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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Fatima—the evolution of a cult

RELIGION and the miraculous represent, as it were, Siamese Twins; their lives are mutually interdependent; one can hardly survive the other. The denial of the miraculous by "modernists" of all creeds represents an acute symptom of the "withering away" of dogmatic religion. In short, the study of Comparative Religion reveals miracles as following religion like a shadow its original substance.

Alone amongst the modern Christian Churches, the Roman Catholic Church has never ignored or repudiated the miraculous element in religion. It is firm Vatican dogma, not only that miracles—that is, direct Divine interventions into the normal course of Nature—*can* happen, or *did* happen "long ago"—the position now taken by most modern Protestant Churches—but that they still occur to-day, as in the past.

At the same time, and contrary to the opinion of many of the more superficial anti-Catholic critics, Rome has always been very cautious in accepting miracles as genuine; for a crop of obviously bogus miracles would do the Church too much harm.

Two major miracles have occurred in the course of the last century; both of which the Catholic Church has now organised with her usual efficiency into systematic cults; both caused by the miraculous appearances of the "Mother of God," the *de facto* Goddess of Catholicism, the Virgin Mary, respectively at Lourdes (1858) and at Fatima (1917) and, though the Vatican, with its usual caution has refrained from officially canonising these apparitions of the Virgin as "Articles of Faith" binding on all true believers, it has, in fact, accepted both Lourdes and Fatima as authentic miracles and has officially sponsored the, by now world-wide cults of "Our Lady of Lourdes" and "Our Lady of Fatima." (Of course, if the fraudulent character of either were to be proved beyond any possible peradventure, it is still always open to Rome to disavow them, since technically, neither is an infallibly guaranteed "Article of Faith." However, so far, there does not seem much likelihood of this ever occurring.)

Thanks to the kindness of the president of the *World Union of Freethinkers*, Mr. Bradlaugh Bonner, we were recently enabled to read a full and well-documented account of, what has been termed, "the miracle of the twentieth century," the successive apparitions of the Virgin Mary at Fatima between May 13 and October 13, in 1917, and the imposing ecclesiastical cult, now of world-wide proportions, which has already stemmed from that still chronologically recent event. The booklet in question, entitled—*Fatima—1917-51*—with the sub-title: *How a Holy Place was Created*: is published by the French *Union Rationaliste*; its author is Professor Prosper Alfaric, a vice-president of the *Union Rationaliste* and a scholar who has specialised in the history of Christianity. In *Fatima*, issued at the beginning of the current year, Professor Alfaric has given us a lucid and complete

account of the whole history of the cult of Fatima between its origins in 1917 and the end of 1951. The learned author writes like a philosophical historian and gives not only accounts but, also, explanations of one of the strangest phenomena of modern times. Under successive headings, we summarise, below, his main facts and conclusions.

THE BACKGROUND OF FATIMA

The "miracle" occurred where *all* miracles, as far as we know, without exception, always occur—in a backward country, hardly touched by civilisation, and amongst an illiterate population of credulous rustics. M. Alfaric quotes, in this connection, a penetrating observation by the great Renan: "It is Faith which creates the supernatural. No miracle has ever taken place before people able to analyse and discuss it critically." In the case of Fatima, the appropriate milieu was provided by a remote rustic area in Portugal, itself, perhaps, the most backward area in Europe, amongst an ignorant and devout population of rustics: the actual visionaries who *saw* the Virgin, were three children, aged, respectively, ten, nine, and seven, and who were shepherds—always God's favourite profession since the days of David!

As Prof. Alfaric points out, the times were favourable to visions. The "Most Faithful" Kings of Portugal had been overthrown by a revolution in 1910. A liberal, "Masonic" anti-clerical republic had been established, bitterly hated by the Church, which saw itself suddenly deprived of its immemorial power in, perhaps, the most superstitious land in Europe. The radical régime established in 1910 was much too advanced for its still mediæval setting. A clerical and conservative reaction was already setting in by 1917, which has now been victorious all along. As our author pointedly observes, the Fatima cult was a most important part of this counter-revolution and, without, it, the present clerical-fascist régime of the Jesuit-trained Dictator of Portugal, Dr. Salazar, could hardly have been installed.

THE APPARITIONS

The actual apparitions of the Virgin occurred at Fatima, a petty hamlet with an Arab name about seventy miles north of Lisbon in a lonely and arid area without industry or culture. According to M. Alfaric the starting-point of the whole affair may, perhaps, be found in a message of the then Pope, Benedict the XVth (1914-22), read out at Mass on May 13, asking the intercession of the Virgin to put an end to the world-war. Lucie dos Santos, the eldest of the visionaries, had a brother in the army, and the original message of the Virgin to Lucie seems to have had nothing to do with Russia, as now stated, but to have simply consisted of an assurance that the war would end immediately and the soldiers return.

The first vision took place on Sunday, May 13, to Lucie (aged ten) and her cousins, Francis (nine) and Jacinte (seven). The actual milieu was under an oak in a circular hollow known locally as "The Cova," where all the apparitions occurred. The three children were tending

their sheep—quite a New Testament touch. Did the sheep see the Mother of God also?

According to Lucie, the Virgin promised to return on the 13th of each month for six months. The affair made a sensation, at first local, then national. Upon the occasion of each apparition an enormous crowd assembled: in the final month of September and October, the crowds may have numbered 40,000 and, as one would naturally expect, whilst the Virgin herself remained invisible to all except the three children, miraculous occurrences multiplied, culminating in the fantastic "fandango" danced by the sun on September and October 13, to which many spectators have testified. After October 13, the visions abruptly ceased. In 1918-9 the post-war "Spanish Influenza" carried off the two younger children, leaving only Lucie dos Santos alive of the original clairvoyants who actually saw the Mother of God.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE FATIMA CULT

The original visions seem to have been genuine hallucinations unprovoked by clerical prompting. For, at first, the clergy held aloof, and the local vicar of Fatima never recognised that the Virgin had honoured his parish with a personal visit. Our historian traces three stages in the evolution of the cult of Fatima. The first of a spontaneous and local nature; the second when the Portuguese clergy transformed Fatima into a national cult; the third when the Vatican took a hand, and the, by now, world-wide cult of Fatima received Papal recognition, culminating, only last October 13, when the Sun again obligingly repeated its Fatima "fandango" before the solitary eyes of His present Holiness, Pius XII, when Christ's Vicar was alone in the gardens of the Vatican.

The various stages of the transformation are depicted by M. Alfaric. The local bishop of Leiria, the Cardinal Archbishop of Lisbon, and, finally, the Pope himself lined up behind the miracle. The whole Catholic world now recognises "Our Lady of Fatima" as a rival goddess to her elder sister, "Our Lady of Lourdes," and her statue has made the round of the world. A miracle has eventuated into a cult before our eyes. For, in some quarters of the world, at least, "the age of miracles" is not yet past! A splendid church has risen on the site of the original vision. Needless to say, the very Christian government of the devout Salazar gives every assistance to so useful a cult, without which, indeed, the pious Dictator might not have ruled Portugal to-day.

What of Lucie, the sole survivor of the trio who saw the vision? Now 45 years of age, she has long since vanished into a nunnery: for the Church, which has organised the miracle, has no desire for embarrassing revelations from the one person whom it could not contradict on what happened at Fatima.

GENERAL REMARKS

Fatima represents, in modern times at least, the classic example of a miracle born of superstition, being handled as an instrument of policy by a worldly-wise world-power. We have already seen how useful it was in promoting a successful clerical counter-revolution in Portugal. On a world-scale, this miracle, which occurred a few weeks before the Russian Revolution, now the major danger to the Catholic Church, has been converted into the visible symbol of the present crusade of the Church against "Communism." (In her final testimony, Lucie, writing under the direction of the Bishop of Leiria, testified to the now famous declaration by the Virgin on the "conversion" of Russia, apparently unknown until then.) Lastly, this revelation in a place named after Mohammed's daughter, seems about to become the basis for negotiations with the

Muslim world, Rome's hereditary foe, for a common front against "atheistic Bolshevism." (Was Fatima originally the scene of a Muslim cult of the prophet's daughter, Fatima?)

M. Alfaric has rendered a most timely and valuable service to the International Freethought Movement. We hope that an English translation of his pamphlet will soon be available.

F. A. RIDLEY.

WHY DO THEY BELIEVE?

PEOPLE will believe in anything. (But not in anybody). Like the bottomless pit, human credulity has no limit. Especially is this seen in religious and supernatural belief.

For a long time, belief was esteemed a virtue. This is still the formal teaching of the Christian Churches based upon the psychology understood by Jesus Christ, the Gospel-writers and the early Fathers. But modern psychology has explored the foundations of belief and we know now, most positively, that belief is not a virtue. Unbelief is not a virtue either.

Nor are belief and unbelief of mind, absolutes—as much religious literature has always implied. There is wholehearted belief and half-hearted belief (as we say). There is also neither belief nor disbelief, but a suspension of judgment. There is also oscillation between belief and unbelief. No doubt the most absolute of believers and the most absolute of unbelievers have moments when they are Doubting Thomases.

It used to be thought—nay, it still is thought—that men can be convinced by argument and propaganda. But the truth is: some men, sometimes. Proverbially the "man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still." Often, too often, we believe that which we will or wish to believe. You may tell the ugliest of women that she is beautiful and though all the mirrors in the world shout the contrary she will believe you (and her own self-love) and not the mirrors!

This is one reason why the side which has the best of the argument seldom wins. An advocate in Court may have the facts and the law on his side, but if his opponent has only the prejudices of the judge or the jury he has enough for a victory.

Take a perfectly reasonable Christian of any sect with an excellent brain, accustomed to using it in the affairs of life with admirable effect! Yet, simply because he was indoctrinated from early childhood with some shocking, staggering and utterly preposterous belief (such as a Father-God of illimitable goodness and omnipotent power who required the Blood of an only Beloved Son as "atonement" for the sins of his created frail human-animals), his mind is utterly incapable of rejecting, and even, generally, of questioning the belief. Other men not similarly indoctrinated in childhood gaze appalled at this strange phenomenon of self-hypnotism. Yet there it is: one of the commonest of mental states.

Equally if that man had been taught the fables of the gods and goddesses of Ancient Rome or the tenets of Mohammedanism, Buddhism, or any other faith in childhood, his mind would equally cling to them in manhood. Especially would this be so if his day and environment shared the childhood-belief.

Often it requires a great and sudden mental shock to liberate the childhood-enslaved mind. Or else, it requires a long and slow process of subjecting the adult mind to new thought that questions, uproots and takes the place of the old.

Not easily does mental emancipation from the beliefs of early childhood come. In mental affairs we are all

natural conservatives. Habit counts for much in mental as in bodily life. New ideas give most minds distinct feeling of unpleasantness, old ideas are deeply-cherished. Like old garments, old ideas are comfortable in wear.

And, of course, there is always more restfulness in belief than in unbelief of any kind whatsoever. We take on trust a million things that we cannot prove and do not want to prove, from the multiplication table, to the good faith of our wives and the staggering figures of reputable mathematicians, astronomers and other experts whose specialist findings are beyond our questioning.

And in religious belief there is great comfort. Belief heals the torture and frustration of thought and questioning. Terrified by the unknown, as Pascal was the silence of the ineffable Universe, the human mind with a sense of relief subsides into sleep like a frightened and tired babe against the bosom of Mother Church. It is all very human and understandable.

Nevertheless, it is wrong and harmful as all drug-taking is. Religion which Lenin declared to be "the opium of the people" can be nothing better or more beneficial than this. And how immoral it is to "cast thy burden upon the Lord," to seek salvation for self in another's Blood instead of by one's own payment in effort and will. Such aspects of the Christian dogma are quite shameful to the self-respecting mind.

This surely points the way to knowing why some believe and some disbelieve. Minds and temperaments differ. In mental food as in physical one man's meat is another man's poison. The claims of Christianity are to one mind simply ludicrous: to another they seem serious and reasonable. For the poorest minds are but distorting mirrors. And unfortunately the best are but little better at their best. Never does the human mind show exactly the thing-as-it-is. Compounded as it is of prejudice, passion, unreason, emotion, fashion, part-knowledge, imagination and a thousand other disturbing factors, the mind is, at best, a poor and imperfect instrument indeed for the ascertainment of truth.

Still we argue and dispute—mostly in vain. So it is as well to realise the limits of what can be done by pure argument, disputation and propaganda. Convention governs most people's minds and while the current convention supports Christianity, Buddhism, Mohammedanism and the rest, so long will the mass of people more or less believe in religion. The gods and goddesses of Ancient Greece and Rome lived long and healthy lives so long as fashion supported them. Once convention changed, they died out for ever.

1,950-odd years is not long for a religion to live. Mankind they tell me has lasted for millions of years, and how can I prove anything to the contrary?

C. G. L. DU CANN.

WORLD UNION OF FREETHINKERS

THE American Association for the Advancement of Atheism and the National Liberal League, both of which I represent at this Congress, have pledged themselves to carry on a relentless, and, if necessary, an endless war against the aggressions of ecclesiastical power. They stand for liberty of thought and freedom of the Press, and complete separation of religion and government. The secular public schools, free of religious domination, are part of our educative system. It was the desire of our Founding Fathers to vouchsafe to our Republic those liberties which had been so long denied in other parts of the world. It was Jefferson's idea that there should be no "tyranny over the mind of man."

I say that we in America cherish the principles of liberty. It is a pleasure to join with those of you in Europe who are ready to keep those principles alive.

It is not enough that we hold congresses at various intervals; we must, those of us who are foreigners here, carry back to our countries a will to further our aims. It is essential to the preservation of those ideals that we work together. In the words of Franklin, "If we do not hang together, we will hang separately." The forces of superstition and oppression are always at work; it is our duty to see that the crimes of religion are not re-enacted on our soil.

It is imperative, I submit, that all freethought societies repledge themselves to the task of opposing all forms of dictatorship and tyranny. Whether they are religious or political, dictatorships infringe on the natural rights of men, depriving them of the right of private judgment and criticism. Freethought, I repeat, requires freedom of speech, and when this is trampled underfoot, there is an end of criticism. As the great historian, Bury, has remarked: "Freedom of thought, in any valuable sense, includes freedom of speech."

In the great and beautiful city of Brussels where martyrdom is not unknown and blood has been shed to uphold liberty, we are met as guests of the Belgian people, and I am happy to think that such a congress as this can hold its sessions under a monarchy. It is a tribute to the Crown, to the country itself, that freethought is encouraged here in Belgium. Here, free of dictatorship, its populace is at liberty to express itself on all matters of public concern.

I respectfully submit that the only resolution I offer to this Congress is: Let us beware of dictatorships. There stands our common enemy, an enemy which can undo, in one fatal moment, the work of centuries. The freethought sacrifices of the past will be as empty dreams if we allow ourselves to be engulfed in the tide of dictatorships. The labours of Vanini and Ferrer, of Bradlaugh and Ingersoll, of Diderot and Voltaire, will come to naught once we submit to tyranny. We have too much to lose by surrendering our rights to dictatorial cliques and regimented thinking. Ladies and Gentlemen of the Congress, I am happy to be with you at these memorable sessions and to participate in your wise councils for furthering our ideals. May there come out of this Union, a united front against all forms of oppression and dictatorships.

WOOLSEY TELLER.

SYMBOL OF HARMONY

In the Geistesfreiheit XLVI, September 9, 1952, Dr. W. Bonness reports on a girl student from Swabia who wanted, at the Olympic Games at Helsinki, to pronounce a speech for peace, quite in accordance with the tradition of the Clanic Olympic Games, in which there were also competitions in music and rhetoric, and in accordance with the peace ideal of Baron Pierre de Coubertin. Dr. Bonness mentions the Olympic Speech of Gorgias of Leontinoi, Sicily (483-375 B.C.), who intervened in about 408 as an advocate of harmony to stop the fratricidal war between Sparta and Athens. Gorgias said: "In peace time, sons bury their fathers which is natural, in the war, on the contrary, fathers bury their sons. In peace we are awakened in the morning by the song of birds, in war by the sound of trumpets. In the war one is hardly safe inside the town walls, in peace the whole land is free for us. The war resembles an illness, the peace is health; in peace time the ill recover, in the war even the healthy are destroyed. . ."

Of course, our modern administrators do not want advocates of peace of this kind. Not only was not the Korean War stopped—as had been all wars inside Greece—but the modern advocate of peace was arrested (not officially!), medically examined because of her foolish pacifism, and expelled from Finland. With some relief it was stated officially that it was not a political demonstration, but a mere childish attempt to speak for peace. Quite unexpectedly there was somebody courageous enough on the Stuttgart wirelessly and so the student still had her go.

A. W.

ACID DROPS

For turning the young minds at school from things frivolous and mundane, the B.B.C. has arranged a series of talks on that popular and fascinating subject, "Does God Exist?", and the first speaker, Mr. E. F. Caldin, who lectures on chemistry at the University of Leeds, had no difficulty whatever in answering the question. "Our Lord" said that he was God Almighty and, therefore, he must have been—hence God does exist. You must take Christ's word for it just as you take the word of Einstein on Relativity. Could anything be more conclusive? All the ponderous tomes written to prove the existence of God can now be huddled together for a cheering bonfire, and all hail to Mr. Caldin as the greatest philosopher ever!

There is, of course, no need to discuss the matter with Mr. Caldin for, as Schiller said long ago, against colossal stupidity and ignorance even the very Gods cannot prevail. The pity of it is that this kind of twaddle invades our schools, and there may be here and there some child actually believe it. Fortunately, most of the children will be utterly bored and perhaps read "comics" under their desks while the broadcast is on—and good luck to them!

Great consternation has recently prevailed in the Methodist Church for one of their foremost members not only was taking part in football pools but had actually won £700. This was too much for the All-Highest in Methodyland. The unfortunate winner was promptly sacked, for there is no more heinous crime in the Methodist calendar than gambling. Playing cards are Hell's Pictures, while going to a theatre is the road to Perdition.

The unfortunate winner of £700, unable to bear the disgrace, committed suicide, and the Methodist Panjams are now trying to explain that they didn't mean it—or something of the sort. For sheer Humbug—capital "H", please—commend us to any thorough, all-believing Methodist.

In Dublin, a New Party has been formed—it is called National Action, and it is going to make an "all-out attack on the party system of government." We seem to have heard of this kind of thing before—National Socialism it was then called, and under its great Fuhrer, Adolf Hitler, it smashed not only the party system, but everything else, particularly freedom of any kind. As National Action is based on Christianity of the Roman kind, it won't have anything to learn from National Socialism. We can only hope that it ends the same way.

A Report on the Third World Conference of Faith and Order, recently held in Sweden, was broadcast by Mr. O. Tomkins, and a very doleful Report it was. Once again the question of the "Unity" of all Christian Churches came up, and poor Mr. Tomkins could hold out no hope there. Unity, alas, was as far away as ever—and it will be unless the other Churches surrender everything to Rome. That was the only unity it understood. As every Church Conference tells the same tale, we should be thankful—for once—that we have it broadcast. Let the people know the truth!

It is quite good to learn that the Vatican—that is, a bunch of yes-priests—is furious at Prof. Hill's Malthusian opening speech of the British Association recently.

The report in the Vatican newspaper says that what he said savoured of "the monstrous practices of Nazism," as if the Vatican ever openly denounced those practices while Hitler and Mussolini were in power. On the contrary, indeed. Hitler was always looked upon as a son of the Church even if a slightly erring one. He was never excommunicated—nor, for that matter, were any Catholic Nazis no matter how "monstrous" their crimes. Perhaps this was because the Church could always cap these crimes by its own.

WORLD UNION OF FREETHINKERS

THIS association has completed eighty years of existence and counts among its leading members men such as Carducci, Ardigo, Sergi, Beiro, Chisleri, etc., and has not forgotten, nor lost the inspiration of, the great international Congress of 1904. The building where for long it was housed was burnt to the ground by Mussolini's men in 1925, but the spirit remained and since 1945 the association has been reconstructing and expanding steadily. The new generations are, however, conformist and sceptical of the value of the individual effort. The economic difficulties, particularly the lack of work, render progress slow and uncertain. Since the 1949 congress the association has published regularly its organ "La Ragione" in 8- and 12-pp. issues. Despite clerical opposition and political indifferences, the appeal of "Giordano Bruno" for a secular outlook has not been without response. Last February jointly with the Democratic Association for the Defense of the National Schools, we held a conference to study the problems of Secular Life. A national congress will be held from September 19-21, under the chairmanship of Prof. G. Pepe. We take part in and organise celebrations in honour of Garibaldi, Mazzini and other champions of Liberty. In November last year we commemorated Garibaldi's victory at Mentana. This year we commemorate Andrea Costa, and each year we celebrate September 20, date of the abrogation of the Papal temporal power.

Our association asks the World Union to consider the establishment of an International Freethought centre in Rome, the seat of the Papacy, the ancient oppressive theocracy.

Report from "Giordano Bruno" Association, Italy, presented by Prof. Angelo Crippa.

THEATRE

"Murder in Motley." Fortune Theatre.

Ingram d'Abbes and Fenn Sheric have collaborated successfully in writing a thriller which brings in the auditorium. What happens is that an actress on the stage is shot dead by someone in the house. An appeal is made for a doctor, and one seated behind me immediately responds. The police arrive, the detective-inspector takes the stage, a programme-seller is involved and the plot develops.

Allowing for various weaknesses, practically inevitable in this kind of thing, the play is well produced and acted. Nothing short of a capable, professional cast could put it over convincingly—or nearly so. Finally we finish up with a twist-ending, and discover we have been hoaxed—most successfully.

All performances were good, but notably those by Vanora McIndoe, Carl Bernard, Winifred Payne, Helène Cordet and Norman Griffin.

RAYMOND DOUGLAS.

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

H. FIDDIAN.—Regret we cannot see the point of your letter.

K. LIDAKS.—Your letters are far too long. Please remember, *The Freethinker* is not a political journal.

The Secretary, N.S.S., acknowledges with thanks a donation of £6 10s. to the N.S.S. Benevolent Fund from Mr. Bayard Simmons, being a continuation of quarterly gifts previously subscribed to "The Freethinker Fund."

JEAN FOU DIC.—Thank you for interesting cutting. We hope that the occupants of the "saucers," wherever they may come from, have a mental outlook worthy of their technical attainments.

GREGORY E. SMELTERS.—Thank you for articles, which we hope to use shortly. Mr. Scott's praise is fully deserved. Will write you soon.

THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, £1 4s.; half-year, 12s.; three months, 6s.

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.

SUGAR PLUMS

Mr. F. A. Ridley is visiting Leicester this week, and his address to-day (October 12) for the Leicester Secular Society, "Social Origins of Christianity," should bring a good audience. We hope it will be productive also of a vigorous discussion.

The English Committee of *The World Union of Freethinkers* met on Wednesday, September 24, at Conway Hall, to discuss outstanding matters. The Chair was taken by Mr. Bradlaugh Bonner, President of *The World Union*, and Mr. F. A. Ridley and P. V. Morris represented the N.S.S. A special feature of the recent Congress was the formation of an International Freethought Youth Movement, represented by a Vice-President on the Executive Committee. Special arrangements for youth will be made at the 1954 Congress at Luxemburg. The International Executive will meet in September next year, at Luxemburg, to make the necessary arrangements. We hope soon to publish at least some of the summaries of addresses delivered at Brussels.

One of the most disquieting facts of recent years is represented by the increasing subservience of politicians of all shades to the Churches. The recent controversy over Catholic schools represented one such example. An even more nauseating and alarming one was exhibited at last week's Labour Party Conference at Morecambe. Mr. Attlee, the Leader of the Party, and Mr. A. Greenwood, its Chairman-Designate, read the lessons at a local service at which the preacher was the Archbishop of York, Dr. Garbett. Worse still, the official programme of the Conference contained official mention both of the above Anglican service and of a simultaneous Roman Catholic one. Shade of Robert Owen! The prospect of the Labour Party going to church, just as the Tory Party seems to be coming away from it—*vide* Mr. Eden!—does not augur well for the progress of Secularism in British society.

Our very live Circulation Department reports a good response to its recent efforts. One subscriber writes: "My late husband was a reader for many years, whereas

I was *strong church*. He went blind, and I read his papers to him and was surprised at what I read, and have continued with *The Freethinker* ever since his death." Then the telephone rings, and a voice asks: "Can I order a five-years' subscription to our paper? I'll send a cheque to-morrow." Such experiences justify hopes that new plans now in hand will produce the results they deserve.

The October number of our contemporary, *The Literary Guide*, is of unusual interest. In addition to its usual quota of articles and letters, the current number includes the varied and comprehensive lectures delivered at the annual conference of the R.P.A. at University College, Leicester, on the agreed subject of *The Menace of Roman Catholicism*. A galaxy of talent participated, including Messrs. Howell-Smith, Joseph McCabe and Avro Manhattan. Of an admirable series of lectures, perhaps that by Mr. Hector Hawton on "The Roman Catholic in Literature To-day" is particularly outstanding. Mr. Hawton gives a masterly analysis of contemporary literary trends of a Catholic character and demonstrates that, here as elsewhere, the Church is "all things to all men." No one interested in the current activities of the major enemy of Freethought can afford to miss this notable issue of *The Literary Guide*.

Readers in Mansfield, Chesterfield, Ilkeston, Long Eaton, Ripley and Heanor who would like meetings addressed by our Nottingham stalwart, T. M. Mosley, in their towns should write to him at 63, Valley Road, Carlton, Nottingham. He wants to extend the area of his many activities for the cause, and we should be delighted to see him doing this in his own inimitable and effective manner.

ON MATERIALISM AGAIN

AS a Freethinker, I find it difficult to keep away from Materialism, particularly as the Materialism of the great Freethinkers is now being violently attacked by "Dialectical" Materialists who are not, I hold, Materialists at all.

I stand for a thorough-going Materialism which has no truck with "spirit" or metaphysics. As far as we can call this "mechanical," I am all for "mechanical" Materialism, and I have often pointed out that Dialectical Materialism opposes this, tooth and nail. As I cannot find out exactly what is Dialectical Materialism (for it means neither "dialectical" nor "Materialism") and as Dialectical Materialists themselves make the confusion worse by accusing each other of not understanding it either, I am very pleased to call the attention of the reader to a particularly fine exposition of genuine Materialism in *Man: Mind or Matter?* by Charles Mayer, translated by H. A. Larrabee, and published by the Beacon Press, Boston, last year.

Mr. Larrabee contributes an excellent preface in which he points out how, ever since the French Revolution, "the drumfire of calumny against Materialism has continued. It has been cursed and abused from one end of the land to the other in literally thousands of books, sermons, and editorials; and it has been blamed, at one time or another, for every form of woe to which the flesh and spirit of man are heir." To these denunciations we now have to face those of Dialectical Materialists.

The author of this book, Dr. Mayer, is a great scholar, and has written widely not only on technical subjects such

as physics and chemistry, but also on politics and economics; and, as his translator points out, "he does not indulge in polite evasions of difficulties, and he does not waste words." Materialists are supposed to "explain" everything, but, of course, this is nonsense. When Dr. Mayer "does not know the answer, he does not claim to know it."

There is still another point which Mr. Larrabee makes. "Dr. Mayer," he tells us, "is also refreshingly frank in recognising that his philosophy is not for immature minds, and that, like all other philosophies, it may even be harmful to those who are not ready for it." In particular, he does not want, because he is a Materialist, to be considered a "fellow traveller" of Communism. "His philosophy," we are told, "is emphatically individualistic, and hence it is diametrically opposed to the authoritarian teachings of Stalinism or Soviet Marxism."

To boil down such a book in the short space of an article is quite impossible, but it may be worth while to touch upon one or two points of interest to those who are still puzzled with the phenomenon we call life or mind. Dr. Mayer asks: "To what sort of causes, natural or supernatural, should we attribute the appearance of life upon our globe? And if we take the position that life is without an ultimate purpose, what consequences will follow?" From the ethical standpoint this is an important question and is very ably answered by Dr. Mayer. The chief point to remember is that "the consequences" depend so very much on time and place as well as on heredity and environment. Our own morals, for instance, are bound to be very different from those held by the Japanese. As J. M. Guyau points out: "It is almost impossible to grasp the exceeding narrowness of the human mind, or to realise how hard it is for us to entertain a state of mind that is foreign to our own, or to see things as others see them."

Dr. Mayer insists that "a Materialist cannot accept the principle of authority, whether of tradition, custom, or the will of the majority, or any absolute dogma."

In these days of matter being resolved into energy as the result of "atom-splitting," it may surprise readers to learn that G. H. Lewes had already said (in 1871) that "energy is the dynamic form of matter and matter is the static form of energy." And for Materialists, it is sufficient to hold that the Universe has existed from all eternity, that everything that happens is the result of purely physical laws, that life "appeared in the world under the influence of natural causes," and that mind "is just a manifestation of material phenomena." Mind, indeed, "is inconceivable without matter and energy." There are no final causes, "nothing whatever except purely material facts. Thought itself is only a spark emanating from matter."

To substantiate these statements, Dr. Mayer has given us page after page of elucidation in the simplest terms, and I am sure it would do most Freethinkers good carefully to master his argument. His criticism of Marxist Materialism is devastating, and he quotes Marx to show how irreconcilable is "the opposition which exists between the individualistic conception of Materialism and that of the Marxists." Dr. Mayer comes to the definite conclusion "that a Materialist committed to logic and consistent with his own premises must be, before all else, an individualist. That does not prevent him from recognising human interdependence and the practical necessities which flow from it."

For Idealism, as taught by Berkeley, Dr. Mayer has no use whatever. As he says: "It is of no practical interest

to discuss a process of thought in which the operator, that is, ourselves, and the object, that is, the world as sensed, do not exist materially." I once was told by a very prominent Freethinker, who called himself a Materialist, that when we left the room in which we were talking, it ceased to exist. He then telephoned to his wife at their home. I pointed out that his house had ceased to exist when he left it—and for a moment he was completely non-plussed. But quite sure that any opponent of Idealism must be an idiot, he calmly stated that in telephoning, he had "reconstructed" the conditions under which his house had again come into being!

Every Freethinker who is a Materialist should read and master Dr. Mayer's brilliant book. Apart from its high philosophic import it puts the case for Materialism better than any modern book I have read. Its great quality is its lucidity. No reader need be frightened at having to wade through a mass of mostly unmeaning metaphysical terms—or jargon as I prefer to call it.

Its price (17s. 6d. in English money) is unfortunately an obstacle to its circulation, and though the publishers make some concessions it is a pity that such a work cannot be produced for 5s. at most. Perhaps one day this will be possible.

H. CUTNER.

TYRANTS AND PRIESTS

Fear not the tyrants shall rule forever
Or the priests of the bloody faith;
They stand on the brink of that mighty river
Whose waves they have tainted with death,
It is fed from the depths of a thousand dells,
Around them it foams and rages and swells,
And their swords and their sceptres I floating see
Like wrecks in the surge of ETERNITY.

—SHELLEY.

CORRESPONDENCE

TRUTH ABOUT RUSSIA

SIR.—In his letter to *The Freethinker*, in reply to mine, Mr. Pat Sloan maintains the Russian case that Popov was the inventor of Radio before Marconi has been checked and substantiated internationally. Such an announcement is unconvincing after the death of Marconi, who would have been able to do his own checking during his lifetime. This, however, is not the only Russian claim. Fleming has hitherto been credited as being the discoverer of Penicillin; George Stephenson is usually believed to have invented the Steam Engine; and Lavoisier is supposed to have discovered the law relating to the interchangeability of matter. This is all wrong according to the Russians, who are now contending that their scientists thought of these things before the individuals mentioned. Presumably it was also Russian scientists who invented planes, submarines, and jet engines; no doubt they were the original inventors of gas and electricity; introduced anaesthetics, and discovered the circulation of the blood long before the Western scientists. Now that Edison is dead the Russians will be claiming his inventions!

Upon reflection Mr. Sloan may realise that in this field there is enormous scope for romancing. All the Russians have to do is to claim the credit of the things mentioned, put their scientists' names into school text books, and the trick or falsification is accomplished.

Mr. Sloan next maintains, or appears to claim (his wording is ambiguous) that the Russian purges are anti-Soviet lies. I would refer him and all Freethinkers interested in Russian anti-freedom of speech policy to Alex Weissberg's book *Conspiracy of Silence*, published this year by Hamish Hamilton. Ample evidence is given in that book of 509 pages of Communist purges, persecution, terrorism, banishment, imprisonment without trial, and murder upon a colossal scale. Mr. Weissberg explains in detail the workings of the Communist régime.

After reading the extensive correspondence which has appeared in *The Freethinker* during the past few years, and also perusing many books written by Communists, ex-Communists and other authors, especially those who have lived in Russia for considerable periods, I have come to the conclusion 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 in the allocation of housing there is much favouritism shown. There are class distinctions, and undemocratic arrangements in regard to rations. Freedom of speech and liberty of the

Press as understood in England is practically nil. Over all there rules the evil Stalin political régime. It is inexplicable why our Sloans boost and magnify Communism, when they should be warning us against it.

You may remember that Mr. Sloan mentioned in your columns 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." This is a curious contention in view of what we know of the Russian Press which prints what it is dictated to print. The Stalin régime is more likely to blunt morality than to promote moral conditions. It is fantastic to credit Communism with integrity; the evidence is all against such a claim.

What are the lessons our country can learn from the Soviet régime? Chiefly that our political conditions and methods are far superior in their humane and moral aspects. We must take good care that Communism is never established here.—Yours, etc.,

ALFRED D. CORRICK.

THE BALTIC NAVAL OPERATIONS

SIR.—The naval operations of the United Navies in the Baltic Sea will not change the situation created by the Treaty of Potsdam. According to the Treaty of Potsdam, Russia took the longest coastline in the Baltic Sea and received the right to exterminate the people in Baltic countries.

Due to land and other reforms, the people living in the Baltic countries were anti-Communists. In case of war, the United Nations cannot rely on people living in satellite countries because all friendly people were killed or deported; but people living there now come from Russia. The natives left in Baltic countries are Communists. Sweden was always serious about the Baltic Sea. In 1945 in Potsdam, Swedish diplomats protested against the annexation of the Baltic countries to Russia because without them the Russian Navy was helpless. The only base was Kronstadt, and that useless in wintertime. The Russian Tsar, Peter the Great, fought 30 years to take the Baltic Sea, but Stalin easily obtained the Baltic in Potsdam and Yalta. Swedish diplomats were always against the U.N. raising Russia to power. During two world wars, Swedish diplomats managed to save their country from destruction and made it one of the best in the world.

As a Baltic Sea sailor, I know that a small part of the Baltic Sea can be used for naval operations. The rest of it is territorial water, a mine zone and uncharted with areas of moving sandbanks, and are forbidden areas, with some marked fishing grounds and shallow waters.

It is too late to frighten Russia to-day. Russia feels too strong. She stirs up trouble in every country. My own opinion is that the naval operations in the Baltic Sea may cause diplomatic complications. The last years show that many calculations of UNO diplomats were wrong and many decisions made by them unknown to the majority of people.—Yours, etc.,

K. LIDAKS.

"RUSSIAN INVENTIONS"

SIR.—Your correspondent "M. M. Lyngtloff" is obviously one of those emigrés who not only is so overcome by emotion that he loses all sense of accuracy but has also become "plus royaliste que le roi" in now resenting any suggestion that his native Russia should ever have been ahead of Britain in scientific discoveries. I need only say that before any announcement is made in the Soviet Press, regarding claims to have achieved certain inventions before they were patented in the West, thorough research has taken place into the original works of the Russian scientist concerned.

To any ordinary, sane person it should not be surprising that under the conditions of Tsarist Russia scientific works of considerable importance lay unpatented and unnoticed, while in the more industrialised West the inventors who patented their discoveries got considerable publicity.

If the Russians are now giving credit where it is due surely there is no cause for complaint.—Yours, etc.,

PAT SLOAN.

[We much regret that, for some time to come, we propose to put an "Iron Curtain" over the Russian question and no further letters upon this subject can be considered. *The Freethinker* is always eager to discuss topical questions of interest to its readers. However, the primary interest of our journal is Freethought and there are, in any case, many other periodicals where political issues can be more appropriately discussed.

Accordingly, this correspondence must be considered closed.—EDITOR.]

WHY LIFE APPEARS

If this conclusion is accepted, it follows that life does not occur as the result of a special act of creation or because of some unique accident, but that it is the result of the occurrence of definite processes; given the suitable condition, these processes will inevitably lead to the development of life.—SIR H. SPENCER JONES—*Life on Other Worlds*.

N.S.S. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, 2nd OCTOBER, 1952

Present: Mr. F. A. Ridley (in the Chair), Messrs. Ebury, Johnson, Hornibrook, Woodley, Tiley, Cleaver, Corstorphine, Barker, Gibbins, Taylor and the Secretary.

Eighteen new members were admitted to Parent, Glasgow, Fyzabad and West London branches. The balance (£409 11s.) of the legacy from the late M. Slater (New Zealand), also a bequest of £10 from the late A. Hanson, had been received and banked.

The Secretary reported the use of misleading advertisements by the Seventh Day Adventists to attract people to their meetings at the London Coliseum. He had drawn the attention of the Advertising Association and of the management of the Coliseum to this, and had been informed that the Press announcements had been amended and that the poster advertising was being discontinued.

An offer by Mr. Basil J. Edgecombe was accepted to advertise Secularism and *The Freethinker* in *The British Esperantist* as a counterblast to religious advertisements in the latter paper.

Arrangements were completed for a public meeting to be held at the Conway Small Hall on Wednesday, October 29, at 7-30 p.m. The speakers selected to deal with the question of "Religion in Politics" were Messrs. Ridley, Ebury, Barker and Shaw, with the Secretary in the Chair. The Secretary's acceptance of invitations from the Students' Christian Group of the College of St. Mark and St. John, Chelsea, for a speaker to give a talk on "I Believe—by an Atheist," and from the Putney Discussion Group for one on "Freethought and Secularism," was endorsed.

P. VICTOR MORRIS, Secretary.

The many admirers of Mr. Harold Day's work for the N.S.S. in Bradford will share our concern at the news, just arrived, that he has had a heart attack and that his doctor says he will have to stay in bed for several weeks.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

OUTDOOR

MR. J. CLAYTON'S Lectures.—Friday, October 10, 7-30 p.m., Oswaldtwistle (near Library). Saturday, October 11, 5-30 p.m., Enfield. Sunday, October 12, 3-15 p.m., Haslingden.

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

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: L. EBURY.

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Large Lecture Theatre, October 5, 7 p.m.): T. M. MOSLEY and A. ELSMERE.

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

INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m.: H. L. SEARLE, "The Ice Ages."

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, W.C. 1). — Tuesday, October 14, 7 p.m.: D. G. MACRAE, M.A., "How Right Was Marx?"

Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY (President, N.S.S.), "Social Origins of Christianity."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Large Lecture Theatre, Technical College, Shakespeare Street). — Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: H. CUTNER, "Malthus or Marx?"

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Sunday, October 12, 11 a.m.: Dr. W. E. SWINTON, "The Sea and Life."

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W. 1). — Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: M. D. NAIDOO (Gen. Sec., Democratic S. Africa Union), "South Africa."

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COMMERCIALISED CORPSES

A RECENT edition of the Catholic newspaper, *Universe* contained upon its front page, under the heading: "The Child Saint Goes Home" a long and glowing account of the cavortions accompanying the commercialising of a child's corpse, and the festivities attendant thereon.

The corpse in question was that of Maria Goretti, who shuffled, or rather was pushed off this mortal coil as a child of twelve in 1902 whilst defending her Catholic virginity against a ghoulish of unspecified denomination and, as a result thereof, received the dubious blessing of canonisation.

One cannot help but wonder whether the same laws of cause and effect would have operated in 1952, had the unfortunate Maria lived that long, but that is perhaps beside the point. The body, we are told, was placed upon a festooned and decorated lorry and paraded through the streets preceded by a choir of angels (pseudo species) arrayed in the traditional wings and haloes and riding upon another lorry, surely a strange mode of transport for celestial beings, prospective or otherwise; one would have thought that the magnanimity of Jesus might have extended to endowing them with the power of levitation for the occasion at least; how much more effective it would have made the whole proceedings had the heavenly host (pseudo species) only hovered over the cortege twanging "Home Sweet Home" upon the golden harps with which they were provided, but alas, 'twas not so, perhaps the reason lies in the fact that fireworks were let off all along the route, thus making the immediate ether a place perilous to winged personages.

The lorry it had to be, and very impressive it must have looked, preceded in its turn by numerous lorries, cars and coaches all crammed to capacity with countless Catholics who had doubtlessly paid well for the privilege. When the procession reached its destination it was met by a Film Star (this is an old religious custom known as box-office attraction) who bore the "order of Mary" and whose only apparent function was to lend atmosphere to the occasion.

The whole proceedings, it is reported, ended satisfactorily, and we doubt whether the body of Mary Bateman displayed upon Blackpool's "Golden Mile" ever drew such a crowd, or incidentally, drew so much money into the pockets of the organisers. After a careful perusal of the article in question the unbiased inquirer is bound to draw one of three conclusions: either (a) that the chastity of Catholics is proverbial and that their women are veritable amazons whose modesty is seldom desecrated, thus making the event a matter of much lamentation; (b) that the prospect of finding a Catholic woman willing to go to any great length to protect her honour is so slight that the event occasions rejoicing; or (c) that the object of the whole affair was merely a profitable "clipping" of the pious.

We will deal with the three possible explanations in turn.

Primarily, (a): whilst celibacy is, and long has been, the boast of the Catholic Church, it is a boast that is very difficult to substantiate, as a short historical account will show.

The first Church Council to forbid marriage to the clergy was probably the Spanish synod of Elvira in A.D. 305, yet the beginning of compulsory sacerdotal celibacy is usually dated from the decretal of Siricius in A.D. 385, and from then until the beginning of the 19th century the history of both priest, pope and laity is one of the flagrant immoralities of the many against the ascetic moralities of the few.

The four centuries following the decretal of Siricius bore nothing but secret and open opposition to it, and even though in the 8th and 9th centuries seven episcopal constitutions forbade a priest to have even his mother in the house, the see of Rouen was held almost throughout by bishops who were family men, and even England's St. Swithun was married. In the 11th century, St. Pietro Damiani bewailed the fact that even the bishops were steeped in the vice of lechery, and complained that it wouldn't be so bad if they only kept it a secret, which apparently they couldn't.

Hildebrand, upon becoming Pope in 1073, warned the laity against attending mass said by "any priest certainly known to keep a concubine."

St. Bonaventura entered into the fray in 1270 with an entirely mercenary motive, and delivered himself of this weighty dictum: "For if archbishops and bishops now had legitimate children they would rob and plunder all the goods of the Church."

The good Saint, however, did not seem concerned about illegitimate children, and Alvarez Pelayo, a Spanish bishop, writing in 1332, declared that "the sons of the laity are scarcely more numerous than those of the clergy."

At the council of Constance in 1415, Cardinal Pierre d'Ailly complained bitterly about "that scandalous custom whereby many clergy fear not to keep concubines in public." Yet this would seem to be a case of a voice crying in the wilderness, as the bishops and archbishops at the time were doing a roaring trade in licences which allowed the clergy to keep as many concubines as they could afford, indeed, in 1450 John de la Bere, bishop of St. David's, refused to separate the clergy in his diocese from their concubines, giving for his reason "for then I, your bishop, should lose the 400 marks which I receive yearly in my diocese for the priests' lemans." This happy state of affairs was allowed to remain for some considerable time, for as Sir Thomas More said, "Marriage defileth the priest more than double or treble whoredom."

In the matter of immorality it is perhaps needless to say that the laity were neck and neck with the clergy, and even now it is doubtful who won the race. Regrettable as it is, it would appear that the Catholic Church has no claim to be the ancient defender of morals, and so, alas, the first of our three propositions must be cast to the winds along, I fear, with the second, for whilst cherishing no particular love for Catholics *en masse*, it would hardly be fair to dub them a race of harlots, at least not now, and so we are left with conclusion (c) that money was the motivating power, and in view of the Catholic Church's well known aptitude for capitalising grisly relics it does not seem unreasonable that it should stoop to exploiting the raped body of a child, however revolting the prospect might be to decent citizens. In a Church that will not stop at "cashing in" on the dead, what hope is there for the living?

MICHAEL J. BARNES.

Judging by atom bomb preparations the earth is rapidly being prepared for its post-Judgment inhabitants; and in so doing no doubt hastening the Day of Judgment. After all, Eisenhower's mother was a Jehovah's Witness.

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