

# THE FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Editor: F. A. RIDLEY

Vol. LXXII—No. 33

[REGISTERED AT THE GENERAL  
POST OFFICE AS A NEWSPAPER]

Price Fourpence

## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### Religion and Superstition

WE recently made the acquaintance of a very interesting book which deals with an aspect of religion that is of particular interest to Rationalists. The book in question is entitled *Superstition*, and its author (the late) Reverend Herbert Thurston was a well-known Jesuit and one of the leading writers and apologists of Catholicism in the England of his day. Fr. Thurston, however, was, by no means, a typical representative of orthodoxy. It would, we think, be almost accurate to describe him as a clerical Freethinker!

If this appears to be a contradiction in terms, yet it is one that finds much support in Fr. Thurston's own numerous writings. For he was the *enfant terrible* of the Church of Rome in his day: an acute reasoner and a man of immense learning, this peculiar Jesuit ruthlessly "debunked" many of the most cherished legends of his co-religionists. Even the cast-iron Jesuit Order periodically produces intellectual freaks. Was it not a Jesuit of an elder day, the redoubtable Fr. Hardouin, who was wont to declare that, "he had not got up at four o'clock in the morning for twenty years in order to think the same as everyone else!" To justify which proud assertion, the Rev. Father propounded the heterodox theory, beloved of the modern "mythicist" school, that the works of Tacitus and other Roman authors had been actually forged by mediæval monks.

Fr. Thurston was a worthy successor to the famous Père Hardouin. For he accomplished the remarkable feat of remaining an outwardly orthodox member of the Jesuit Order, usually regarded as the "Old Guard" of Catholic orthodoxy, whilst pouring out a whole series of booklets and pamphlets which, whilst continuing to profess entire submission to the orthodox dogmas of the most dogmatic of the Christian Churches, actually tore to pieces the pious legends of the Middle Ages in the most critical vein of modern scholarship. Thus, Fr. Thurston ruthlessly "debunked" the mediæval legends of "Pope Joan" and the "Holy Shroud of Turin." (If one reads the article on "The Holy Shroud" in the current issue of *The Literary Guide*—July, 1952—it would appear that Fr. Thurston's criticism of this particular Catholic legend was definitely more advanced than is that of some of our contemporary "reverent Rationalists"!) Whilst in an article contributed to a Catholic symposium on *Witchcraft*, our Jesuit author, whilst explicitly accepting the possibility of witchcraft on the authority of the Church, goes on to tell us quite casually that there can be no reasonable doubt that the vast majority, at any rate, of the "witches" tortured and roasted by the Inquisition were undoubtedly innocent. A rather startling contribution to "Catholic Evidence."

From which it appears that Fr. Thurston concealed a highly critical intellect behind his clerical cassock. What the Church laid down as "an article of Faith," that, and that alone, he accepted. All the rest, legends, "pious opinions," speculations of theologians, were fair game to this Jesuit master of casuistry. His type is more common in the Church than is sometimes realised outside. Not all

priests are credulous! Nor are they all consciously dishonest. The Jesuits, in particular, are past masters in obliterating the sharp distinctions between black and white. Equivocation is the Jesuit "science," par excellence! One of Fr. Thurston's most distinguished clerical contemporaries was Mgr. Louis Duchesne, the French ecclesiastical historian. The late Prof. Bury, the eminent Rationalist historian, declared that, outside the dogmas of his Church, Duchesne's was the most sceptical mind that he had ever met. The French cleric justified this judgment by writing a standard history of the Early Church which was accepted as orthodox by the Vatican, but which never made any reference to miracles at all!

Fr. Thurston showed a similar mentality in approaching the question of Superstition in his booklet. The Church, he tells us in effect, has to wage a war on two fronts simultaneously; against incredulity, on the one hand, and against superstition, on the other. The former consists in refusing to believe on sufficient grounds, the latter in believing on inadequate grounds: the sceptic believes too little; the credulous devotee, too much. Both are grievous sins for a Christian to fall into. Fr. Thurston does not actually say, but implies pretty obviously, that the Church, whilst adamant against scepticism, has often been remiss in rebuking its opposing vice, superstition. This is bad; for not all belief is good. St. Paul bids Christians practise a *reasonable* Faith. Our author, writing in 1933, refers, cautiously but unmistakably, to a current craze for miracles in ecclesiastical circles.

Those more slipshod critics of Catholic theology, whether Protestants or (self-styled) Rationalists, who seem to imagine that Faith necessarily means blind belief in everything, could read Fr. Thurston's little book with much gain to their mental clarity. For example, the learned Jesuit points out quite clearly that, whilst it is undoubtedly an "Article of Faith" that supernatural visitations *can* take place, no Catholic is bound to believe that they *have*, in fact, occurred since the days of the New Testament. This applies even to the most famous apparitions of the Virgin in Lourdes—and, now, Fatima.

Upon this subject, our author writes: "The credulity of each individual modern miracle has to be determined upon its own evidence, neither is any one of them in particular a matter of faith. No Catholic, for example, is bound in conscience to believe that a cure at Lourdes, even when fully approved by ecclesiastical authority, is necessarily of supernatural origin" (cf. *Superstition*, p. 34). Fr. Thurston cites a contemporary Rationalist author, the late F. C. Conybeare, to argue that the Church had often played a rationalistic rôle in abolishing older Pagan superstitions.

Our cynical cleric fully recognises the power of superstition nor does he appear to be very optimistic that the strange aberrations of the human mind, some of which he goes on to describe, will ever be obliterated either by the light of the Gospel or by the power of human reason. For, he tells us: "The bulk of mankind turn to mascots and fetishes, as children and kittens delight in toys, and to look

forward to a future when superstition will be banished from the world is, I submit, to dream of the impossible" (as above, pp. 37-8).

The above worldly-wise *obiter dicta* accurately reflect, not only the personal opinions of a disillusioned author but, as its whole history indicates, that of his Church as well. Indeed, its belief that superstition is unconquerable, goes far to explain the fundamental attitude of the Church of Rome throughout its history. For Rome, now as in the past, turns two faces to the world: to the educated, she offers reason, "apologetics," and a rational compromise with modern science and the advance of knowledge—recent Papal pronouncements on evolution and the age of the world are relevant cases in point. But Rome knows that reason is in a permanent minority. The majority want superstition, and Rome sees that they get it—hot and strong! Like its Pagan predecessor, the God Janus, Rome turns two faces to the world: Catholicism can thus include in its capacious fold Rationalists, like Duchesne and Thurston, and the ignorant peasants who throng to Fatima and to the shrine of St. Januarius.

Towards superstition, indeed, religion in general always presents a double front. It, simultaneously, has to destroy and to encourage superstition. For every new religion, in order to exist, has to destroy or transform the earlier superstitions. Isis and Aphrodite had to make way for the Virgin Mary. Many gods had to die before the one god could live. *The beliefs of one creed are the superstitions of another.* The Koran cannot co-exist with the Bible. Pagan gods become Christian "Devils." *Every creed is ultimately founded on Deicide.* In which respect, atheism only completes the work of innumerable religions!

F. A. RIDLEY.

## VINCIT VERITAS

### II

(a) ONE of the books we found very interesting was written by Thomas Whittaker and is entitled: *The Origins of Christianity*. In it he says, "It is a remarkable fact that Christianity, said to have been revealed, has to recur for every serious effort to find in the Universe the manifestations of a national and moral order, to thinkers who never pretend to have obtained what they might offer to this direction by anything but the exercise of their own reasons."

(b) Then there is *Christianity in the Light of Modern Knowledge*, by Dr. Gilbert Murray, which attempts to show how Christianity developed out of beliefs of the superstitions and ignorant cults which abounded in the countries surrounding Palestine 1,900 years ago, all having their crucified Saviour Gods and beliefs similar to what gathered round the simple teachings of Jesus, which medley of different beliefs came to be known as Christianity.

(c) A book by Rev. James H. Baxter, Professor of Ecclesiastical History at St. Andrews University. It is also entitled *Christianity in the Light of Modern Knowledge*.

(d) An interesting book by Professor Harnack, entitled, *What is Christianity?* In it he says that he believes the Gospels are only credible in their outlines.

(e) Mr. F. C. Burkitt, a Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, published a book in 1932 entitled, *Jesus Christ—an Historical Outline*, in an attempt to form a reasonable view of Jesus, his life and teachings.

He regards the Gospel of St. Mark as the oldest Gospel. On this more or less faithful Gospel are built up, in his opinion, the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. He deals with various interpolations, many of which he says are quite out of their settings and have no reference to what is being reported. In St. John's Gospel, he thinks, we find the basis of the Church's teaching. Here we find that belief is

everything and that our reaching Heaven depends on our beliefs and not on our deeds.

(f) The *Encyclopædia Britannica* has some interesting information under the headings of "Gospels" and "Creeds." Under the heading of "Gospels" it says that either the Gospel of St. John is inaccurate or the synoptic Gospels are, as both cannot be correct, and remarks on its "accumulation of obviously inconsistent statements" and how "contradictions meet the reader."

(g) Mr. F. C. Conybeare, who made the subject a life study, describes this Gospel as a romance full of exaggerations and not worthy of any consideration by those who wish to find the true Jesus.

(h) Marcion in the second century complained of the way the texts of St. Paul's Epistles and the Gospels had been tampered with, and mutilated by the Church authorities. The fact remains that not one of the original documents from which the New Testament was constructed has ever been seen, no original document relating to the life of Jesus has survived. The Gospels are not considered historical records.

The earliest, namely Mark, originated, it is believed, about the year 70 A.D. Luke originated between the years 80 and 95 A.D., and Matthew about the year 100 A.D. The Gospel according to St. John dates to about 110 A.D., and is not considered to be of any historical value. Its contents are believed to be based largely on the imagination of the writer. St. Paul, of course, had never seen Jesus, but he knew Peter, James and John.

It was not until 300 years after the death of Christ that Christianity began to form. It only culminated in the reign of Constantine. It was conceived at Alexandria, born at Nicea and cradled at Rome. Paul was its father and Constantine, with his mother Helena, its guardians. Its two principal nurses were Eusebius and Athanasius. Under the care of these and other attendants it grew and flourished, protected by all the wealth and power of the Roman Court.

Protestant Christians will generally admit that Jesus is their religious ideal, and they are often at a loss to identify the teachings of their Church with those of Jesus. The Roman Catholics overcome this by basing all their beliefs on the findings of the early Church fathers, and this view the Anglo-Catholics of the Church of England also adopt.

In the year 397 A.D., at the Council of Carthage it was decided what writings should be considered suitable for inclusion in the New Testament and what were to be rejected. It was then that the New Testament, more or less as we know it to-day, came into being. It was written on papyrus without points and without commas.

Augustine and Jerome failed to agree on many points and much discussion centred on the numerous Gospels which were to be included. The opinions of Augustine and Jerome carried great weight, but to-day could only be ridiculed by intelligent people.

What is in the minds of a lot of us to-day is how unsatisfying religion is, with such doubtful foundations. We have listened to many hundreds of sermons but never remember hearing a parson tell of the origin of the Holy Bible. Our religious teachers ignore origins for the very obvious reason that when we begin to look into the question of the origin of Christianity or the origin of the books of the Bible, we find that the Church's claims for these have no foundations whatever.

The Pope has, I believe, just recently added a bit to the New Testament (without the slightest justification so far as I can see), by declaring that the Virgin Mary ascended bodily into Heaven and did not see corruption. I suppose

all good Roman Catholics have now to accept this as part of their belief.

It was not until the ninth century that we find the Old Testament combined with the New Testament in its present form, though it contained a number of books omitted at the Reformation. When the Bible was revised in 1881 it was found that 36,191 corrections had to be made to the old version. Luke, for instance, states there were 42 generations between David and Joseph, while Matthew gives 26. But why mention the pedigree of Joseph at all, if he was not the father of Jesus?

But for an accident of birth we might all have been Mahomedans, Buddhists or Confucians. It is ridiculous to suggest that all these millions of people are going to Hell just because they have not accepted the Christian faith, as the orthodox Christian Church would have us believe.

We cannot share in such a belief. What did Jesus really teach? is the great question. We know what the Church says he taught, but the great difficulty is to know what he really did teach, as there is every reason to doubt that what the Church says he taught, he ever taught at all.

The mind of man is forever seeking after truth, and truth will be sought wherever it can be found.

Is it too much to hope that some day there will be a revised edition of the Old and New Testaments in which everything will appeal to reason and be capable of a rational explanation? Already many people are doing this in their own minds, and the Protestant Churches very rarely preach Hell-fire and eternal punishment nowadays. The main exception to this is in the Church of England's recital of the Creeds. For instance, at the end of the Athanasian Creed we get: "This is the Catholick Faith: which except a man believe faithfully he cannot be saved."

How many intelligent people honestly believe this although they recite it in Church? Great changes in popular belief have taken place in our lifetime. To those of us who remember what was preached in Victorian days this is very pronounced. Who knows what the next 75 years will bring forth?

W.T.B.

#### "WORLD PEACE AND PROSPERITY"

A CHINESE delegate to the United Nations Assembly said that he had heard proposals for disarmament for five years, but not a single proposal for universal disarmament without which there could be no true peace.

There can be no universal disarmament until all nations are able to change their national economy that is at present based on industrialism which is itself based on the production of arms, munitions, and the production of raw materials for armaments.

To effect this almost miraculous change in national and international outlook, we have got to realise that, given true unity and peace among the nations, the energies of all the people at present absorbed in armies and armament production will have to be absorbed in equally vast schemes of peaceful construction and production. This is quite possible if a united effort is made to develop all the undeveloped, but fertile areas of both hemispheres. The British Empire and Commonwealth are unique examples of vast undeveloped areas and unbalanced populations. Great Britain has in the past maintained substantial armed forces on land and sea and now in the air, mainly to protect or defend that world-wide Empire that was allowed to remain undeveloped while industrial Britain patronised the U.S.A.

We know that the individual applications in the U.S.A. development were based on ruthless exploitation of immigrants and the negroes, but in a new effort for world-wide economic development these exploitations can be averted. It is not a question of ideologies or narrow nationalisms, but a question of sound commonsense between the peoples

of all nations. To-day the Western world is dominated by the vast industrial and financial interests that have "defence" and rearmament as the basis of their policy, with the directors of these vast interests holding leading positions in national affairs. Universal disarmament to them is heresy and economic collapse. It is possible however by world-wide appeal to the people who have to produce the arms and be slain or mutilated by them, to show that development of all the undeveloped areas in a vast peace campaign, could and would absorb all the energies now used for senseless defence against each other at somebody else's invitation and direction. The world needs increased food production. It can develop that food and use all the materials now wasted in armaments, in the production of the machinery and implements of land development and the necessary initial construction of the roads, railroads and communications. Increased industrial prosperity throughout the world would mean increasing demand, justifying the development, though the former system of the greater the demand the greater the profit would have to be eliminated. This idea of universal disarmament is not a mere ideal that is unattainable, it is the only practical means by which the entire human race can escape World War 3 and annihilation. Orthodox religion, which to-day supports Anti-Communist armaments as it supported Anti-Fascist wars can be made to realise that the true Christianity is that which seeks to establish universal peace and unity. Orthodox Christianity has failed and always will fail, while it seeks to induce the peoples of the world to follow blind leaderships and allow others to do their thinking for them. The Chinese delegate knows that in his country there are vast areas capable of development that have stood neglected like the British Empire while selfish international interests exploited a narrow fringe and the cheap labour of Asia. To ally oneself to the Communist cause for war against capitalism, or to the capitalist and orthodox religious groups for war against Communism is futile. The way to World Peace is by world-wide development for the mutual benefit of all. It is the Spirit of Truth opposed to the Spirit of oppression that is based on untruth and the twisting of facts to suit the interests concerned. Immediate disarmament, even partial would mean economic chaos. Unemployment, distress and poverty, compared with which even war and work for arms production would seem preferable.

Many politicians would embrace this partial disarmament and economic depression in order to stifle the growing desire for true peace and universal raising of living standards. Universal disarmament would necessitate at once a universal policy for the re-employment of all human energies and the re-direction of all raw materials. There is only one way in which these colossal forces of human energy and equally colossal raw materials can be utilised. Russia is vast but largely undeveloped. China is vast and equally undeveloped. The American continent is hardly scratched outside the U.S.A., and the whole of the British Commonwealth waits for that universal declaration of Peace. It is a choice that the human race cannot now afford to be left in the hands of a few traditionalists, nationalists or self-seeking internationalists, whose international outlook is merely the continued exploitation of life, labour and the products of labour. All our energies and our materials are being wasted in futile preparations for war, when the whole earth is crying out for development and the whole human race crying out for the products of such development.

A. J. RADFORD.

**MISTAKES OF MOSES.** By Col. R. G. Ingersoll. Price 3d. postage 1½d.

## ACID DROPS

According to Prof. H. H. Price, who is Professor of Logic at Oxford University, "what we have to do is to discover our own souls again." And the right way to do this? It is very simple—just go in for Psychical Research. Needless to add, Prof. Price must long ago have found his own soul this way, and we are curious to learn what is he going to do with it? Teach it some Logic? In any case, Prof. Price is quite sure that the Bible "declared that all the Lord's people would become prophets," and if by the Lord's people he means the Jews, it is sad to recall that very few of them excelled in the art of prophecy; indeed, we cannot recall one who made a fortune by prophesying the Derby winner, and goodness knows they have tried hard enough. The Bible went off the rails a little there.

Prof. Price's particular windmill is, however, "Materialism," and as he believes in "survival" as well as "supernormal, cognitive powers" (they look very impressive when put that way), "telepathy, clairvoyance and precognition," he has no use for "the materialistic theory." We believe that Prof. Price is an earnest Christian, and he proudly points out that "belief that man had a soul had always been an important part of the religious outlook," and the Professor certainly has more than the average share of "the religious outlook." But those of us who haven't a religious outlook do not believe that there is a scrap of evidence for a "soul," immaterial or material—and Prof. Price knows this as well as we do.

In fact, he admits that "all the empirical facts, so far as normal experience discloses them, are strongly in favour of the materialist position." So what? Well, you must go outside of normal experience—"we must," he insists, "take supernormal phenomena into account as well." Once you do this, then for the 18,973,645th time, Materialism will be smashed into smithereens. It must be very heartbreaking for the Professor to find so many people, including other Professors, obstinately and stupidly refusing to recognise "supernormal" phenomena.

Opening an exhibition the other day of "spirit photographs," Mr. P. S. Seward, the President of the Association of Psychical Research Societies, admitted that the late Harry Price managed to get the late William Hope to submit to a test, and found that that "doyen" of spirit photographers had "switched" the plates. Another gentleman, called McCarthy, who defied anyone to catch him out, was also "exposed," and Mr. Seward therefore had to give his own recipe for producing spirit photographs. It was "to take a spirit photograph yourself. Anyone can do it with a fair medium and a little knowledge of photography." Yes, and without a medium, Mr. Seward. We ourselves can produce dozens—all we need are good photos of the dear departed—*first*.

The Archbishop of York told an audience recently that at one time the Bible was to be found in every house which was not the case to-day. The sad fact was that where it can be found these days, no one opened it except to help a crossword puzzle. We have always found a big, properly bound Bible invaluable as a stand for the four o'clock teapot—and even for any large dish with the dinner "left-overs." It is all very pathetic, and a good case can be made for smaller Bibles—though here the excuse is that the print is too small to read. But surely the road to salvation must not be made too smooth!

## THEATRE

"The Bride of Denmark Hill," by Laurence Willians and Nell O'Day. The Royal Court Theatre.

THE reopening of this historical theatre has made a good start with a play about the married life of John Ruskin.

I cannot claim to know much about his life, but I understand that the facts given about his marriage are authentic. It seems that his possessive mother was an overbearing and dominating influence in his life, that he married a beautiful girl called Effie (Euphemia Gray) against the old lady's wishes, and that the few years of so-called married life were never blessed with the correct behaviour between husband and wife. In fact, Effie remained a virgin, not by her wishes but due to her husband regarding her in much the same light as he would see a beautiful painting or piece of architecture. He so detested the thought of sexual relationship that he forbade her to speak about it. But finally Millais appears on the scene, sums up the unwholesome situation, and brings Effie her salvation by getting her marriage annulled and marrying her himself.

There is some fine writing in the play, and the acting of Barbara Murray in the part of Effie Gray is outstanding. Andrew Osborn is almost entirely convincing as Ruskin, but has not quite the personality. Ernest Jay makes the most of a less interesting part as his father. Dorothy Green, as his mother, plays too much on one note and there is not enough variety in her performance. Clement McCallin handles the part of Millais capably and Henry Longhurst puts a great deal into the part of a manservant.

The theatre is run as a club, and has much that is attractive to offer. The theatre membership is purely a nominal charge.

RAYMOND DOUGLAS.

## ONCE I KNEW A TAVERN

Once I knew a tavern where the ale was clear and brown  
And each man who sat and drank it was my friend,  
When the silver stars came leaping by the chimneys of  
the town  
To fall into the horsepond at the end;  
But the tavern's now a road-house, and the tap's a  
dancing-floor,  
And the swinging sign is framed in coloured light,  
And the men I sat and drank with they gather there  
no more  
But are scattered in the bowels of the night.

I have no wish to quibble at the changes come to pass  
Now my ancient inn is wearing modern dress,  
But I'd give a month of Sundays just to take another glass  
In the seat between the pickles and the press.  
I suppose I am out-dated, but I liked to drink my beer  
In the tried and silent friendship of my kind,  
With no Yankee music moaning for all the world to hear,  
No chewing gum, no floozies without mind.

I know there must be progress, and I know we must  
be free,

That the march of civilisation must go on;  
But there were things within that tavern that meant a  
lot to me

And I'm grieved a bit that now their day has gone.  
There was courtesy, and kindness, there was wisdom  
speaking slow,

There was honest-bodied ale—gone with the rest.  
But the structure of my tavern it was altered months ago,  
And I suppose the men who did it know the best.

JOHN O'HARE.

# "THE FREETHINKER"

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London, W.C.1.

## TO CORRESPONDENTS

M.B.—Inquiry re book passed to Mr. Cutner. Thanks for donation "In memory of John Seibert."

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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 Secretary of the N.S.S. at this Office by Friday morning.

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.

## SUGAR PLUMS

Our contributor, Mr. C. G. L. Du Cann, informs us that, in response to his recent article on "The Religion of Somerset Maugham," he has received an appreciative letter from that distinguished author, now "the grand old man" of English letters and, probably, the greatest living writer in the contemporary literature of the English-speaking peoples. Mr. Somerset Maugham has made little effort to conceal his anti-clerical opinions, as readers of *Catalina* and others of his books will recall. It is, indeed, remarkable how many of our eminent contemporary authors have diverged from orthodoxy in various degrees: Shaw, Wells, Bennett, Maugham, A. E. Housman, George Meredith, Thomas Hardy; the list could be prolonged indefinitely. D. H. Lawrence and Llewelyn Powys reverted to the pagan tradition of nature-worship, whilst George Moore in his *The Brook Kerith*, gave an ironic account of the Resurrection and of the subsequent meeting of Jesus and Paul, which ranks amongst the satiric masterpieces of modern literature.

Has something gone wrong with the celestial prayer-index? We are aware that prayers for rain have been offered up in country districts for some time past. But, surely, not for rain on Bank Holiday? The millions of "day-trippers" and visitors to week-end seaside resorts were surely expecting something better from Heaven than a steady downpour of rain? For most of these people August Bank Holiday is their last opportunity for a well-earned break this summer. Could not God do something to meet their wishes for fine weather and work a *useful* miracle for once? Or is it that he just can't, whilst Nature goes on her blind way oblivious both of God and of the Bank Holiday?

## REVIEW

*London Mystery and Mythology.* By William Kent; F.S.A. Staples Press, London, 1952. 12s. 6d. net.

WHETHER history is or is not "bunk," most historians these days are prepared to agree that a good deal of it is, if not mythology, at least "mystery." Religion has certainly not got a monopoly of this, and little by little a good many of famous historical stories, supposed to be authentic, are being debunked. One would think that historians had almost, if not quite, exhausted the story of London, but here comes Mr. Kent, whose enthusiasm for all things Londonian shows no abatement, with a most

entertaining volume playing havoc with stories culled from London's history which have done duty as facts for centuries. Little is left of them under his searching analysis and our regret at their disappearance is tempered only by our devotion to hold to the truth, and to the truth only.

As a boy I never could read of the death of Essex without tears especially as I believed implicitly the romantic story of the ring given to him by Queen Elizabeth which he was supposed to return if he wanted anything from her. When he was condemned to death he sent it to the Queen but his greatest enemy, the Countess of Nottingham, got hold of it and withheld it, and Elizabeth in her anger signed his death warrant. She only knew about it when the Countess confessed on her deathbed; "the Queen angrily shook the Countess and exclaimed, 'God forgive you, madam, but I never can.'" Alas, Mr. Kent in a very searching inquiry as to the truth of the story dismisses it with contempt; and he has equal contempt for the many writers on, and historians of, Elizabeth who all accepted it as "gospel truth." And thus my boyish delusions are shattered.

Whether the ring presented to Westminster Abbey by Mr. Makower in 1927 (he had paid 520 guineas for it) is the identical ring it is impossible to say—but quite a number of writers are "inclined to believe in the tradition," as Mr. Kent notes. Apart from the many authorities he quotes, if the reader can get hold of a completely forgotten work by J. F. Smith (who shared with G. W. M. Reynolds the honour of being the most popular writer of melodramatic romances during the middle quarters of the nineteenth century) entitled *The Lives of the Queens of England* he will find the story romantically told—as if there was not the least doubt of its truth. I am very loth to give up Mr. Smith.

But there are equally important legends sternly (perhaps I ought to say amiably) dealt with by Mr. Kent in the interests of truth undefiled. For example, "Is London Stone of Roman Origin?", "What is the truth about Richard Whittington?", "Where were Shakespeare's London Residences?", "Who was the Executioner of Charles I?", "Did Daniel Defoe have any connection with Tooting?", "Where was Dickens's 'Old Curiosity Shop'?", "Was Sweeney Todd a Fleet Street Barber?", and many other queries connected with London—to be precise, no fewer than 53.

You get the mystery or the legend first and then Mr. Kent very patiently analyses it for you replete with numerous authorities for and against. Take that great favourite of our childhood, the story of good old Dick Whittington and his cat. Mr. Kent devotes twelve pages to demolishing it—though it must be confessed that my own recollections of the renowned Lord Mayor of London present him to me as a dainty figure in tights singing "After the Ball," and wringing my heart with the woes of the old gentleman in the song missing his love through a silly mistake. "The first entry," says Mr. Kent (of the story in history) "is in a dramatic version entitled *The History of Richard Whittington, of his lowe byrth, his great fortune, as yt was plaied by the prynces servants.* This was licensed for the Press on November 8, 1605." There was also a ballad but neither has survived. And Mr. Kent points out that the tale came into being 130 years after Caxton had put up his Press. Few of our historians mention Whittington—though, of course, he himself is not a myth. It is the current story about him which is mythical. What about his famous "cat"? Readers will find it also fully discussed.

*London Mystery and Mythology* with its 254 pages will be found one of Mr. Kent's most entertaining books. I strongly recommend it.

H. CUTNER.

### AN OXFORD PROFESSOR ON SPIRITS

THE Society for Psychical Research has been celebrating its seventieth anniversary with a series of lectures at Caxton Hall. On July 16, Prof. H. H. Price, F.B.A., of New College, Oxford, spoke on "Survival and the idea of 'Another World.'" He said that while a few psychical researchers are convinced spiritualists, and a few believe all can be explained on the basis of naturalism, the majority are puzzled by some of the phenomena. But as our world is built up of sensations received and co-ordinated through a nervous system, which dies with the body, they find themselves unable to formulate a hypothesis about "Another World." Hence they regard the conception as absurd.

Prof. Price contends that it is when we are cut off from sensations in sleep that we enter a dream world; and it is possible to conceive "Another World" as one in which the laws of the psychical world give way to those of dreams and imagination. It is true that each dreamer lives in a private world of his own; but after passing over we could be aware of other consciousnesses by telepathy. Still there would presumably be a large number of other worlds, corresponding to the variations in individual wishes and imaginations. Like-minded individuals would tend to find themselves in similar worlds. The gap between wish and its realisation would be lesser than in our material world. In our dreams we satisfy desires we cannot fulfil in waking life; and therefore it is to be presumed that in the other world we will satisfy our unsatisfied earthly desire. He suggested that the universe of the Idealist Philosopher, of Berkeley, and the Will and Idea of Schopenhauer, though untrue of this world, are true of the next world.

He did not draw the inference, though it seems logically necessary, that the thwarted proletariat, who can enjoy the pleasures of life only vicariously at the cinema, True-Love stories, etc., will have such dreams to satisfy in the next world—it will be a real Moslem's paradise (see the unexpurgated *Arabian Nights*) while the jaded plutocrat will be bored. Hence it is true that it is harder for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle!

Also, when I was leaving, a gentleman next to me asked me, "Does a baby who dies live in a next world of eternal, luscious nipples?" That suggests that just as the success of a revolution or counter-revolution is a matter of timing, so our status in "Another World" may be a matter of timing our passing over. If, for instance, Von Papen had gone over with Hitler, Goering and Ribbentrop, the kind of like-minded people he would have contacted there would have been quite different from those he appears likely to meet if he lives a few years longer, judging by the relatively favourable reviews of his book by people who now, finding him a Christian patriot, forget what they said about him a few years ago.

The next lecture, "Some Landmarks in Psychical Research" will be delivered by Prof. C. D. Broad on Wednesday, October 29, at 8 p.m. It is open to the public and free.

T. S. BARWELL, M.A.

### THE CRUCIFIXION AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS.

By W. A. Campbell. With a Preface by the Rt. Hon. J. M. Robertson. Price 2s. 6d.; postage 2d.

### CATHOLIC IMPUDENCE

AUSTRIA is 99 per cent. Catholic and Mariazell is their holiest place of pilgrimage. On April 25, 1952, the curate of Mariazell, a Father Beda, lifted up hearts by means of the (Western-controlled) radio transmitter *Rot-Weiss-Rot*. In the course of his morning address this churlish celibatarian painted in stark colours the bliss of marital life in Christ where there must be no sexual intercourse without ensuing childbed; otherwise, he shrieked, "the husband is nothing but the paramour of his wife who, herself, is a whore!"

Early in May a number of Social Democrat Deputies asked the Federal Minister of Transport and Communication (Catholic People's Party) what course he proposes to take in order to prevent a recurrence of a similar misuse of the general public's tax moneys when tens of thousands of decent and honest Austrians were grossly insulted.

In its issue of May 17, *Neue Zeit*, the Social Democrat newspaper of Graz (British Zone of Austria) carried an Open Letter to the agitator padre, signed by four workers, which reads (my translation):—

"In your broadcast Morning Devotion of April 25, you stated your—that is, the Roman Church's—opinion that childless couples were unions of 'whores' with their 'paramours.' You may have come to know, sir, that it is not at all difficult to beget children; yet we, being conscious of our moral obligation, know that it is far more difficult to provide those children with adequate food, clothing and education.

It appears to us that if you have the interests of the toiling people at heart that a far better purpose would be served if you tried to induce the gentlemen of your party, the Austrian 'People's' Party, to vote for and abide by measures for the general reduction of prices; you ought to have worried far more noticing how uncannily but steadily the cost of living goes up, thus compelling newly-married couples, for the time being at least, to forget about progenitors and to get, first of all, the most essential household things. This is no easy task, considering wages nowadays, and most women are compelled to take their share in life earning.

However, as you—or the Catholic Church—are so keenly child-conscious, the simplest remedy appears to be the abolition of your controversial celibacy.

I and my colleagues who find themselves in a similar position consider your remarks disgusting and insulting; owing to the lowly opinion your Church has formed of the likes of us we feel no longer 'worthy' of being paying members of this body and, in consequence, we herewith contract out of any religious community."

At any conceivable opportunity the Austrian authorities make you state your denomination, and in 1919 they had reluctantly to admit the existence of an undenominational community of irreligionists: adherence to which is accepted by the authorities after a simple declaration, once and for all, before an official of the local Registry Office.

P. G. R.

### WARRIOR'S CREDO

Behold, the noble warrior's creed:  
 "To hate all evil is my need."  
 How lacking hate can warriors fight?  
 For non-resistance Christians plead,  
 And weaken struggle for the right.  
 Hatred of Evil steels the brave:  
 Leave non-resistance to the slave.

B. S.

## CORRESPONDENCE

## BETTER THAN EVER?

SIR,—*Va dire à ma mie que je l'aime toujours* (Old French Song). Both *The Freethinker* and myself were born in 1881. We met in my early teens. I promptly fell in love with it and have loved it consistently ever since.

But there may be something in what your critics are saying about a change in the atmosphere of the paper, *car, dernièrement, je l'aime mieux que jamais. Expliquez-moi ça!* Perhaps a stronger breath of Secularistic philosophy is blowing through its pages.

More power to your Editorial arm.—Yours, etc.,

DAVID L. WEBSTER.

## A MODERN TARTUFFE?

SIR,—Mr. Sloan says the U.S.S.R. is "the most moral country in the world." Now I wonder what he means by "moral" and what yardstick he uses in making this dogmatic statement. So far as one can judge from his letter he means the U.S.S.R. is more Christian than the "so-called Christian states," and he uses the term "moral" apparently in the narrow puritanical sense of sex suppression. "Sexuality" is something immoral according to the bible-bangers—and Mr. Sloan. Yet Engels laid it down that Marxists "reject every attempt to impose any moral dogma whatsoever." How on earth can the U.S.S.R. be described as "more moral" than a bourgeois Christian State when there is no common moral denominator whatsoever? Like some modern Tartuffe Mr. Sloan wishes to appear all things to all men.—Yours, etc.,

P. C. KING.

## THE THREAT OF FILM CENSORSHIP

SIR,—I feel most strongly that a further encroachment on liberty and the free expression of ideas should be made known to all Freethinkers, and especially to the N.S.S. Executive, with a view to possible action. A Bill has recently been introduced in the Lords, and is likely to go to the Commons at any time, to bring all showings of sub-standard size films in halls and clubs, under licensing control and under the same strict safety regulations as required in cinemas using 35 mm. inflammable film.

Whilst the N.S.S. has not made use of this modern vehicle of propaganda (although, I believe, lantern lectures were a regular feature at the old Hall of Science), it may modernise itself sufficiently to do so one day. The important point is this. For many years film shows on 16 mm. safety non-flam. film have been allowed in Halls, etc., without let or hindrance, and without any serious accidents or fire scares. Also, this has enabled many films to be shown to the public *outside the jurisdiction of the film censor*, and some of us think this is the real reason behind the Bill.

It is obvious that if the Bill becomes law, few proprietors of halls or meeting rooms will be prepared to carry out the expensive alterations to their premises, to conform with the Act, for the sake of the occasional hiring for a film show, and a most valuable means of entertainment in country districts as well as a propaganda weapon will be lost. I do feel this latest threat to freedom should be strenuously opposed.—Yours, etc.,

J. MARTIN ALEXANDER.

## TRUTH ABOUT RUSSIA

SIR,—After reading the extensive correspondence which has appeared in *The Freethinker* during the past few years, and many books written by Communists, ex-Communists and other authors, especially those who have lived in Russia for considerable periods, I have come to believe that the Russian people have attained a higher standard of life and material benefits in comparison with pre-revolution days. Their housing conditions are still deplorable, and there are class distinctions with undemocratic arrangements for better rations and privileges for some. In this respect Communism is absent. There is unmistakable evidence that the political regime contains most evil elements, and freedom of speech and liberty of the Press as understood in England is practically nil.

In your last issue Pat Sloan maintains that "to-day the U.S.S.R. is certainly the most moral country in the world as far as Press and entertainment are concerned"; also he says that discipline is encouraged in the schools. What the latter means I am not sure, but let us consider what is done in the schools.

In *Dateline Moscow*, by Don Dallas (published this year) Dallas writes that "Lenin once declared that the whole business of education, the formation and teaching of contemporary youth, should be the inculcation of Communist morality! This involves a constant supervision over textbooks, each of which must be ideologically correct in every respect. No textbook should be 'devoid

of political significance,' nor should it preach 'admiration of things foreign.' Science textbooks to-day should clearly demonstrate the priority of Russians in all important scientific discoveries of the past few hundred years, and dispose once and for all of the false claims of Western scientists. Marconi, for instance, had been falsely hailed as the inventor of radio instead of the Russian Popov. This is one of the most widely disseminated and insolent myths, according to the Russian Press. Now Soviet Radio Day every year commemorates the birthday of Popov. Then Professor Fleming had been lauded in the Capitalist world as the discoverer of penicillin. The medical books in the Capitalist countries conveniently kept silent about the fact that Russian doctors were using a form of penicillin back in the eighties of last century. George Stephenson impudently claimed to have invented the first steam engine and the bourgeois world publicised this, ignoring the fact that some Russian serfs built a steam engine several years before. The French scientist Lavoisier had also tried to claim the credit which rightly belonged to the Russian physicist Lomonosov who discovered the law relating to the unchangeability of matter. Planes, submarines, jet engines were all really Russian inventions. Modern Soviet textbooks, with the clear logic of the Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist approach, put all these things in their correct perspective so that Russian schoolchildren may know once and for all who invented what and not be confused by bourgeois propaganda. Unfortunately a lot of the pre-revolutionary textbooks in Russia were wrong; because the Tsarist authorities were hand in glove with the Western Capitalists and had no proper national pride or interest in ascertaining the real facts."

Mr. Dallas gives further instances of the falsification of modern Soviet textbooks. What does Pat Sloan think of that kind of morality? Does he really believe that the Stalin regime is highly moral and humane? There is ample evidence for regarding Stalin as being responsible for more persecution, imprisonment, torture and murder (commonly known as purges) than any other person in ancient or modern history. It is calculated that millions of Russians have suffered from this modern tyrant.

According to *Conspiracy of Silence*, by Alex Weissberg (see page 414) Stalin announced through the judges at the Tiraspot trial "that the Great Purge was now at an end. Six years previously he had announced the end of his suicidal agrarian policy almost as demonstratively. Eleven million peasants had already starved by then. Now eight million innocents were in the Arctic camps. They would never return." This book of 509 pages should be read by all Freethinkers, being an account of Weissberg's three years' imprisonment, without trial, with details of life in prison and very often death, just for being suspected of heresy.

In England freedom of speech and liberty of the Press are cherished possessions, fought for and obtained by the old guard of Freethinkers. In Russia the Stalin regime rejects these democratic ideals with violence, and stands condemned as immoral, inhumane and despicable.—Yours, etc.,

ALFRED D. CORRICK.

## LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

## OUTDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park).—Every Sunday evening, 7 p.m.: H. DAY.

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

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Plattfields).—Every Sunday, 3 p.m.; (St. Mary's Gate, Blitzed Site), every Sunday, 8 p.m.; (Alexandra Park Gate), every Wednesday, 8 p.m.; (Deansgate Bomb Site), every weekday, 1 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK and BARNES.

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon: J. M. ALEXANDER. (Highbury Corner), Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Saturday, August 16, 7 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY and A. ELSMERE: "The Challenge of Secularism."

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

South London and Lewisham Branch N.S.S. (Brockwell Park).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: L. EBURY.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park, Marble Arch).—Sunday, 4 p.m.: Messrs. WOOD and O'NEILL.

MR. J. CLAYTON.—Friday, August 15: Clough Fold, Rossendale, 7-30 p.m. Saturday, August 16: Great Harwood, 6 p.m. Monday, August 18: Clithero, 7-30 p.m. Thursday, August 21: Padiham (Moor Lane), 7-30 p.m.

### A CATHOLIC PILGRIMAGE

IT is customary in some coastal parts of France to commemorate the Fête of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary on August 15 of each year by a curious ceremony known as "La Bénédiction de la Mer." This, I first believed to be, a "Mother's Blessing," but found out subsequently that it meant "Blessing of the Sea." This should not be confused with "A bord de la Mer," which means "Abroad with Mother."

It so happened that I was visiting Normandy in 1948 when just such a ceremony was due to take place, so I resolved to attend and satisfy my curiosity. The only recollection I had of a sea blessing was something I once heard as a child concerning King Canute. I had pictured him looking very angry and humiliated and giving the sea anything but a blessing. However, I thought it might be interesting to see how differently the sea would react now to a good hearty Catholic blessing.

St. Matilde is a very small fishing village not so far from the famous Mont St. Michel. Normandy is, of course, a most luscious land—the land of butter and apple cider—of fat pigs, fat cows and fat priests. I must hasten to explain that "a fat priest" is an Americanism. In America when they want to say "You lucky people!", instead they say, "Why, you fat priest!" Of course I wouldn't dream of being so rude as to call the Norman priests fat. Though, now that I come to think of it, they were rather fat. It is an odd thing too that there are more priests per square mile in Normandy than anywhere else in France. I have this on the authority of the Révérend Père Claude Moutard, curé (vicar) of St. Matilde. However, it is just a coincidence that priests should be so numerous in the richest food-producing area in France—for in truth the Normans are a deeply Catholic people who love plenty of priests around them. And the way they combine their Catholicism with a love of money, a sharp business sense and a facility for collaborating with occupying soldiers of whatever nationality can but fill one with envy and admiration. Another aspect of their Catholicism is their love of pilgrimages. These they don't regard too solemnly.

While waiting for the pilgrimage to start, I sensed something of the "fair" atmosphere about the place. There was no solemnity. The shops and houses were gaily decorated with flags and bunting, people were drinking noisily in cafés, children running about in new rig-outs—there was a note of excitement and impending events in the air. Only there were no coconut shies or roundabouts.

Suddenly the buzz of the assembled groups of pilgrims was hushed by a dreadful, discordant, ear-splitting flourish from six young Catholic trumpeters. It sounded remarkably like "The Last Post," but I was told later that it was a special pilgrimage prelude which they hadn't quite perfected. Then six hardy workmen appeared, bearing on their shoulders a blue and white plaster figure of the Virgin Mary on a wooden stretcher. This group formed up behind the trumpeters. Next came a party of four or five priests looking remarkably funereal in their black cassocks. Prominent in their midst was a tall, intelligent-looking priest dressed in purple and wearing a small square black hat. This gent, I learned, was the bishop who was to deliver the oration. On a signal from a priest the trumpeters burst into a rousing military march which I am sure I once heard at the July 14 Bastille celebrations. The pilgrims formed two lines at the rear and the procession wended its way towards the sea.

A fresh sea-wind was blowing as we reached the sea-

shore. The sea was a good mile and a-quarter out from the coast, but the sands made easy walking. Then a distinctly bad omen loomed up in the sky in the shape of a huge dark cloud which was fast moving towards us. A few minutes later I received a good-sized globule of aqua plumb in the eye.

A few feet from the sea a crude altar had been constructed with planks and boxes, with three large wooden steps leading up to the altar. The whole was gaily decorated with bunting. Two priests immediately prostrated themselves before the altar, whilst the company led by a priest sang a Latin dirge. The pilgrims meanwhile had assembled around the altar in a large horse-shoe formation.

A bespectacled priest wearing an aggressive air of authority then strode up to the altar, bowed, and knelt in prayer. All of a sudden there was a tremendous crash as a part of the wooden superstructure came bowling down the steps, missing a prostrated priest by a short head. The wind was howling and the sea was looking rather angry. The bespectacled priest, now very windswept and dishevelled, at a given moment, took up the brass cross resting on the altar. With his other hand he withdrew a magnifying glass from an inside pocket and solemnly inserted it in the centre of the Cross. "That is the Holy Ghost!" whispered a kind gentleman alongside me. "The Holy Ghost?" I asked, "where?" "There! you see that glass in the Cross? That is the Holy Ghost." Well! Well! I must say, although the Holy Ghost had always puzzled me, it had never occurred to me that it had its origin in silicate of soda. The priest was now standing upright, and to the accompaniment of Latin praises from the choristers, he motioned the Cross three times in the direction of the sea.

GEORGE BELL.

(To be concluded.)

### FILMS FOR FREETHINKERS

"**Tabu**," (U. Cert.). Academy Cinema, Oxford Street. THE revival of this twenty-four-year-old Robert Flaherty classic is of special delight to those interested in the religious and tribal customs of primitive peoples. This fast-moving drama of the South Seas with an untrained all-native cast tells how the age-old tribal rites have such a hold that lovers must be separated, death must follow the breaking of religious tradition: and even the white man's government will not interfere with the laws of tabu!

Now given a delightful background of native music, the drama moves smoothly and such is the naturalistic performance of these natives that this "silent" epic needs few captions or sub-titles. It includes some excellent scenes of pearl-fishing and genuine examples of the beautifully rhythmic and symbolic native ritual dances. In the same programme is "First Communion," an Italian comedy of much ado about nothing in particular.

J. MARTIN ALEXANDER.

**HOW THE CHURCHES BETRAY THEIR CHRIST.** An Examination of British Christianity. By C. G. L. Du Cann. Price 1s.; postage 2d.

**INFIDEL DEATHBEDS.** By G. W. Foote. Revised and enlarged by A. D. McLaren. Price 3s.; postage 3d.

**LIFT UP YOUR HEADS,** An Anthology for Freethinkers. By William Kent. Price, cloth 5s.; paper 3s. 6d.; postage, 3d.

**MATERIALISM RESTATED.** Fourth edition. By Chapman Cohen. Price 5s. 3d.; postage 3d.