNOW

Where was God when thieves started to strip lead from the roof of His Church in Herne Hill?

When the Judge of a Texas court sentenced a man to "four Sundays in Church" did he hope to increase the congregation, or make another atheist?

Did the reporter get his news items mixed when he writes that the collection on the "Queen Mary" for the Marine Charities resulted in £121 from the Smoking Room pool, and nine shillings and sixpence from the Church service?

# "THE FREETHINKER"

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## TO CORRESPONDENTS

S. JONES.—Thanks for your good wishes. See Lecture Notice for Birmingham meeting.

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.

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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 FREIDENKER (Switzerland), LA RAISON (France), DON BASILIO (Italy).

## SUGAR PLUMS

We have often pointed out in these columns that the most important part of the marriage ceremony, from the legal point of view, is the signing of the Register by the two parties. This must have been forcibly brought home to the bride and bridegroom who waited three hours in Church whilst frantic efforts were made to unlock the safe which contained the Register. The wedding had to be postponed.

Mr. W. Glamville Cook, Secretary of the Rationalist Association of Australia and Editor of *The Rationalist*, who is in London en route for the World Union of Freethinkers' Congress in Rome, has been appointed Registrar of Marriages in Melbourne. Mr. Cook is well known for his Freethought views, not only through his lectures and writings, but also for his broadcasts over the Australian radio on many occasions. His appointment is something in the nature of a triumph for Australian Freethinkers and their forceful Secretary. Our congratulations.

Where the Catholic Church is concerned, "time does not wither nor custom stale," and like Tennyson's Brook, Fatima statues will go on for ever. A correspondent sends us a cutting from a Spanish Railways magazine, with an illustration and description of the enthusiasm with which a statue of the Virgin was received at Puento Arco Station, with the priest well to the fore, leading the cheering of the crowd. We are not quite sure whether the statue will make the station holy ground, but without doubt, travellers will still have to buy their tickets.

An effort is being made to form a Branch of the N.S.S. in the Wanstead and Woodford district, and in that connection a meeting is being arranged for Thursday evening, September 8, in The Wanstead Community Centre, Wanstead House, George Green, Wanstead, E. 11, near Wanstead Central Station, at 8 p.m. Mrs. P. Ta'Bois, P.R.A.S., will lecture on Freethought versus Religion. Will those willing to help form a branch please write to Mr. E. Maple, 35, New Wanstead, Wanstead, E. 11. Mrs. Ta'Bois is well known in the district by her pointed Freethought letters in the local Press.

## DRAWING STUMPS

IN bringing this spiritualistic controversy to an overdue conclusion I would like to make three final observations.

1. The reason I do not call myself a spiritualist is because spiritualists believe in a Christian God and *I do not*. Spiritualists believe that survival has been proved. I believe that the existence of psychic phenomena has been proved but that its *cause* requires further investigation. Although the Irwin seance does, in my opinion, make it difficult to disbelieve in survival I still preserve an open mind, and I am quite ready to accept an alternative explanation—if anyone can provide it. Obviously Mr. Cutner cannot!

2. The Big Chief Hornet and his entire nest of Little Hornets can call me a spiritualist if it pleases them to do so. I couldn't care less!

3. That "Psychic News" and "Light" (both Christian journals) have given so much prominence to the views of a Freethinker rather points to the fact that they are not so bigoted as many so-called Freethinkers. In every article printed by them I expressed my atheistic views very plainly, together with the contention that there was no logical reason why, because one did not believe in God, one must necessarily believe in complete extinction at death. *They* can credit this, but apparently *Freethinkers* cannot.

In Mr. Cutner's first article he said that he expected me to provide him with all the documents relating to the Irwin seance so that *he* could investigate the matter! Does he consider himself more qualified to do this than the late Mr. Harry Price? In any case, if he wants to investigate *any* subject it is up to him to get hold of the evidence—not to expect other people to supply him with it. However, I did oblige him with an account of the Irwin seance written by Harry Price and published in the "Sunday Dispatch" as one of a series of articles on psychic phenomena investigated by him and other members of the Psychological Research Laboratory. Because this series of articles happened to be published several years after the R101 disaster, Mr. Cutner chooses to disbelieve it. In short, he implies that Price made up the whole story!

In a recent letter to me Mr. Cutner stated quite bluntly that he did not believe a word of Price's account. But what else could he say? He could not offer any alternative explanation or theory—so he just said "I don't believe it." Evidently Mr. Cutner is the sort of man who, walking along some jungle path and suddenly confronted by a man-eating tiger, would exclaim "I don't believe it!" But I doubt if that statement would help him very much—or convince the tiger that it wasn't there! Anyone can refuse to believe what he does not want to believe—Christians do it quite often.

Why doesn't Mr. Cutner accept my challenge and secure the services of one of those conjurors he mentioned, who so easily bamboozle scientists, and let them perform Mrs. Garrett's feat at the seance? No—it is so much easier just to say "I don't believe it!" He says he is not aware that mediums ever give surnames, such as "Irwin," which proves how ignorant he is of the subject. If he is really an investigator I would like to know how many seances he has attended and who were the mediums.

Many of the questions Mr. Cutner asks I have asked myself many times. If the answers are to be found they will be found by genuine enquiry and investigation, not by blind disbelief and scoffing. Where Mr. Cutner really surpasses himself is when he draws attention to my statement that the airship was built at Cardington while

Harry Price said it was built at Bedford. I purposely made this distinction because I happened to have served at Cardington, which is the R.A.F. Station at Bedford. Perhaps Mr. Cutner imagines that two huge airship hangars could be erected in the middle of Bedford High Street. I am surprised that an "intellectual" should be ignorant of the fact that a large town like Bedford is usually surrounded by a number of small satellites administered by the parent town. No, Mr. Cutner, before telling your readers to *take their choice* you should have polished up your geography. The official address is "R.A.F., Cardington, Bedford."

I definitely deplore the attempt made to discredit Mr. Price's life-work by the suggestion that he only gave the public *bunk* to *de-bunk*, because that was what the public wanted. Price was not a convinced spiritualist any more than I am. I am anxious to find the truth, and so was he, because the subject was of great interest to both of us—so why is Mr. Cutner so anxious to label *me* a spiritualist and to emphasise the point that Mr. Price was *not*? It will take more than Mr. Cutner and his friend to convince me that a man will spend a large private fortune studying psychic phenomena merely to give the public some bunk to debunk.

Of course Price was right in saying there was no *proof* that it was the discarnate Irwin speaking through Mrs. Garrett, that is, if one insists upon *scientific* proof; but Price also said—and this Mr. Cutner forgets to mention—that "the seance provided food for much thought and was the most remarkable I have ever known throughout my experience of psychic matters."

Regarding the Borley Rectory phenomena, Mr. Cutner stated in his first article, "I read the other day, not only that there was not a word of truth in the story as put forward by these eminent gentlemen (Harry Price and Dr. Joad—thereby accusing them of fraud) but that Mr. Price himself believed in it no more than he believed in his Talking Mongoose." If *this* does not impute dishonesty then what does?

Harry Price wrote two books on the haunting of Borley Rectory, describing the scientific tests carried out and himself wrote the following—"I now come to the point where I must ask my readers whether, on the evidence submitted, and the evidence alone, the Rectory is haunted or not. Have phenomena occurred at Borley Rectory that cannot be explained in terms of our known physical laws? In other words, are the phenomena—or some of them—genuine? My answer to my own question is 'Yes, decidedly!' It is difficult to put into cold print the enthusiasm with which I record my affirmation . . . the spirit hypothesis is the one that best covers many of the observed phenomena at Borley Rectory." So, if what Mr. Cutner says is true then *someone is a liar!* I prefer to accept the statement of Mr. Price; Mr. Cutner prefers to believe what he has read somewhere—but does not say *where*.

Here, then, we must leave it. Both sides have had a good innings. Both sides have bowled a few "fast ones" and scored a few boundaries in what I hope has been a friendly game. I shall continue to keep an open mind on the subject of survival while Mr. Cutner will continue in his disbelief. No hard feelings!

W. H. WOOD.

P.S.—Possibly Mr. Cutner and some of your readers may be interested to know that I have just received a letter from the officer who examined the protocol of the Irwin seance.

In Mr. Harry Price's newspaper account of the seance this officer is referred to as "Mr. X." His letter, signed "W. Charlton" reads: "I was the officer at Cardington who

examined the protocol and enlightened Mr. Harry Price as to the *really marvellous evidence* it contained. As this episode is really a classic illustration of something we cannot explain, I shall intensely appreciate an hour's chat with you—etc., etc.

As Mr. Cutner refuses to believe a word Mr. Price has written about the seance he may be interested to know that "Mr. X" at least is no invention!

W.H.W.

[Note by Mr. H. Cutner: There is no need to answer Mr. Wood any further—except to point out that Harry Price did not say "there was no proof . . ." but, "There is no evidence that it was the discarnate Irwin speaking." If his seance did not convince Mr. Price, why should it convince me? After what Mr. Tabori says about the *Sunday Dispatch* article, I do not retract a word I said about it; while the communication from Mr. Charlton would have been more convincing if we knew when he read the protocol.]

## PALESTINE UNDER ARABIAN RULERSHIP

JEWISH rebellion against Roman administration led to the destruction of their Temple in 70 A.D. A later insurrection, in 135 A.D., ended with the defeat and dispersion of the insurgents through the Roman Empire. Then Palestine continued free from foreign invasion until 614, when the Persians appeared in the province. But in 636, migrating Arabs overthrew the army of the Eastern Roman Empire and for nearly a millenium Palestine remained the scene of constant conflict, during which the native population was victimised by Bedouins who ravaged its crops, destroyed its flocks, and even massacred the inhabitants.

The soil of Palestine was rendered richly productive by the industry of its cultivators, while the intruding Arabs were forsaking their scanty pastures and sandy deserts for conditions of settled husbandry. This early wave of nomad conquest has been regarded as the result of religious hysteria, but it is evident that a large proportion of the Bedouin tribes were still Pagan, both in custom and belief. Later it is true that the Moslem cult exercised enormous influence. Still, the main motives of the migrant Arabs were economic in character.

Persia and the Eastern Empire had become enfeebled and this largely explains the remarkable rapidity of the Arab conquests. As Mr. James Parkes avers in his *History of Palestine from 315 A.D. to Modern Times* (Gollancz, 1919, 21s.): "Another factor was the religious intolerance of Orthodox Christianity [the Greek Church] and Persian Zoroastrianism, both of which had created in their respective Empires large and dissatisfied elements in the population only too willing to accept a change of masters. Here again correction of traditional view is necessary. If the motive of Arab expansion was not religious, neither was it characterised by fanaticism. The conquerors were looking for tribute rather than converts, and their attitude towards those who did not resist them was characterised by generosity rather than arrogance." Indeed, the instructions of the first Caliph were markedly humanitarian. His followers were told to spare the lives of young and old and to destroy neither cattle nor crops, except for food. Thus Jew and Gentile alike submitted to Moslem rule. "For once they had paid their tribute—and it was no more onerous than the previous taxes—they were free to manage their own affairs, and their new masters were indifferent to their religious beliefs."

The Caliph Umar undertook the conquest of Byzantine provinces, and Persia. Syria was annexed; with the capture of Damascus the Palestinian cities soon fell, while in 641, Egypt was overrun until in the reign of

Walid (705-715), the Arabian dominions attained their zenith and extended from India to Spain.

When Palestine and Syria were conquered, the Caliph and his subordinates governed a Jewish and Christian community. At a later stage, landed possessions passed into the hands of opulent Arabs. Still, there appears little change in the rural population who cultivated the soil, for the Arabian intruders were nomads unacquainted with husbandry which they deemed degrading. Moreover, rustics and town-dwellers alike largely continued the observance of their Jewish and Christian cults, if many embraced the Moslem faith as the years ran on.

Apparently, the earliest Palestinian converts to Mohammed's cult were the Christian Arabs. "The twin facts," observes our historian, "that the new conquerors were themselves Arabs, and that the Christianity of the Nabateans had been . . . exposed to continuous persecution by the Byzantine government and the Orthodox patriarchs of Jerusalem, seems to have made them very ready to change their religion."

Conversion to Islam in Syria proceeded slowly, but it increased considerably in the eighth century of our era. Yet the majority of the Arab officials remained non-Moslem, but as the Arabs gained greater experience and culture, many became eligible for government positions. Competition for appointments now induced both Jews and Christians to join the Moslem communion, if merely for the purpose of gaining or retaining official posts. Under the famous Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphates, while the Moslem administrators discountenanced intolerance, the populace manifested an ever-increasing scorn and hatred towards unbelievers in the Koran. Yet, both Jew and Christian were unmolested and continued to enjoy the protection of the Caliphs and the full control of their communal affairs."

Resident monks, and pilgrims to the sacred shrines of Christendom, were more encouraged than repelled by the Moslem authorities, where they exercised control. But in the frontier regions and amid the mountains, Bedouin raiders in the eighth and ninth centuries murdered monks and plundered and destroyed their monasteries. Nevertheless, in those realms where the Caliphs were obeyed, non-Moslems were tolerated and held important public positions while openly avowing their faith, while in Christian Europe, a pitiless extermination of the mildest heretics was the order of the day.

The celebrated city of Baghdad was erected by the Abbasid Caliphs in the eighth century as the capital of their dominions. Palestine then became a distant and declining province. Now, at the mercy of turbulent intruders, the country became insecure to Christian, Moslem and Jew alike. Civil conflict among the Arabs themselves led to widespread misery and spoliation. Even in the illustrious reign of Harun al-Rashid, internecine struggles inflicted terrible injuries. With al-Rashid's death, Palestine witnessed many atrocities. In addition to mass murder, villages and hamlets were laid in ruin. Religious hatreds were intensified and fanaticism flourished. Still non-Moslem intellectuals continued to adorn the Courts of the Abbasid Caliphs, if none came from Palestine. But, as Parkes declares,

"The high humane level of civilisation to which the early Abbasids raised the whole of Western Asia naturally had repercussions in Palestine. Trade and industry flourished as well as agriculture and the dyeing, weaving and glass works of the country found a ready market; Arab geographers describe it as one of the most fertile and prosperous regions of the empire." At the yearly fair at Jerusalem, merchants from the commercial cities

of Europe gathered and exchanged their commodities for the silks and spices of the Orient. Yet, by the middle of the ninth century, disorder and misrule plunged Palestine into a state of penny from which it has never since completely recovered.

Religious fanaticism led to the destruction of churches and shrines. In 1009 the then Moslem ruler prohibited pilgrimages, and synagogues and churches were demolished, although a little later permission was granted for their restoration. To increase the troubles of the time, throughout the eleventh century the country was afflicted by a series of earthquakes which caused widespread desolation. Again, the devastation wrought by Arabian arrivals from the desert during their raids was worsened by their internecine conflicts which paralysed all initiative and enterprise. Then, the harsh taxation imposed fell most heavily on the industrious section of the community. Also, it is noteworthy that the decline and disappearance of Palestine's prosperity became most pronounced in the years succeeding the Crusades which, as Parkes declares, "ended unhonoured and unlamented, leaving behind nothing of which Christendom could be proud." In Palestine, as in other Moslem possessions, the failure of the Caliphs to establish any system of permanent security or sound administration largely contributed to the eclipse of Islamic civilisation both in the East and in the West.

For the present distracted condition of Palestine, our author places the chief blame on Jew, Moslem, Christian and the British officials alike. "As for the Christian Churches," he asserts, "it is difficult to speak with moderation of the ignominy of the rôle which, with individual exceptions, they have played. . . . Their influence has been negligible, because their behaviour has too often lacked not only moral grandeur but even honesty."

T. F. PALMER.

## LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

### OUTDOOR

- Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Car Park, Broadway).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: Mr. H. DAY.  
 Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.  
 Kingston Branch (Castle Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. J. BARKER.  
 Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Platt Fields).—Sunday, 3 p.m.: MESSRS. KAY, SMITH and BILLING. (Alexandra Park Gates).—Wednesday, MESSRS. KAY, SMITH and BILLING.  
 Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Ranelagh Street, bombed site, Liverpool).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. W. PARRY.  
 North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon: Mr. L. EBURY. (Highbury Corner).—7 p.m.: Mr. L. EBURY.  
 Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barkers Pool).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. A. SAMMS.  
 South London Branch N.S.S. (Brockwell Park, Herne Hill).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: Mr. F. A. RIDLEY.  
 West London Branch N.S.S. (Marble Arch, Hyde Park).—Sunday, 6 p.m.: MESSRS. E. BRYANT, C. E. WOOD and E. PAGE.

### INDOOR

- Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Sati's Cafe, 40, Cannon Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Man, Mind and Muddle," Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON (Vice-President N.S.S.).  
 West Ham Branch N.S.S. (Loco, Men's Institute, 62, Forest Lane, Stratford, E. 15).—Tuesday, August 30, 8 p.m.: A Meeting.

### OUTDOOR

- Glasgow (Brunswick Street).—Sunday, 3 p.m.: MESSRS. S. BRYDEN, E. LAWAST and J. HUMPHREY.

SECOND-HAND BOOKS. Wants List Welcomed. Michael Boyle, 30, Parliament Hill, N.W.3.

## WAS HE GUILTY?

FOR twenty or more years, crime stories have enjoyed phenomenal success and seem to have swamped "serious" fiction. Whatever one might say, it is a fact that more people will be found to read a good detective novel than, let us say, a masterpiece like *Middlemarch*. I myself can never resist a good crime story—though for that matter, I can read with equal enthusiasm the great novels of the past; and I am by no means sure that we shall ever capture an era again which will give us a Dickens, a Thackeray, a Reade, a Balzac, a Zola, all giants among a host of lesser lights a degree only below them. Is there a single crime story produced during the past 100 years which comes anywhere near *The Count of Monte Cristo* or *The Mysteries of Paris* for excitement, adventure, suspense?

But what about real crime? Is truth actually greater than fiction? Is there anything in fiction which can outdo the *Newgate Calendar* or Alexander Dumas' *Celebrated Crimes of all Nations*? Can modern ingenuity give us something more thrilling than the story of Joan of Naples or Lucretia Borgia or, to come to more modern times, of Constance Kent? Have our fertile and inventive writers beaten the story of the escapes of Jack Shepperd, of Casanova, or Baron Trenck?

Some of the most celebrated criminal trials of our own epoch have been carefully edited and published so that the student of crime can study particular cases; and it is not surprising that a successful writer of crime fiction himself like our contributor, Mr. John Rowland, should also take a great interest in real life stories. In *The Wallace Case* (Carroll and Nicholson, 9s. 6d.) he has given us a clearly written account of one of the most puzzling murders of 18 years ago, detailing, step by step, the tragic story leading to the murder, and analysing the various motives, personalities and events surrounding the crime.

The defendant was W. H. Wallace, described as "a perfectly ordinary man" living more or less happily with his wife for about 20 years. Coming home one evening, he found her murdered, and after some preliminary inquiries and investigations, he was arrested and charged with the murder.

Mr. Rowland has carefully analysed the whole story from what could be gathered about Wallace himself, and about his wife, and the many happenings before and after the crime in which Wallace was involved. These details are quite as thrilling as the average crime story, especially as a good deal of what happened could go to make Wallace guilty while, on the other hand, many things were quite consistent with his innocence. There are so many puzzling things about the affair that it is not at all surprising to find the *pros* and *cons* still argued. In such a case, it is never easy to prove with certainty anything, as the reader would soon find trying to sort out the various details. I think myself there is a good deal of luck in such cases. Poor Stinie Morrison was condemned to death, but there was enough uncertainty in his case for a reprieve. He always stoutly affirmed his innocence, and I personally am quite convinced that he never committed the murder for which he eventually paid with his life. (I do not believe that he starved himself to death, but was brutally manhandled). Wallace was eventually acquitted but he might just as well have suffered Morrison's tragic fate, and nobody would have cared two hoots.

As it was, he did not survive his trial long but he had a very narrow escape. I remember the case well—it

took place in 1931—and I came to the conclusion that he was innocent, and in that I am confirmed reading Mr. Rowland's fascinating volume. And those who are interested in seeing how a case can be built up, how the evidence can appeal to one side or the other, and how it affects the judicial minds of counsel and judge alike, should make a point of reading Mr. Rowland's deeply interesting and well written work.

H. CUTNER

## "REFORMED" CHRISTIANITY

A PARAGRAPH in a recent daily paper announces that the Dutch Reformed Church in Johannesburg had asked Dr. Malan's Government to make representations to the British Government to prevent Seretse Khama from accepting the chieftainship of the Buanangwato tribe.

I expect that most readers know about the Seretse Khama affair by now, but for those who do not let me sum up. Seretse Khama (a Negro) married an English typist (Miss Ruth Williams) and after a vote had been taken by the elders of the tribe, it was decided by a big majority to accept him as Chief.

This matter, of course, is of considerable annoyance to the South African Government who are trying to push back the advance of time and progress by depriving the coloured Africans of what few rights they had under the slightly more advanced and enlightened Government of General Smuts.

To add to all this, the Dutch Reformed Church have cried out against it and want to show that they disapprove of the union of two people of different coloured skins.

Reformed, as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, means: *Make or become better by removal or abandonment, of imperfections, faults, or errors; abolish, cure.* Such a Church one would expect to be perfect, after having removed or abandoned its previous imperfections, faults and errors. However, it would appear that it is merely a resuscitated form of Christianity, the form that condoned slavery and its later development—serfdom. Of course, a truly Christian organisation, such as the Dutch Reformed Church, would support the South African Government in its anti-humane policy. I wonder if there are any coloured members of its congregation and if there are, do they have a separate section of the Church in which to bow down to this awesome deity, or perhaps they have some hovel of their own where they are allowed to grovel in the dirt before a symbol of execution.

In a "Bible Explainer and Concordance" that I recently bought, there is a definition of "Christian" and it reads in this manner: "*The name given to a disciple of Christ . . . A real Christian is one whose understanding is enlightened by the influence of divine grace, who is convinced of the depravity of his nature, who sees his own inability to help himself . . . !*" Concerning the latter part of this definition, I should like to say to these Dutch Reformed Churchgoers: "You are truly correct Christians!"

PETER CROSS.

## EPITAPH ON EVERYMAN

He was born; he worked; he died;

He loved a little,

What else beside?

A little, too, he sighed.

BAYARD SIMMONS