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Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

The Witch Mania

WITHOUT discussing whether magic precedes religion or not, it is plain that the practice of magic belongs to the very earliest ages of human culture. The witch and the wizard are familiar figures in all stages of religious history. Not only are their figures familiar, but their method of operation remains substantially constant. The methods of bewitching people or things described in European witch trials of the seventeenth century are precisely those practised by savages all over the world. A Fijian would have felt quite at home sitting on the judicial bench with Sir Matthew Hale condemning poor, half-insane women for magical practices. To bewitch a person by securing a few hairs belonging to him, or to cause his death by manufacturing a lay figure and driving pins into it, are plans pursued by savages to-day, just as they were followed by the more civilised savages of these islands little more than two centuries ago.

In subscribing to the belief in witchcraft, Christianity only fell into line with other forms of religious belief. Its peculiarity is that, coming into existence when it did, it gave to the belief an authority that it was fast losing, while its intolerance of opposition prevented criticism doing the natural work of purification. The primitive theory of things, which holds that man is surrounded by spiritual agencies, mostly of a malevolent description, was fully endorsed by the early Christians. In the commonest as well as in the rarest events of life demoniacal agency was to be seen. The suppression of witchcraft had been ordered in the Old Testament, and demoniacal activity endorsed by the New. Moreover, the fact that Christianity, for long after its establishment as the religion of the Empire, was struggling with earlier forms of faith, gave further impetus to this belief. An easy explanation for miracles and marvels that occurred in connection with non-Christian beliefs was that they were the work of demons. And in all probability much that went on under the form of witch assemblies, up to a comparatively late date, a more detailed knowledge than we possess would show to be the exercise of prescribed forms of faith. The old saying, "The sin of witchcraft is as the sin of rebellion," has in it more than meets the eye. There is little real difference between the magic that appears as piety and the magic that is denounced as sorcery, save that one is permitted and the other is not. The gods of one religion become the demons of its successor; and the same rule applies to the practice of successive faiths.

But while witchcraft exists in all ages, it exists in a way quite different to that which presents itself from the fifteenth to the end of the seventeenth century. For centuries the attention of the vast majority of people had been directed and centred on questions of theological interest. Every branch of culture was under the control of the Church, and no explanation was tolerated that conflicted with its teaching. The general mind was saturated with supernaturalism to an almost incredible degree. The

wildest tale of witchcraft was suitable to such an environment, and there is no question that many of those who were tried and executed for sorcery actually believed the things they were accused of doing to be within their power. The fifteenth century saw, too, a rising tide of heresy against which the Church was forced to do battle, and to ascribe this to the agency of Satan was an easy plan to pursue—just as the heretics attributed the power of the Church itself to the same source. Social conditions were also favourable. Moral ties were as loose as they could reasonably be, and the attitude of the Church towards the sexual relation had forced the religious mind into wholly unhealthy directions. This aspect of the witch epidemic has been but little dealt with, but it is undoubtedly a very real one.

That there was a very strong sexual element in medieval witchcraft is undeniable. When we examine the stories current of the "Sabbath" of the witches, we find that a large part of the proceedings are of a strongly marked erotic character. The figure of Satan often enough reminds one of the old Pagan deity, Priapus, and it is possible that the "Sabbath" itself was little more than a carrying out of the old priapic ceremonies, with the mixture of Christian language and symbolism made inevitable by time and other circumstances.

Universal as has been the belief in witchcraft, it was not until the end of the fifteenth century that it justly assumed what may be called an epidemic form. Then a fatal impetus was given by the issue of a Bull by Pope Innocent VIII. This precious document declares:—

"In truth, it has come to our ears that very many persons of both sexes, deviating from the Catholic Faith, abuse themselves with the demons, Incubus and Succubus; and by incantations, charms, and conjurations, and other wicked superstitions, by criminal acts and offences have caused the offspring of women and of the lower animals, the fruits of the earth, the grape, and the products of various plants, men, women, and other animals of different kinds, vineyards, meadows, pasture land, corn, and other vegetables of the earth to perish, be oppressed, and utterly destroyed; that they hinder the proper intercourse of the sexes, and the propagation of the human species."

It was this Pope who commissioned the inquisitor, Sprenger, to root out witches. Sprenger's book on the subject remained for long the guide for all those engaged in the work.

Almost at once the mania for witch-finding and witch-burning, and one may also assume the belief of people that they could secure and utilise satanic power against others, assumed alarming dimensions. The number given as executed is so great that one would hesitate to accept them as genuine if the statements were not well authenticated. Says Lecky:—

"In almost every province of Germany, but especially in those where clerical influence predominated, the persecution raged with a fearful

intensity. Seven thousand witches are said to have been burned at Treves, six hundred by a single bishop in Bamberg, and nine hundred in a single year in the bishopric of Wurtzburg. . . . At Toulouse, the seat of the Inquisition, four hundred persons perished for sorcery at a single execution, and fifty at Douay in a single year. Remy, a judge of Nancy, boasted that he had put to death eight hundred witches in sixteen years. . . . In Italy, a thousand persons were executed in a single year in the province of Como. . . . In Geneva, which was then ruled by a bishop, five hundred alleged witches were executed in three months; forty-eight were burnt at Constance or Ravensburg, and eighty in the little town of Valery in Savoy.*

In England, from 1603 to 1680 it is estimated that seventy thousand persons were put to death for sorcery.† Grey, the editor of *Hudibras*, says that he had himself seen a list of three thousand persons who were put to death during the life of the Long Parliament. The celebrated witch-finder, Hopkins, hung sixty in one year in the county of Suffolk. In Scotland, for thirty-nine years, the number killed annually averaged two hundred. The most remarkable, and the most horrible executions of all were those that took place in Wurtzburg in February, 1629. No less than one hundred and sixty-two alleged witches were burned in batches. Among these were actually no less than thirty-four children.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

* *Rise and Influence of Rationalism*, vol. i., pp. 3-6.

† A. Williams, *The Superstition of Witchcraft*, p. 214.

SCIENCE AND THE SPIRITUAL ASPECTS OF LIFE

DURING the recent world war, Dr. C. E. Raven delivered a series of lectures at Cambridge University as its Regius Professor of Divinity. These addresses: *Science, Religion and the Future* (C.U.P., 1943, 7s. 6d.), are not only outspoken but decidedly provocative. Our author deeply deplores the armed conflict then raging, and suggests that in allowing so awful a calamity to occur, both scientists and theologians ignominiously failed in their duties. Man, he claims, is a religious animal, and it is only by the co-operation of science with an enlightened spirituality, inspired by the ethical teachings of Paul and Jesus, that humanity's salvation can be consummated.

Dr. Raven's ideal is the exercise of all man's power in quest for truth and the attainment of a good life. He laments that "the prospect of such a development seems not merely remote, but under present circumstances, frankly unattainable. . . . While the Christian religion as professed by the churches still clings restrictively to a *Weltanschauung* that is demonstrably unscientific, to superstitions that violate the intelligence, and to conduct that shocks the morality of modern man, no such consistency as is essential can be expected. To be a Christian, or at least to hold official position in the churches, is to accept formulæ, parts of which can only be explained by being explained away, or else to keep secular knowledge and religious belief in permanent estrangement." Christendom, he complains, seems still contented to retain a view of life of a medieval and pre-scientific character.

This orthodox outlook was originally based on the literal acceptance of every jot and tittle of the ancient Scriptures as divinely inspired. Origen, who had striven to lessen the crudity of this assumption was condemned and discredited by the early Church and the alleged inerrancy of the Bible

was accepted and intensified by the Protestant Reformers of the 16th century. A personal God and Devil; a physical heaven and hell; the vicarious atonement, with all the folklore of the Jews were accepted as divinely revealed and, for long centuries after the alleged resurrection of Jesus, his second coming, with the succeeding Day of Doom, were regarded as certainties throughout the Christian world. Raven assumes the purity of the early Apostolic Church in its teachings, but it was devitalised and degraded by its adaptation to an age "morally and intellectually exhausted, economically and politically bankrupt." This distortion, organised and sustained by the priesthood, prevailed until the 16th century. Moreover, he avers: "Some of the strangest features of it are still accredited parts of Christian orthodoxy."

Many striking examples are given of the superstitions which lingered until relatively recent generations, which were by no means confined to the uncultured. As Raven notes: "How long these superstitions persisted can be seen by a couple of illustrations relevant to the University of Cambridge. In 1645, when John Nidd of Trinity first began his researches in biology and was observing the breeding of frogs in a vivarium, a woman was hanged in the town for keeping a tame frog which was sworn to be her imp; and in 1669, seven years after the foundation of the Royal Society, and eight years after Isaac Newton came into residence, the University entertained Cosimo de Medica with a dissertation denouncing the Copernican astronomy."

Raven stresses the religiosity of the early English scientists as evidence that there is no natural antagonism between science and Christianity. Still, Newton rejected the Trinity, while, as Hobbes discovered, it was unwise, if not positively dangerous to shock the orthodox. It is noteworthy that politics and religion were debarred from discussion at Royal Society gatherings. Even so, Newton himself was charged with robbing the Almighty of his attributes. Halley, again appears to have been a very cold believer, if he believed at all. Prof. Bain averred that it is very doubtful if Macaulay's real religious opinions are expressed in his writings, while Prof. Trevelyan practically admits his great uncle's heterodoxy. Some still living remember the prosecution and political and social ostracism of avowed Freethinkers in our own enlightened land.

As Edmund Gosse has shown in his *Father and Son*, his father, the once popular naturalist, Philip Gosse, would have accepted Darwinism had its message not clashed with his primitive religion. So he published a work, *Omphalos*, which purported to prove that the geological evidences of evolution were deliberately designed by God for the purpose of misleading those who inquired too curiously concerning his creations. Kingsley read the book and then in a letter to its author declared that: "Assuming the act of absolute creation—which I have always accepted as fully as you—shall I tell you the truth? It is best. Your book is the first that ever made me doubt it, and I fear it will make hundreds of others do so."

Darwin had several evolutionary predecessors, Herbert Spencer among them, whose services to the cause, as the late Prof. Poulton testified, are incalculable. Yet Raven, a convinced evolutionist himself, never mentions his name. Another cleric, the Rev. W. D. Ground, in his able study, *An Examination of Spencer's Structural Principles*, assured his readers, who included most of the leading theologians and thinkers of the Victorian Era, that to ignore Spencer was fatuous.

In Raven's estimation natural selection fails to account for many organic phenomena. So other factors must be

engaged in the transformations of plant and animal life which are revealed in our planet's fossil-bearing rocks.

Raven refers contemptuously to Mallock's *Reconstruction of Belief*, and dismisses him as "a dilettante who joined the Church of Rome on his deathbed!" In past decades, he avers, the Anglican clergy knew little or nothing of science. "Even to-day it is noteworthy," he writes, "that popular theologians from Dean Inge to Miss Dorothy Sayers make blunders in matters of science which they would not venture to leave unchecked if they were dealing with literature or history." Prof. Hogben is also accused of inaccuracy in his *Science for the Citizen*, but the instances Raven alleges are trivial. Raven's own interpretation of Darwin's personality and capacity is unconvincing, if not absurd. Also, in the volume under review in a footnote on page 47, T. H. Huxley's famous *Man's Place in Nature* is incorrectly entitled *Man's Place in the Universe*.

Copernicus, Raven remarks, was never persecuted, but, if we remember rightly, the Church was never given the chance. But the shameful persecution of Galileo, one of the most illustrious founders of modern physical science, is not mentioned. It is true that Bruno and Servetus were burnt alive, but Raven reflects, "they were queer and difficult people." We are assured that until the 19th century the evidence of antagonism between religion and science is very scanty. Still, one would scarcely accept this claim after perusing the history of the long conflict in the important work of Dr. White: *The Warfare of Science with Theology*, or Prof. Draper's volume on the same subject.

In any case, Raven deplors the antagonism between science and the supernatural which became pronounced in the 19th century, and he seems to suggest that the disunity which appeared has been largely responsible for the world's present woes. All attempts to reconcile the verities of science with the fantasies of theology have completely broken down. This in substance, Raven admits, and even his more mystical or spiritual reading of life finds little encouragement. He grieves that even those who most earnestly desire universal peace display an indifference to the true sacredness which adorns the life and message of Christ. He avers that: "It is indeed testimony to the disintegration of our intellectual life that so many who are profoundly concerned with the search for truth and the achievement of personality should ignore or lightly dismiss the founder of Christianity. That a person so sensitive and deeply concerned as Mr. Aldous Huxley, for example, should brush aside the whole fact of Christ with cheap sneers at 'his very inadequate biographers' and at three minor incidents recorded of him, shows a lack of perspective out of keeping with the rest of his book."

So much for Aldous Huxley's *Ends and Means*. In company with us all, Raven in conclusion, is compelled to leave the future both dark and doubtful and, as the poet says: "The world is what it is, despite our dust and din."

T. F. PALMER.

RECORDS OF PLAGIARISTS

POPE'S *Essay on Man* is a famous metrical piece of philosophy, but it is not well known that Pope did not compose this *Essay*, the original manuscript is attributed to the Pythagorean school whose motto was, "The noblest study of mankind is MAN;" the equivalent to another ancient Grecian saying: "Man know thyself," B.C. 580.

Lord Bolingbroke possessed this antiquarian M.S. and paid Pope to versify it, in English. In Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, a letter from Dr. Blair is given, and tells us that the ancient manuscript of the *Essay on Man* was examined by Lord Bathurst and that the last few lines were com-

posed by Lord Bolingbroke and written by him, on the original M.S. Pope certainly wrote what he translated and versified, and this is the manuscript purchased by Lord Rothschild who sold it at auction, and was "knocked down" to the American book specialist, Dr. Rosenbach, for an immense sum, given to the Red Cross Funds; price at auction, £6,000.

There has been ridiculous confusion concerning the authenticity of this "Essay," because it has been finally rediscovered, having been lost on three different occasions. It is written in Pope's careful style, in a quarto book, and differently worded in some lines, in distinction to the composition of other English versions, and Pope altered the titles, one of these being "Ethic Epistles."

More literary borrowings belong to *The Golden Ass* by Apuleius. Boccaccio used it for his *Decameron*; Cervantes copied the "Ass" book for his *Don Quixote*; and the English story of Cupid and Psyche is from Apuleius. Apuleius himself copied and used parts of Lucian's *Dialogues*; and, Lucian cribbed from Lucius Petreas. The Egyptian story books, 5000 years B.C., now kept in the British Museum, have in them compositions similar to *The Golden Ass*, like Shakespeare's "Ass" in *Midsummer Nights Dream*.

I will conclude these records by transcribing a peculiarly worded Colophon, written at the end of a Wynkyn de Worde book.

Wm. Caxton's *La Mort d'Arthure*, printed in the Westminster Abbey Cloisters, republished by Wynkyn de Worde, 1498 as *The Whole Booke of Kynges Arthure and His Knyghtes*.

"It treateth of the byrth, lyfe and actes and the meruaylous enquests with achyeuinge of the Sancgreall (Holy Bloode).

"Praye for Master Wyllyam Caxton, that is hys tyme was a man of moche ornate and wysdome. He deceased full crystanly in the Yere of Oure Lord MCCCCXXXI (1481)."

WM. AUGUSTUS VAUGHAN.

BLAND BEATITUDES

Blessed are the Poor—they've plenty of scope
For daily indulging the pleasures of hope.

Blest be the Meek, in nobody's way.
Missing the kicks—and the ha'pence, they say.

Happy the Hungry, with insides to fill,
No blood-pressure either, or grocery bill.

Blessed be the Thirsty, some not to be found
In their usual place, when their turn for the round.

Lucky the man with no Creed or Religion.
His mind has some room for what's really his
"pigeon."

—ARTHUR E. CARPENTER.

WHAT IS RELIGION? By Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 2d.; postage 1d.

WHAT IS THE SABBATH DAY? By H. Cutner. Price 1s. 3d.; postage 2d.

THOMAS PAINE, A Pioneer of Two Worlds. By Chapman Cohen. Price 1s. 4d.; postage 1d.

WILL YOU RISE FROM THE DEAD? By C. G. L. Du Cann. An inquiry into the evidence of resurrection. Price 6d.; postage 1d.

ACID DROPS

We are always lost in admiration at the confident way in which so many diverse people tell us the real truth about Christianity. The latest example is a Mr. P. Hitchcock who claims that Christianity is not the religion of Jesus at all. We know, of course, that "Churchianity" is always dismissed with contempt by true Christians, but the real thing—the Christianity of Jesus—we always imagined to come straight from Heaven. Mr. Hitchcock is the President of the Marylebone Spiritualist Association and so, of course, the true religion of Jesus which was completely suppressed by Christians, must be Spiritualism. Mr. Hitchcock not only believes in Jesus, but also in all the Blessed Apostles, while the Resurrection was just an ordinary case of "Materialisation."

In actual fact, outside the New Testament, there is not a scrap of evidence of any kind that any of the Christian people described in it ever had an actual existence. If the Resurrection of Jesus was "Materialisation," then the wholesale resurrection of Jewish saints must mean wholesale materialisations. That this is believed in by Mr. Hitchcock we can well believe—but why should any person believe it these days merely because it is recorded by Matthew? The truth is that when true believers get talking about Jesus, they give vent to the most incredible twaddle.

An example of this was delightfully recorded by Prof. C. A. Coulson who teaches physics and who recently gave a lecture on "miracles" to children in a schools broadcast. This gentleman who, no doubt, is an admirable teacher of physics, believes almost every word in the New Testament as being irrefutably true. We say "almost" because even his infantile credulity could not swallow the "miracle" of Jesus cursing a fig tree till it withered. But he believed in all the other miracles—and for sheer hopeless childishness, his lecture would be hard to beat. Poor children—that they should be forced to listen to such drivel.

The question of popularising Christianity has always been a difficult problem, but it is refreshing to note in the *Spectator* that, while some people approve, for example, of Miss Sayers' *The Man Born to be King* as being of value for this, the writer himself does not "approve" of it. Nor does he like Christianity referred to as in a missionary publication, as being "One o'clock news," or that, "Suffered under Pontius Pilate" is "news," or that the name of Pilate as having been "on a regional wave length" is very impressive. But what would you have? If Christianity is to survive at all it has to be bang up-to-date—and there, brother, you've said a mouthful.

In reply to someone in the same journal who insisted that "a more intense study of the Bible" would lead to "reunion," we were pleased to see that veteran Rationalist, Mr. Hamilton Fyfe, pointing out that "it was precisely Bible reading which created disunion." Of course. The more the various sects read the Bible, and the more they understand it—if that is possible—the more they will differ. And violently too!

Whether Christians can or cannot be Masons, one fact remains clear and that is, that Masons have to take a solemn oath "in the presence of Almighty God" never to reveal the mighty secrets of the craft. They have a Masonic Prayer Book in which "so help me God"

appears to be prominent. Still, there are masons who do not believe in *Christ*.

Whether the churches fill up on Easter Day or not, it is fairly sure that they will not fill up in the same way on many of the Sundays following. Mr. A. J. P. Taylor (a well known broadcaster) tries to tell us why in the *Sunday Pictorial*—and the journal's numerous readers will, no doubt, not like his pronouncement that "science has killed religion," for "religion offers something that has nothing to do with reason." And his conclusion is, that if religion survives at all, it will be because of its ceremonies "and not for its teaching." If the *Sunday Pictorial* goes on like this, it also may have a struggle to survive; for to be tarred with the brush of Atheism is the most deadly sin known to Christians; more so than even "atheistic Communism."

Another mournful Jeremiah has appeared in the pages of the *Christian World* in the Rev. H. V. Martin, M.A., B.D., and Ph.D., who fills two columns with moans why Christianity "seems to have so little appeal to the majority of people in our country." We may not have noticed his article but for the fact that he mentions some Freethinkers by name, and knows so little of them, that he spells the name of one of the most famous as "Payne," instead of (Thomas) "Paine." Obviously, that is all he knows about the "great commoner," his name by sound—and for a presumably educated man his mistake is as bad as if he wrote "rool" for "rule." Perhaps, if Mr. Martin would read *The Age of Reason*, he would have a much better appreciation of the reasons why Christianity is slowly but surely dying out. But we can tell him in a nutshell—it is not true.

It is most instructive to learn what R.C. Bishops think of other Bishops. Here is what Archbishop Wyszyński says about them: "There is only one priesthood in the Catholic religion, whose founder is the highest Archpriest—Christ. All others are not pastors, but wolves." The Archbishop of Canterbury really should ask Wyszyński to preach in the Catholic St. Paul's Cathedral before Anglo-Catholics. He need only repeat, "There is no authority on earth which can replace the supernatural authority of Christ. His Vicar, the Pope, and his ministers, the bishops," and we are sure that that blessed "Unity" they are all fighting for will be a step nearer.

We are always pleased to give credit where it is due, and the Rev. B. R. H. Spaul is to be congratulated on not shirking the fact that "Our God is a consuming fire." This quotation comes from Deuteronomy (4, 24) and beautifully describes the Sun—just as, when Jesus claims to be "The Light of the World," he is telling us that he is also the Sun. It is a pity, however, that his readers in the *Christian World* do not know this—they still probably look upon God Almighty as a kind of Jewish old gentleman, sitting on a cloud, and wearing a typically foreign beard. Still, how in the world can they describe the "halo" of Jesus if not as the Sun?

It seems hardly necessary to add that—now that he is dead—Mr. Ernest Bevin was a thorough spiritualist, an out-and-out believer. Strange that the *Psychic News*, which splashes the news on its front page, never discovered it before!

"THE FREETHINKER"

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Will correspondents kindly note to address all communications in connection with "The Freethinker" to: "The Editor," and not to any particular person. Of course, private communications can be sent to any contributor.

When the services of the National Secular Society in connection with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, 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.

The following periodicals are being received regularly, and can be consulted at "The Freethinker" office: THE TRUTH SEEKER (U.S.A.), COMMON SENSE (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 FRIEDENKER (Switzerland), DON BASILIO (Italy).

Correspondents are requested to write on one side of the paper only and to make their letters as brief as possible.

Lecture Notices should reach the Office by Friday morning.

SUGAR PLUMS

The Evening Demonstration in Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London, W.C. 1, on Whit-Sunday evening, following the Annual Conference of The National Secular Society, gives an excellent opportunity for London and suburban readers and friends to hear some of our provincial speakers. Messrs. J. T. Brighton (Newcastle), H. Day (Bradford), T. M. Mosley (Nottingham), with L. Ebury and F. A. Ridley are all experienced speakers and capable of presenting the case for Freethought from many attractive and instructive angles. Admission is free, with some reserved seats at one shilling each, and proceedings begin at 7 o'clock with Mr. R. H. Rosetti in the chair. Reserved seat tickets may be had at the door, or in advance from the N.S.S. offices, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C. 1; cash with application.

Only members of the N.S.S. can attend the morning and afternoon sessions of the Conference, and those requiring hotel accommodation must send in their requirements without further delay to 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C. 1, or find themselves without accommodation.

The Lewisham and South London Branch N.S.S. regret that the debate between Mr. Tom Colyer and Mr. L. Ebury announced for last Sunday had to be postponed owing to the illness of Mr. Colyer, and will take place this evening, April 29, in the London and Brighton Hotel, 139, Queens Road, Peckham, London, at 7-30 p.m. The subject for debate is, "Is Roman Catholicism More Tolerant than Protestantism?"

Birmingham readers and friends should make a note of Mr. H. Cutner's visit to-day (April 29). He is lecturing on "Spiritualism" at the Satis Cafe, 40, Cannon Street, off New Street, for the Birmingham Branch N.S.S., beginning at 7 p.m. Mr. Cutner's articles on "Spiritualism" in these columns during the past few years prove him a strong opponent of "survival," and we hope spiritualists could be persuaded to oppose him.

We are asked to make a correction in the Obituary Notice in our issue of April 15, the name should have been Miss Anne Elizabeth Wilford. The name was printed as sent in to us, but we express our regret for the error to the surviving relatives.

FATIMA CALLING!

THANKS to the kindness of a Glasgow reader of *The Freethinker*, I have received copies of two recently published Roman Catholic publications.

By the *Queen's Command* and *If War Should Come*, both by Lawrence F. Harvey, a Tertiary (lay brother) of the well-known order of the "Servites" or "Servants of Mary." Both these publications, the former, a booklet, and the latter, a pamphlet, are published by John G. Burns, 195, Buccleugh Street, Glasgow, at, respectively, the price of 2s. 6d. and 2d.

These latest Catholic publications both, apparently, published to coincide with the official promulgation of the Dogma of the Assumption of the Virgin upon November 1, 1950, make interesting, not to say intriguing reading. For the purpose of the larger of these two works, *By the Queen's Command*, was to record the personal appearances of the Virgin in modern times upon this earth and to record the warnings to mankind which she then uttered. Whereas the pamphlet *If War Should Come*, indicates what the actual response of militant Catholicism should be to the impressive warnings of the supernatural visitor. It would also appear that Brother Harvey's appeal for what is, in effect, a new Crusade against the contemporary enemies of the Catholic Church, represents official policy at Rome. For his booklet contains a glowing tribute to and wholehearted endorsement of the author and his thesis from a highly placed ecclesiastic, the Prior General of the Order of the Servants of Mary, Fr. Benetti. Writing in Rome under the eye of the Vatican, a top-ranking Roman ecclesiastic would scarcely have ventured to support such extremely startling proposals as are advanced by Brother Harvey, unless the Vatican itself was in favour of such steps being taken. The author dedicates his work to Cardinal Mindszenty, now doing a life sentence in a Communist gaol.

By the *Queen's Command* records the modern appearances of the Virgin at Lourdes, Fatima, etc., etc., and the warnings there delivered by the August Visitor to mankind at large. The oratorical style of the Queen of Heaven, like that of so many of her servants here below, tends to the diffuse! These celestial communications, like mundane ecclesiastical pronouncements, contain much verbose padding. However, the gist, the operative kernel, so to speak, of our Lady's message, was delivered during her appearance at Fatima in the summer of 1917, as recorded by our author upon page 19 of the aforementioned work.

"If my requests are granted, Russia will be converted and there will be peace! If not, Russia's impious propaganda will spread to every country in the world, raising up wars and persecution against the Church; many will be martyred, the Holy Father will have much to suffer, and many nations will be wiped out." All of which last prediction, as our author feelingly observes, "is happening in front of our eyes."

All of which goes to prove what long-range political views they take in Heaven or, at least, in ecclesiastical circles in Rome! For at the time our Lady of Fatima broadcast this warning to the world on her spiritual transmitter, the Russian Revolution was still in its early constitutional phase under the political leadership of Mr. Kerensky and the Mensheviks; its revolutionary communist phase under Lenin still lay in the future at the time that Fatima received its Divine Visitor. Rome traditionally mingles Heaven and Earth in her pronouncements. But a careful perusal of Brother Harvey's two works before us, lends fresh point

to an earlier statement of the present writer in the columns of *The Freethinker*; the real significance of Fatima was that it represented the official declaration of war by the Church of Rome against the Russian Revolution; the celestial trappings, the acrobatics of the sun, etc., were merely put in, as it were, to enhance the importance of the life-and-death struggle against the new menace of "Atheistic Communism" which Rome then solemnly undertook and which is, at present, raging more fiercely than ever; as, indeed our author repeatedly and vigorously insists.

In point of fact, the successive appearances of "the Queen" at Loretto, Guadeloupe, and in more recent times at Lourdes and Fatima, have always corresponded pretty accurately with successive fundamental crises in the history and fortunes of the Church of Rome. Thus, to take only the two most recent instances already cited, Lourdes and Fatima, the former occurred in France, the traditional "eldest daughter" of the Church, at a period when Rome was locked in a mortal struggle with the Atheistic Free-Masonry and anti-clericalism which characterised pre-eminently the middle years of the 19th century when "Our Lady of Lourdes" appeared to Bernadette (1858). Simultaneously, there was raging within the Church herself at the time a bitter controversy over the then newly-proclaimed Dogma of the Immaculate Conception and over the right of the Pope, then still not officially recognised as infallible, to proclaim dogmas. The explicit statement of the Virgin at Lourdes, "I am the Immaculate Conception" at one and the same time, confirmed the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception and foreshadowed the later (1870) Dogma of Papal Infallibility. (It may be assumed that any future apparition of the Virgin will have something to say of the new Dogma of her Assumption.)

Similarly, we have already noted the political implications of Fatima. Here too, the apparition took place also in a land, Portugal, where the Church was then (1917) fighting for its life against anti-clerical liberalism and Freemasonry in the Lusitanian peninsula. Happily, we are here able to record that, thanks to Our Lady of Fatima and the Fascist regime of her servant, Dr. Salazar, the present Portuguese Dictator, Portugal has now seen the error of her ways and has returned to the one true fold!

Incidentally, I have never seen the point raised, but it seems worth commenting on here. Fatima was, of course, the name of the only daughter of the prophet Mohammed and in the theology of several heretical Moslem sects she held a position somewhat similar to that occupied in Catholic theology by the Virgin Mary. The Moslems ruled Portugal for several centuries after the conquest of Spain; was there a Moslem cult of Fatima in the place named after Mohammed's daughter? We lack any information upon this point but a survey of the local antiquities of Fatima might be found to shed some light upon this question. Perhaps, the next time she visits Fatima, our learned Portuguese correspondent "N.F.," might look into the matter and acquaint us with her findings?

To return to our author, *What the Queen Commands* tells us what the "Queen" said. In his accompanying pamphlet, *If War should Come*, Brother Harvey tells us what she requires to be done. Put briefly, and omitting the rhetoric and verbosity, this boils down to a war against Russia and "godless Communism," the further expansion of which means inevitably "the Catacombs," the final end of "Christian civilisation." What is wanted is a new Crusade against the worst enemy that the Catholic

Church has ever encountered. Spain has heard, and obeyed the warning voice of "Our Lady of Fatima" and has extirpated Communism by force; the whole Christian world must follow this noble example.

How? Our author has a plan! To fight the "red army" of Communism, a "blue army" consecrated to our Lady of Fatima and vowed to the extirpation of the foes of the Church, is required. Such a "blue army" is already in process of formation on an international scale. Of this army, which we are informed, "is growing at a tremendous rate," the author proudly informs us that he is "the National Commander for Great Britain and Ireland" and he ends his pamphlet with a passionate appeal for recruits in the New Crusade.

As Christianity gets older, it seems to get more ferocious! For Jesus stated that he came to bring not peace but a sword. However, apparently his Mother will be satisfied with nothing less than the Atom Bomb!

F. A. RIDLEY.

STREAMLINED ENGLISH

SHAW in his "Testament" tried to impress upon us how much a spelling reform was overdue; his proposed alphabet of 40 letters, however, would not result in saving time but would inevitably mean that at least one other tier of keys had to be added to the existing four-tier keyboard of all typewriters.

The argument for an increase in signs is that the spoken alphabet contains 43 sounds, whilst the written alphabet has only 26 letters or symbols to represent them. As a perfect alphabet is based upon phonetic principles, the English alphabet is found wanting. And whilst the five vowels have to represent 13 sounds, we have the luxury of three superfluous letters: c, q, x.

If we aimed at a "perfect" alphabet, we would have to borrow signs from the Russians who can denote every simple sound by a distinct symbol; in Cyrillic writing no sound is represented by more than one sign.

Yet even in a *regular* system of spelling many of the symbols may have different values; for instance, s in German, "Stein," or l in French, "fils." Some of these changes or exceptions are covered by rules, others impose themselves as a matter of course, e.g., in the final -s of the plural and the -ed of the past which we assimilate to the preceding consonant of the noun or verb-stem (c.p., butts/buds and helped/sobbed). All that is wanted, therefore, is not a "perfect" phonetic alphabet, but a regular system—like in Italian—so as to enable every schoolchild to pronounce any given word or family name in one, and only one, distinct way.

To-day, even words in frequent daily use are being pronounced in varying ways, let alone the snobs who call fungi "Fun-Guy." The fact that linguists had to devise a phonetic script to help us pronouncing words by means of signs which do not occur in the common alphabet—this fact alone is reason enough for a reform.

Such a reform cannot stop at spelling only, as if English were spelt arbitrarily.

Northern English is still spoken with as much refinement as our present literary English, because Scotland has long had a higher average of education than England; therefore the pronunciation there has been less subjected to debasing influences than in the south. Ever since the invention of printing, the forms of words of one particular dialect have been gradually stereotyped and preserved from further change. But it is due still more to wider education; however, this is true of the *form* only; it is not true of the *sounds* of the words. They have changed so

greatly that it is not too much to say that the Bible as read nowadays would be barely intelligible to its translators. And this change of sound will continue to operate and to widen the gap between sound and symbol as long as English is a spoken language.

GH, which is usually silent and sometimes like an f, survives from a period when the pronunciation of "night" was more like the Scots "nicht"; as, therefore, GH stands for a guttural sound which was once common in the Teutonic languages (and still is in Dutch and German), the conventional spelling of "night" should not be replaced by "nite."* What ought to be changed (and standardised) is the pronunciation.

The sounds most affected in "King's English" are the vowels and not infrequently people cannot agree upon the pronunciation of, say, *a* in Pall Mall—a problem which could not arise in German, French or Italian. Since "but" is derived from Anglo-Saxon "bi-utan," it is difficult to understand why this u-sound differs from the one in "put" or "butcher." Nor seems it excusable to distort classical names such as "Pythagoras."

With "univocal" signs we could also dispense with (silent) final -e (formerly denoting that the preceding vowel was long while the word was dissyllabic).

The letters a, e, i, o, u were originally devised and intended to represent the vowel sounds heard in part, pet, pit, port, put, respectively, and in other languages they still have this value. Generally the use of a double consonant indicates that the foregoing vowel is short; this is the case according to the Norwegian spelling reform of 1938. On the other hand, h (or e) may lengthen the preceding vowel (as in German); or we could differentiate "beat" from "bit" by using y as i + i.

Spelling reform is advocated on the grounds that the spelling has become obsolete for not having kept pace with the evident changes in our pronunciation, resulting in a divorcement of our written from our spoken alphabet. Simplified spelling does not lay claim to phonetic accuracy; its aim is to narrow the gap as much as possible and to remedy the great dislocation of our orthographical system through official reform.

PERCY GORDON ROY.

* On the other hand, in "I" we discard even in writing the historical form which in Middle English—prior to the softening-up process affecting gutturals—was "ich" (Anglo-Saxon *ic*).

CORRESPONDENCE

DERIVATIONS OF CHESS

SIR,—My learned friend, Mr. Percy J. Roy, rather belatedly takes exception to certain translations from the ancient Persian language used in relation to the game of chess by Mr. Kenneth Matthews and quoted by me in a not very recent article in *The Freethinker*. Mr. Roy is, of course, perfectly entitled to produce his own translations; in any case, his lavish display of erudition is scarcely necessary since I very much doubt if any of your readers are sufficiently acquainted with the Paphlavi (ancient Persian) language as currently spoken under the Sassanian Dynasty (228-641 A.D.), to check the accuracy of his renderings. Consequently, with reference to this part of his letter, we shall have to leave Messrs. Matthews and Roy to their respective translations.

As regards, however, the question of the derivation of our word "Exchequer" from the Norman-French *exchequier*, or chess-board, I may relevantly add that, not only the author cited by me, Mr. Kenneth Matthews, but, equally, the eminent Anglo-French social historian, the late Robert Briffault, accepts this derivation (cf. R. Briffault, *La Fable Anglaise*, Paris, 1943).

Be this as it may, Mr. Editor, I really must join issue with my learned friend upon one aspect of his letter. I pointed out that the Persian king, Chosroes Anurshiviran, exterminated the contemporary communist sect founded by Mazdak (early sixth century A.D.). Mr. Roy astonishingly goes out of his way to deny that Mazdak and his followers were identical with the authors of

"The Communist Manifesto" (1848). Seeing that Mazdak lived rather more than thirteen centuries before the authors of "The Communist Manifesto," the above disclaimer really seems a trifle superfluous! Mazdak and Marx were, however, both communists in the fundamental sense of advocating common ownership. Naturally, the precise character of communism in the ancient agrarian East and in modern industrial Europe differed profoundly. It is really rather surprising to have to point out so obvious a fact to so learned a scholar as Mr. Roy. Surely he does not believe the legend that Karl Marx invented Communism all on his own in the library of the British Museum? Actually, the theory, if not the practice, of Communism, has been known at least since the ancient Greeks. Naturally, its forms have varied with the evolution of society. Elementary, my dear Roy.—Yours, etc.,

F. A. RIDLEY.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Report of Executive Meeting held April 19, 1951

The President, Mr. R. H. Rosetti, in the chair.

Also present: Messrs. Griffiths, A. C. Rosetti, Ridley, Morris, Johnson, Ebury, Woodley, Page, Corstorphine, Barker, Hornibrook, Mrs. Venton.

Minutes of previous meeting read and accepted. Financial statement presented.

New members were admitted to Manchester, North London, West Ham, and the Parent Society.

Exhibits sent on loan to the Thomas Paine Exhibition to be held in Thetford in connection with the Festival of Britain were reported. Fraternal greetings to the American Congress of Freethinkers in Montevideo endorsed. A very satisfactory balance sheet from Bradford Branch noted.

The Executive's annual balance sheet presented, discussed, and adopted for presentation at the Annual Conference.

The Executive's Annual Report was read, discussed and accepted to be read at the Annual Conference.

Details in connection with conference arrangements and for the evening demonstration reported and approved.

The next meeting of the Executive was fixed for May 31, and the proceedings closed.

JOHN SEIBERT, General Secretary.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

OUTDOOR

Blackburn Market Place.—Sunday, April 29, 7 p.m.: F. ROTHWELL, A Lecture.

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park, Bradford).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. H. DAY, A Lecture.

Kingston-on-Thames Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. J. W. BARKER.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (St. Mary's Gate, Blitzed Site).—Lunch-hour Lectures every weekday, 1 p.m.: Mr. G. WOODCOCK.

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

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Sunday, April 29, 6-30 p.m.: Mr. T. M. MOSLEY and A. ELSMERE.

Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barker's Pool).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. A. SAMMS.

INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. ("Satis Cafe," 40, Cannon Street, off New Street).—Sunday, April 29, 7 p.m.: H. CUTNER (London), "Spiritualism Unmasked."

Lewisham and District Branch N.S.S. (The London and Brighton Hotel, 139, Queen's Road, Peckham, S.E.15).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: Debate between Mr. L. EBURY and Mr. T. COLYER on: "Is Roman Catholicism More Tolerant than Protestantism?"

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, April 29, 11 a.m.: Dr. W. E. SWINTON, Ph.D., F.R.S.E., "The Spirit of Man."

West Ham and District Branch N.S.S. (Wanstead House, The Green, Wanstead, E.11, Wanstead and Woodford Community Centre).—Thursday, April 26, 7-30 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, "A Freethinker Looks at the World."

METAPHYSICS OR MATERIALISM?

MR. YATES is to be complimented; for it is quite an achievement to commit so many fallacies. His article has surely earned a place in the logical text-books of the future, if only as an illustration of the queer reasoning to which some are given. Though he has not much knowledge of, nor faith in, metaphysics, that does not preclude him from writing on this subject, and though he states, "It is not my intention to make a third party in the controversy," he does, nevertheless, enter into the controversy.

I am afraid that I cannot agree with him when he states that Materialism is "nothing" about which he says there is "much-ado."

His argument that a Materialist is a Freethinker is circular, and *ipso-facto*, it is fallacious. Apart from this consideration, even if, which I do not accept, most Freethinkers are Materialists, it is *non-sequitur* to argue from that, "Therefore all Materialists are Freethinkers." It would appear, *prima-facie*, that a Materialist cannot be a Freethinker. McCabe assures me that a Materialist is necessarily a Determinist, it does appear to follow that the terms "Freethinker" and "Materialist" are mutually exclusive, i.e., they cannot be applied to the same phenomenon without falling into self-contradiction.

Even if, but it has yet to be established, I "merely repeat the parrot-cry of religionists. . . ." that does not, on that account, make my criticism valueless. The repetition of statements does not affect either their truth or their validity. The proposition, $1 + 1 = 2$, within the present arithmetical system, will still be true however many times it is repeated. Again, it has yet to be established that religionists are "credulous." Can it be said, for instance, that Whitehead and Dorothy Emmett are "credulous"?

I have demonstrated elsewhere (*The Freethinker*, March 5, 1950) that materialism is not "founded on reason, experience and common sense." And even if it were founded on these, that would not, on that account, make it acceptable. Surely, if it can be shown that that on which a philosophy is based is untrustworthy, then does it not follow that the superstructure is also untrustworthy? (i.e., if the grounds or premises of an argument are not certain, then surely the conclusion cannot be regarded as certain.)

I should be pleased to learn where any recognised metaphysician claims "that what we regard as such (i.e., matter) is only an idea in our minds without any external objective existence." Even if a number of metaphysicians hold that this proposition is true, that does not commit *all* metaphysicians to the same view.

For Mr. Yates's benefit, it does not necessarily follow from the fact that I am not a Materialist that therefore I am an Idealist. In point of fact I am an Agnostic, and if this correspondence establishes nothing else than the absurdity of some Materialists' claim that Agnosticism is "Atheism in a top hat" then it will have served a useful purpose.

Mr. Yates is confusing metaphysics with Solipsism—and while all Solipsists may be metaphysicians, it does not follow from that, "Therefore all metaphysicians are Solipsists," e.g., some metaphysicians are Materialists. If he will take the trouble to read the article in which I gave the various definitions of "metaphysics" he will see that I quote these definitions to illustrate my point that what the method of metaphysics is, will depend finally

on the school to which an individual belongs. If he will compare their implications he will see that they are "contrary." Hence, I can hardly be described as "Fortified by these explanatory dicta."

I can assure Mr. Yates that you cannot have a contradiction between "belief" and "behaviour," any elementary text-book of logic which deals with the relations between propositions will confirm this statement.

I take it from his remarks, ". . . will afford him an opportunity to substitute a little argument for much worthless abuse," that he fails to notice the arguments which I have put forward. It seems strange that Mr. Yates comments at such lengths on arguments which, he says, have not been produced. It may be that they have been produced and have not been noticed by Mr. Yates. If the latter, how can he comment on that which he has not yet noticed? If the former, how can he comment on that which has not yet been stated?

I should be interested to learn of a few examples to substantiate his statement: "In no other science are theory and practise so much at variance." What knowledge has he of the other sciences? Indeed, what knowledge has he of metaphysics? Further, I should be interested if he will show me where I have stated that I believe in "self-stultification." I can only conclude from his remarks that the number of metaphysical works which he has read is precisely nil.

I fail to grasp the logical process which Mr. Yates follows in his penultimate paragraph. I would like to see the demonstration that his "inference," "of course I have myself fulfilled these requirements," follows from, or is contained in, "Philosophy is a serious study requiring intense and concentrated effort."

Let us examine his claim: "Materialism is based on experience, reason and common sense." I pointed out (March 5, 1950) that Materialism renounces experience because "one of the fundamental contents of my awareness is a capacity of choice." I have frequently been assured that this experience is an illusion, hence, Materialism renounces experience, and yet, as I pointed out, it is upon inferences drawn from experience that the Determinist builds his case for Determinism. So much, then, for "reason and experience." "Common sense" supposes (rightly or wrongly is not the point) that man is composed of two different qualities, namely, "matter" and "mind," i.e., material and the immaterial. Yet the Materialist assures me that what we call "mind," are really "physiological processes," and that these processes are not qualitatively different because, by definition, only matter exists. So much, then, for "materialism being based on common sense."

On April 23, 1950, in reply to a Mr. Turner, I pointed out "The problem is not one of understanding, but one of judging the validity of extending, as a metaphysic, a purely anthropomorphic aid to the understanding," i.e., mechanism. About the same time, I noted (in reply to Mr. Simmons), "One of the difficulties facing the materialist is to show how 'rationality' can enter into physiological processes." So much for Mr. Yates's claim: "An absence of any explicit statement on my part." Needless to say, there was never even an attempt to deal these points, here then, is an opportunity for Mr. Yates to become Materialism's apologist.

VERNON CARTER.

ROME OR REASON? A Question for Today. By Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 1s.; postage 2d.