

The Freethinker

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Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

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[This article is part of a lecture which was delivered by Alec Craig to the Progressive League Conference on "The Anti-Vice Drive, a threat to freedom," on March 21 last in London.]

THE basis of the law relating to obscene publications is part of the common law and is not laid down in any statute. From the early part of the eighteenth century it has been laid down to be a misdemeanour at common law to "publish an obscene libel." A misdemeanour is an offence less serious than an felony, but nevertheless punishable by fine or imprisonment or both. The accused person is entitled to trial by jury. But, if both sides agree, a charge can be disposed of in the police court where the penalties are less.

Now in this offence there are three components: there must be a libel, it must be obscene and it must be published. A libel derives from the Latin *libellus*, "a little book," and means any writing, printing, painting, drawing or photograph. To be "published" it is sufficient if the libel, the little book, the printing, writing or picture is just shown to someone other than the person possessing it.

This is illustrated by the case of the unfortunate Count Potocki de Montalk, a rather eccentric New Zealander of Polish extraction who was a picturesque figure in London in the 'thirties. He used to wear a long red robe with accessories in keeping, and laid claim to the throne of Poland. Potocki wanted to send something in the way of a Christmas card to his friends. So he translated a poem by Rabelais, another by Verlaine and added three of his own compositions in the same vein, and took the typescript round to a printer. There was some dispute about the price and the typescript was left with the printer pending settlement of terms. The next thing that Potocki knew was that he was arrested because what he had done constituted publication in law. The typescript was subsequently held to be "obscene" and the Count served a sentence of six months imprisonment.

But what is "obscene"? Obscenity is the other component of the offence and is the crux of the whole matter. The test of obscenity accepted by the Courts was that given by Lord Chief Justice Cockburn in Hicklin's case in 1868. This was a case where a man had printed and distributed a pamphlet entitled *The Confessional Unmasked Showing the Depravity of the Roman Priesthood, the Iniquity of the Confessional, and the Questions Put to Females in Confession*. It was common ground that the purpose of the pamphlet was to discredit the R.C. Church, a purpose with which Cockburn had every sympathy; but he said that which Cockburn had every sympathy; but he said that intention, however excellent, could not excuse obscenity and "the test of obscenity is this, whether the tendency of the matter charged as obscenity is to deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences and into whose hands a publication of this sort may fall. That this is still the law as regards the test of obscenity was confirmed by the Court of Criminal Appeal recently. The facts of that case are of little interest to us as it concerned

cheap fiction of no literary pretensions; but the judgment of the Court, delivered by the Lord Chief Justice, is of great general interest. Besides confirming that the Cockburn dictum is still good law he said that the best way to try obscenity cases was to read this definition to the jury, let them see the matter that was the subject of the charge, and then let them make up their minds whether the matter

was obscene according to that test. Adopting the law of Scotland as laid down in a recent case, he ruled that evidence in the form of other books which were published without prosecution was inadmissible, either to show that matter more obscene than that which was the subject of the charge was

published, or to put before the jury the general standards and background of the age.

Evidence of experts on the issue of obscenity is also inadmissible, but the circumstances of publication are a relevant consideration for the jury.

In addition to this common law there are two important statutes dealing with obscene publications.

One is the Obscene Publications Act of 1857 which empowers the courts of summary jurisdiction on information laid before them to order the destruction of any obscene publications held for sale or distribution after the owner has been heard in their defence if he so wishes.

The other is the Customs Act which empowers the Customs authorities to destroy imported obscene matter subject to the right of the importer to be heard either in the High Court or in a Court of Summary Jurisdiction. Apparently the Customs authorities can choose the Court, and there is no appeal.

To establish the fact that this is unsatisfactory in a general way, it is not necessary to do more than mention a few of the authors whose work has been condemned under it: Havelock Ellis, D. H. Lawrence, James Joyce, Radclyffe Hall. Further, there are the number of eminent, reputable and respectable persons who have explicitly or implicitly shown disapproval of the law by appearing as expert witnesses of the literary and scientific value of books which have been attacked under the law we are considering, or by publicly defending such books. For example, Robert Buchanan, Edward Carpenter, Prof. J. B. S. Haldane, Prof. Julian Huxley, George Moore, Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells, Lancelles Abercrombie, Laurence Binyon, John Buchan, Laurence Housman, Desmond McCarthy, Rose Macaulay, Lytton Strachey, E. M. Forster, Prof. Malinowski, Dr. Maude Royden.

In addition to actual prosecutions and condemnations we must take into account the fact that a great deal of work is never published as the author first conceived it because of the nervousness of publishers and printers. Indeed, it is probably true to say that as in the case of icebergs what is unseen and unknown is more dangerous than what is seen and known. A detailed and documented demonstration of the general unsatisfactoriness of the law is given in my books *The Banned Books of England* and *Above All Liberties*.

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

"Obscene Publications"

—By ALEC CRAIG—

One of the worst features of the law is its arbitrary character. Although it is not permissible to urge in defence of a charge of obscenity that even more obscene matter is not prosecuted, it is nevertheless true that the incidence of prosecution is quite haphazard and depends on the chance circumstances of complaint or local police zeal, or on the personality and opinions of the Home Secretary of the hour. Furthermore, the results of individual cases are largely a matter of luck. Cockburn test is not a criterion of fact but

of opinion. It does not require that corruption should be proved, only that the jury should be persuaded of a tendency in that direction. A jury might take a condemnatory view of many books which freely circulate if they were brought to trial; and almost anything might be condemned if the judge allows himself, as he sometimes does, to harangue the jury on the iniquity of the matter before them. In the case of trial by an individual magistrate the outcome is even more chancy.

Chosen Question

By G. H. TAYLOR

FROM time to time, as may be opportune, we shall take from our correspondence a question which indicates that the sender is an earnest inquirer into the Freethought position, coming usually from some liberal-minded Christian or "nothingarian." Such questions may occasionally call for rather fuller treatment than is possible in "answers to correspondents."

The first to be dealt with in this way comes from a Notts. reader, who was replied to as "Christian Rationalist" in "To Correspondents" some weeks ago. The relevant extract from his further letter is:

"I have casually known 'The Freethinker' for a year or two, but am unable to agree with its general position which . . . savours of cocksureness about matters which puzzle all thinkers. A cold materialism has always seemed to me inadequate. Just look at that wonderful instrument, the human eye. To explain this by simple evolution, unaided by Design . . . which implies a Designer . . . you are driven to believe in an endless chain of coincidences."

This question is sincere, and no doubt impressive to many people, but it merely strengthens one's conviction that there is not a single new argument under the sun, in favour of the Christian position. The question before us is of the general type advanced by Archdeacon Paley (1743-1805) in his *Evidences for Christianity* (1794). "If," he said in effect, "I come across a watch, I suppose that somewhere there is a watchmaker." Or, as our friend would say, if we find in the human eye an organism beautifully adapted for the purpose we are compelled to postulate a Designer, whom the Christians call God.

The argument, however, is vulnerable (a) logically (i.e., prior to investigation), and (b) empirically (i.e., subsequent to investigation).

In the first place, we can *verify* the existence of watchmakers, but we *cannot* produce for inspection the "Maker of Eyes," so the analogy fails in its essence.

In the second place Darwin's theory of natural selection knocked the Paleyan argument right out of the picture. It is not just atheists who say this and scientists who say this. Christian scholars admit it. I will stay only to quote one. "Paley's position has unquestionably been shattered by evolutionary science." (Canon Storr, *The Argument from Design*).

The evolution of sight may be traced from the primitive vertebrates (e.g., lampreys). Their whole nervous system is light-sensitive. Most parts are protected from it but the unprotected parts of the head and tail respond to it, and the response constitutes a survival-advantage. A mutation may make any tissue light-sensitive, just as the human skin becomes sensitive in hæmatoporphyria or xeroderma. Haldane has shown mathematically in his *Causes of Evolution* that if only ten variables must alter together to improve the function, and, moreover, do not alter at the same time but are independent hereditary characteristics (i.e., not linked genetically), then we may expect one in

every 1,024 individuals. Natural selection would do the rest.

Further, what are we to think of the Almighty Maker of Eyes who produces blind children and people with faulty sight? In nature such imperfections are possible, but not with Almighty God, who continually has to be reinforced by opticians, and who, if He went into business, would very soon be inundated with complaints from dissatisfied customers.

According to Prof. Garrison the eye "is not perfectly planned to guard against spherical and chromatic aberrations, while in mechanical construction it is inferior to the cheapest optical instrument in the market. Astigmatism, or want of sphericity in the cornea, is present in a greater or less degree in every human eye, while the crystalline lens is not truly centred—on the optical axis of the eye. The refracting media of the eye, as the aqueous humour, the crystalline lens, the vitreous humour, are not uniformly transparent; and hence rays of light during transmission undergo absorption and refraction, giving rise to various shadows, haloes and fringes, which fall upon the retina to the great impairment of vision—long-sightedness and short-sightedness are common difficulties, arising from want of proper relation between the refracting power of the eye and its depth—all these difficulties are practically overcome in even the cheapest cameras in the market, and yet no one has ever claimed that the camera had a miraculous origin, or that the wonderful design manifest in its mechanism proves its designer to be God."

N.Z. Rationalist Conference

Freethought history was made in Auckland, New Zealand, on April 27-28, with the first Rationalist Conference organised by the Association. The conference and dinner were highly satisfactory and telegrams and letters of goodwill arrived from various parts of the country.

Among the subjects discussed were: State Aid to private and denominational schools; questions to be put to General Election candidates; Rationalist (i.e., Secular) funerals; weapons of mass destruction; the welfare of the Association's branches; the future name of the Association itself, and the unification of the movement in New Zealand.

Seventy members sat down to the conference dinner, the first of many toasts being given by the President, Mr. A. O'Halloran (whose New Zealand letter appeared in *The Freethinker* recently), to "The International Freethought Movement."

The President's Report makes encouraging reading, showing increases in literature sales, in the Sustentation Fund, and in bequests over the previous year.

TUOMAS PAINE, A Pioneer of Two Worlds. By Chapman Cohen. Price 1s. 6d.; postage 1½d.

"The Abominable Snowman"

By F. A. RIDLEY

FOR some time past, there have been persistent rumours that a "strange"—all *unknown* creatures are "strange"—and uncouth creature inhabits the remote snow-line of the enormous Himalaya mountains, the highest in the world. Tracks of this creature have, we learn, often been seen but never the elusive beast itself. However, to quote our great poet, it has, if not a concrete existence, at least two attributes of existence, "a local habitation"—viz., the snow-line of the Himalayas—and a "name"—which is, "The Abominable Snowman." For such is the title which either the Tibetan "natives," or their European visitors, give to this Himalayan *enfant terrible*.

Like all students of religion and of religious psychology the present writer is familiar with myths and legends, and with goblins, hobgoblins, fairies, and freaks of all kinds. To be an "expert" in the divine—and diabolical!—"science" of theology, one has to be! From Jack-and-the-Beanstalk to the Assumption of Our Lady, from Little Red Riding Hood to Our Lady of Fatima, all such strange phenomena are "more than somewhat" familiar. Consequently, when I learnt of the existence, or alleged existence, of "The Abominable Snowman," I was not in the least astonished. "God moves in mysterious ways," and so, apparently, does "The Abominable Snowman." The "snowman" has, at least, *one divine* attribute. *No one* has ever *seen* him!

The "historicity" of the "abominable" one is not, perhaps, beyond question. He can hardly be a "sun" myth, so high up in the Himalayas, where the sun has so little power. That he (or she) may be a *snow* myth is, perhaps, rather more probable, in view of the large amount of snow to be found in the elevated regions which the adjectival "snowman" is said to "inhabit." We cannot, accordingly, be certain of his "historicity." We must wait until some eminent scholar of the "mythicist" persuasion, a "John M. Robertson," or a "Herbert Cutner" sharpens a "John M. Robertson," or a "Herbert Cutner" sharpens his pen, and our wits, upon this abstruse problem of the "myth-making" faculty, which has produced this bizarre creation of the human fancy at an estimated altitude of some 15,000 feet above sea level. Until such time we may, perhaps, imagine that "the abominable snowman" is *real*, a misguided baboon, or even a "Homo" of sorts, who has found the way *in*, though not out, of the terrifying glaciers where he is alleged to make his permanent residence. And even if, following the example of so many learned theologians, we "darkly know," by faith we cry, that the "snowman" does actually exist, how can we be sure that he (or she) is really "abominable"? He may be, in fact, a model of all the domestic virtues, whilst his current avoidance of human society may simply be due to "cold feet," surely excusable at so frigid an altitude?

However, let us, for the moment at least, leave the "snowman," with or without his adjectival prefix, and let us descend from the Himalayan heights to our own sea level. Let us turn our current attention to another "snowman," one who, whilst perhaps, not more historical than the present "abominable" one, has left vivid tracks of his footprints, if not on the Himalayan snows, at least on "the sands of time."

The time when snow falls in our temperate zone is during winter, and it was during winter, they say, that our "snowman" was born; to be precise, on December 25, in mid-winter, at the time that *our* "snowman" was—or was not—born, for his actual historical existence has been called

in question, like that of his Himalayan antitype. The world had become comparatively civilised, people were free to think and to talk, much as they liked; science was making great strides; whilst superstition had practically disappeared amongst the educated classes, thanks to the educational work of the Greek and Roman Freethinkers; and religious intolerance was found only amongst some isolated tribes like the Jews, who lived in a geographical and intellectual backwater. The civilised world was on the upgrade, and it seemed to be only a matter of time before at least the more advanced races would leave their primitive superstitions behind them for good and all.

Such was the current scene when *our* "snowman" appeared, or was alleged to appear, on the scene. Our "snowman" knew nothing about science, and not too much about anything else. He "cast out devils" right and left, he flew around after the Devil like an infernal helicopter, and he sent up the price of pork by drowning pigs wholesale and retail. Finally, he went back to Heaven in, presumably, some sort of spaceship, leaving behind him a church, with instructions to "preach the gospel" until he parachutes down again, which he has not done yet.

His church took him at his word. They preached the Gospel, and what, pray, was the result? A thousand years later, science was dead; mankind, that part of it which had accepted the Gospel, was sunk in the grossest superstitions. All freedom to think had been abolished. Any-one who cast doubts on the "snowman's" teaching, was thawed over a slow fire.

By such means, the whole world came to believe in the "Snowman." Like his successor in Tibet, everyone has heard *about* him, even if *no one* has ever seen him. Can we not see his footprints, in history, if not in the Himalayas?

What was the name of this Heavenly "Snowman" whose birth, or alleged birth, we celebrate, appropriately enough, on December 25, in mid-winter? Also appropriately, it was a double-barrelled name with a prefix. Was it "Father Christmas?" No, it was not! Was it "Santa Claus"? No, it was not! Was it —? But, at this point, an editorial hand is laid upon my shoulder and an editorial voice cries in my ear:—

"Stop! This is still a *free* country. But—the *Blasphemy Laws* are still on the Statute Book."—*Verb sap.*

N.S.S. Executive Committee

August 11

Present: Mr. Ridley (in the Chair), Mrs. Venton, Messrs. Griffiths, Ebury, Taylor, Hornibrook, Tiley, Johnson, Corstophine, Barker, King and the Secretary.

Twelve new members were admitted to the Parent, Fyzabad, Birmingham, Bradford, Merseyside and North London Branches. Mr. McCall's acceptance of membership of the E.C. as a further representative of the North-West Area was reported. It was announced that suggestions re freethought broadcasts, in response to an invitation in *The Freethinker*, were arriving and would be considered by the broadcasting sub-committee after the end of the month. Continued co-operation with the Central Board for Conscientious Objectors was authorised. An encouraging amount of new interest in the Society was reported, and a number of new readers of the paper had resulted from recent advertising. A report of unfair treatment of a naval rating who had declared himself an agnostic was considered. The Secretary had written to the Admiralty requesting an investigation. Mr. Ridley was assured that the good wishes of the Society would be with him while representing it at the Luxembourg International Freethought Congress next month.

P. VICTOR MORRIS, Secretary.

This Believing World

A raucous, acrimonious voice attracted us the other day at a Northern seaside town, which we found proceeded from a typical seaside in shorts and, appealing from a Methodist platform, yelled Christ Jesus at a small crowd, and also God Almighty, and Hell, and Sin, with the most unhappy vehemence. We have rarely seen such a bunch of miserable people as this speaker and his equally violent fellow Christians. How they could imagine that they were Ambassadors for Christ Jesus to "enter your lives" is something beyond our comprehension. But there they were—typical examples of ignorance, stupidity, and credulous belief. We wonder whether the various "Moderators" of the Nonconformist Churches have ever seen these products of pious Dissent?

So Boccaccio's masterpiece "The Decameron" has once again come under the ban of some magistrates who think that they have the right to censor literary *chef d'œuvres*—even though, in doing so, they become the target of most unholy derision. All the same, we wonder sometimes if this censorship is due as much to Boccaccio's freedom in discussing sex, as in the picture he gives of the "saintly" lives of the clergy and the nuns of the period? Devoted to a rigid celibacy in theory, the picture *The Decameron* gives of the real life of the average priest in practice is something quite different. The "way of a priest" in morals is, in fact, depicted by Boccaccio with contemptuous laughter.

Both Chaucer and the anonymous writer (or writers) of the *Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles* have also poked fun at the "celibate" priests, monks, nuns and hermits of their day, using very plain language. We doubt whether anybody was really made any worse reading their stories—though we can quite understand how angry Christians must be when faced with the lax moral standards of the then male and female spiritual advisers. In spite of Jesus, "celibacy" appears to have been thoroughly unpopular in the Middle Ages—noble dames, knights, bourgeois, nuns, priests, monks and hermits, all actively duping each other. Boccaccio may be "banned" by a number of stupid magistrates, but it will never be banned by the people so long as healthy laughter rules the day.

By nearly common consent, Michael Angelo is considered one of the greatest, if not the greatest, artist who ever lived. So it is most interesting to find that, in spirit form, he is still supposed to be drawing quite concrete portraits—through the mediumship of a Mrs. Collie. With pain we must say it however, if the "drawings" reproduced in *Psychic Realm* are really due to Michael Angelo, as Mrs. Collie claims, he must have lost *completely* all his genius. Or to put it another way, is it not an insult to the great artist to couple his name with childish rubbish?

If there is a Summerland as described so vividly for us by a number of eminent Spiritualists in which Beethoven, Dickens, Shakespeare, Thomas Paine, Titian and others are all living much the same life as on this despised Earth—why do they write such twaddle, compose such dreadful music, or draw so horribly? Dare we whisper that the answer may be—all we get comes from nobody but the medium, and everybody knows what mediums are!

The stoutest believers in immortality are, of course, not even Spiritualists, but Roman Catholics. Here is what they themselves say in an advertisement, "Hundreds of

millions of Catholics hold that there is nothing uncertain about life after death. Would you like to know why the Catholic Church is so sure of itself?" Personally we wouldn't—but any priest will tell you. All Catholics believe in Purgatory where everybody, including readers of *The Freethinker*, is sure to go willy-nilly. It is a sort of Ellis Island for immigrants journeying to Heaven, and where Peter (McCarthy) Simon interrogates you to see whether you have ever been smeared with Heresy.

God help you if you have, for Hell will be your everlasting resting place. If however you have unquestionably "believed," you will join the happy throng of all-adoring Catholics, and jostle (it may be) even with Roman Catholic Spiritualists. The Catholic Church will be only too pleased to give you further details. So there you have it. If a Spiritualist pure and simple, immortality will certainly be yours. So it will be if you are a Catholic. That is, unless you want *proof*. And, alas, that is quite a different kettle of fish.

Recognition ?

How few in this England knew aught of their worth
When Shelley and Keats walked around on the earth!
Too honest to flatter, too proud to be bought,
They fearlessly reasoned, and wrote as they thought.
But thinkers and writers who act in this way
Come under the ban of the powers of their day.
What upstart or fraud can feel safe on his perch
When poets are scornful of Throne and of Church?
'T was Shelley, recall, who inveighed in his time
'Gainst an "evil faith grown hoary with crime,"
While Keats on the clergy no compliments showered,
But called them "knave," "idiot," "hypocrite," "coward."
Such candid expressions of infidel views
A nation of Christians would never excuse;
The pious and servile were quick to cry "Shame!"
And Shelley and Keats had to wait for their fame.
Reviled and neglected, in exile they died,
Their characters blackened, their genius denied.
Yet when they had both been some fifty years dead
Their works the world over were still being read.
As masters supreme of the great English tongue,
With Shakespeare and Milton their praises were sung.
And, after another eight decades had passed,
The powers in the land made their minds up at last
To give our two singers, now highly respected,
A place in the house of the creed they rejected,
Where England pays homage to poets and dreamers
With monarchs and lickboots and cut-throats and schemers
Ye lovers of Shelley and Keats, pray proceed
To find the two tablets whereon you can read
Their names and the years of their birth and their death—
Of all that they thought or they wrote, not a breath!
How clearly it shows every orthodox doubt
("We don't want them in, but we daren't keep them out"),
This precious example in Westminster Abbey
Of true Christian charity, grudging and shabby!

P. V. M.

—NEXT WEEK—
SPIRITUAL REALITIES AND THE TOP HAT
By JOSEPH McCABE
INTERVIEW WITH F. A. RIDLEY

THE FREETHINKER

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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.

To Correspondents

CORRESPONDENTS may like to note that when their letters are not printed, or when they are abbreviated, the material in them may still be of use to "This Believing World," or to our spoken propaganda. On the basis of an eight-page paper, space is the enemy, which means we cannot print as much as deserves to be printed.

W. A. LEVERTON.—Ingersoll would probably have become Governor of Illinois but for his infidel opinions.

M. HEATH.—The "graveside fertility" theory was advanced by Grant Allen, who found that the richer crops in that area were attributed to favours bestowed by ancestral spirits.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

J. CLAYTON'S Lectures.—Friday, August 20, 7-30 p.m. Worsthorne. Sunday, August 22, 3-15 p.m., Blackpool (Squires Gate); 7-30 p.m., Preston (Town Hall Square). Tuesday, August 24, 7-30 p.m., Huncoat.

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Every Sunday, 7 p.m.: F. ROTHWELL.

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park).—Every Sunday at 7 p.m.: HAROLD DAY and others.

Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle St.).—Sunday at 8 p.m., J. W. BARKER and E. MILLS.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every weekday, 1 p.m.: G. A. WOODCOCK. Every Sunday, 3 p.m., at Platt Fields: a Lecture. At Deansgate Blitzed Site, 7-30 p.m.: COLIN MCCALL. A Lecture.

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, August 22, noon: L. EBURY and H. ARTHUR.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Every Friday at 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY. Sunday, August 22, 7-30 p.m., Old Market Square: T. M. MOSLEY and A. ELSMERE.

West London Branch N.S.S.—F. A. RIDLEY, H. ARTHUR, L. EBURY, C. E. WOOD and W. J. O'NEILL. Hyde Park, every Sunday, 5 p.m.

INDOOR

West Ham Branch N.S.S. (Community Centre, Wanstead).—Thursday, August 26, 8 p.m. Open Meeting.

Notes and News

On May 6 we published an open letter to Roy M. Cohn, protesting against the radio boycott in U.S.A., from the American freethinker Robert Scott. It is interesting to note that this same Cohn has had to resign as chief counsel of the Senate Investigations sub-committee under the McCarthy régime. Announcing his resignation Senator McCarthy said it would give "great satisfaction to Communists and fellow-travellers." It actually gives satisfaction to all who detest the snooping with which he is associated, irrespective of political creed.

In his "retirement," that Nottingham stalwart, T. M. Mosley, is looking for fresh worlds to conquer. He speaks at Old Market Square, Nottingham, every Friday and Sunday, but is quite willing, nay anxious, to go further afield. If he can get any support in Mansfield, Chesterfield, Ilkeston, Ripley and Heanor, he will gladly open up Secularist propaganda in those areas. We hope he will receive invitations to do so as a result of this announcement. Mr. Mosley's address is 63, Valley Road, Carlton, Notts.

In spite of atrocious weather Mr. Jack Clayton has been having some good meetings on the Blackpool sands. It was evident that many of his listeners were making their first acquaintance with the Freethought case. On one evening the opposition became violent, starting with some members of a gospel group, who sang hymns, gradually working themselves up into a Christian frenzy. There were frequent threats to throw the speaker into the sea and one attempt made to put this into practice. Some of the crowd followed him after the meeting, and Mr. Clayton was afforded first-hand experience of how a Christian crowd can behave under Christian emotions. Needless to add, Mr. Clayton will be returning to Blackpool.

THE WEEPING STATUE

ON December 12, 1953, the Catholic primate of Sicily announced the official recognition of the "miracle" tears said to have streamed down the face of a terra cotta statue of the Virgin Mary in Syracuse, in Sicily. Countless persons attested to the miracle and individuals who were "hopelessly sick" claimed that the statue had cured them.

The weeping Madonna hung over the bed of a Sicilian Communist's pregnant wife (of course it *had* to be a Communist's wife). The woman reported that she felt something splash upon her forehead as she lay in bed one night. Looking above her she saw tears miraculously rolling down the bright, hand-painted cheeks of the cheap statue.

The Madonna continued to weep for four days (August 29 to September 1), and as word of the "Miracle" spread, with the diligent assistance of the clerical propagandists, no doubt, throngs of pilgrims flocked from all parts of the country to be a witness of the supposed "miracle." Cardinal Ruffini, Archbishop of Palermo, announced that the Church definitely recognised the supernatural nature of the tears.

As freethinkers we have to inquire, critically, into these illumed occurrences, these so-called miraculous weeping statues. Catholic intellectuals are undoubtedly embarrassed by these holy spectacles, but the Vatican realising, as it surely does, their priceless value in the form of propaganda and publicity, directed essentially toward the naive and gullible, is churlish to give them up—or, in the event that a fluidous substance actually does emanate from a religious statue they make little or no effort to see if it has a rational origin.

If you know much about British mythology you have probably heard of the ancient Druids, a once powerful order of priests who ruled the Celtic peoples of Britain, Ireland and Gaul, and who greatly influenced Celtic mythology. A thousand years or so ago, before the coming of the Anglo-Saxons to the British Isles, the Druidic mystics ruled supreme. Among some of their strange practices was the construction of *Dew Ponds* from which came an almost endless source of pure water. I am informed by a scholarly correspondent that the fact that these Dew Ponds did exist and did "miraculously" produce water, is an actual matter of record in the British Museum Archives.

These Dew Ponds were constructed thus: A site was generally chosen near a promontory and after the priests concluded their frothy ejaculations of mystical mumbo-jumbo, an excavation in the earth was made. Limestone was burned and meticulously worked into a powder and certain grasses were collected. A small veneer of clay was first pounded against the wall of the pit, then a layer of burned limestone powder followed by dried grasses or straw, over which more clay, lime and straw was placed. Under certain conditions these pits, or Dew Ponds, as they were called, actually produced an abundance of pure water!

(Concluded on next page)

The Age of the Gospels—3

By H. CUTNER

ONE of the names given as proving how early were the Gospels, invariably used by Christians, Jews, and reverent Rationalists, is that of Papias. His date is given as c. 60—135 but nobody really knows. All we know of him comes from Irenaeus and Eusebius, and he is supposed to have given an account of how Mark and Matthew were written. Archbishop Sheehan (of Sydney) mentions him in his *Apologetics and Catholic Doctrine* (1922) and tells us that Papias "refers to a work by St. Matthew, probably his Gospel"; so it is not surprising to find Mr. Paris using *exactly the same words* in his letter to *The Freethinker* without mentioning where he got his information from. I pointed out in my first article that, as far as I have read Mr. Paris, he merely copied from a Roman Catholic apologetic work, and I was not, later, surprised to find that it was Sheehan's. In fact, nearly all of the letter comes from Sheehan though, as the passages are not in quotes, Mr. Paris no doubt hopes that we shall all look upon him as the profound scholar.

The "probably" of Sheehan (copied by Paris) about the Gospel of Matthew indicates quite clearly that Papias did not know our Matthew. According to this very hazy Church Father, Matthew wrote his Gospel in Hebrew. Even the most credulous Roman Catholic finds this hard to swallow for that would mean, either it was translated next into Aramaic or into Greek. Unfortunately for Papias, nearly all authorities are quite convinced that our Matthew is an *original* Greek work.

This means that somebody took down the exact words of Jesus which were spoken in Aramaic, and then translated them into Greek when composing the Gospel; so that we have *not* the exact words of Jesus at all, but a translation. And this has upset some critics so much that they insist that Jesus really spoke to Palestinian—and mostly illiterate—Jews in a foreign language when he went about "doing good"; and as Greek is such an *easy* language to learn and understand, they "heard him gladly."

But what nearly invalidates Papias is that he was looked upon as a fool even by Eusebius.

Following Sheehan again, Mr. Papias quotes Irenaeus who certainly did quote the four Gospels by name—about 180 A.D. And what does this prove? That they were known then? Of course they were if we can trust that part of Christian history. But what Mr. Paris should have done was to tell us where the four Gospels are mentioned by name *before* 180 A.D.? For unless he does this, he has not answered Mr. Ridley at all.

But neither he nor Archbishop Sheehan deals with one particular affirmation by Irenaeus which all Christian apologists shun like the plague. This eminent Church Father, who is always quoted for being the first to mention the four Gospels by name, with all of them in front of him, actually throws overboard entirely the Crucifixion under Pontius Pilate. He tells us that Jesus lived until he was past fifty and then simply "came to death itself." And to prove that he was right, Irenaeus appeals "to the elders, those who were conversant in Asia with John the disciple of the Lord affirming that John conveyed to them that information." They got the same holy truth from other apostles also.

Sheehan wrote what Mr. Paris wrote in exactly the same words, about Tatian's *Harmony of the Gospels* which appeared in 170 A.D. Well, if Christian history is true, it is possible a "Harmony" was written then—but how does this prove Mr. Ridley wrong? In truth it completely

confirms him. It is up to Mr. Paris to produce the "numerous texts" he mentions found, he says—following Sheehan—in Clement, Polycarp, Ignatius, and Justin. What we Freethinkers want is documentary proof that the Gospels were known before 150 A.D.—not *any* Gospels, but the New Testament ones. That proof has never been forthcoming, in spite of Sheehan or Paley or even more modern apologists.

As for St. Paul, we are perfectly well aware that some letters called Epistles were written by somebody—but who was he? If he was the Saul of the Acts of the Apostles who changed his name to Paul—will Mr. Paris give us his evidence? Personally, I look upon the Epistles of Paul as very heavily edited Gnostic documents edited in the interest of the growing Church. Out of the fourteen Epistles which have been attributed to "Paul" one, that to the Hebrews, is quite certainly not by Paul, and that is admitted by all cultured Christians. Out of the others, only *four* are accepted as "genuine"—but who wrote them is quite unknown. Prof. Van Manen called them (and by them I mean the whole fourteen) "without distinction pseudo-graphia." They are, in their present form, second century forgeries. To take up every point raised by Mr. Paris would be tedious. First and foremost there is no evidence whatever that such a person as Jesus Christ ever lived. Nor is there any evidence that any of the Apostles ever lived; which means that Peter and John are myths. Nobody knows who wrote the Epistles of Paul or Revelation. As far as a God is concerned, or a God's son, or his Mother, or any miracles, or a Devil—these things belong to the lowest strata of superstition and credulity. They are born of fear and ignorance as well. That Mr. Paris and his Church can frighten the simple Maltese people with the Fires of Hell may be quite true; but what effect would "Hell" threats have on an English Freethinker? We would merely point out that, if all infidel scientists had been forced to go to Hell—if there is a Hell—they would have put out by now all the fires quite easily. Indeed they would have introduced "nuclear fission" and blown Hell into annihilation.

Whether Mr. Paris likes it or not, let me assure him that it is quite useless to give us Sheehan's *Apologetics*. No doubt whatever the book convinces Mr. Paris, but it is what may be called a "scream" for anyone who knows the subject. That is why I am not going into any other point raised by his letter. All the same, however, I hope that he will continue diligently to study *The Freethinker*. He may yet come over to our side.

The Weeping Statue

(Concluded from page 269)

It may sound absurd but chemists affirm that water can be made to spring from limestone rocks under certain conditions, and scientific experimenters have actually mimicked these ancient Dew Ponds and had success in manufacturing water! Plaster walls and ceilings have been known to "sweat" in hot weather, and there was an extraordinary case in France some years ago where a housewife's hardwood floors were partially ruined in such a manner.

Some experts have said that it is not impossible that a moisture-passionate mineral might have been incorporated in the making of these so-called "weeping Madonnas." (Extract of an article by Frank Volkmann in the *Liberator*.)

The Church is a Tiger

By VALENTINA MANOUSSO

ONE of the most remarkable thinkers of the France of the eighteenth century was Claude-Arien Helvetius (1715-1771). Long before the French Revolution destroyed the monarchy and serfdom, he made a devastating criticism of all aspects of his contemporary society, *l'ancien régime*.

Born in 1715, the son of a court physician, at the age of twenty-five he became the General Collector of Taxes. Despite this privileged position he was not indifferent to the pitiable condition of the mass of the population. Pondering deeply this subject, in due time Helvetius became fellow-combatant with the great materialist-atheists of the time, Paul-Henri Holbach (1723-1789) and Denis Diderot (1713-1784), one of the greatest of the Encyclopédistes, whose thought brought about the mental climate which produced the Revolution of 1789.

In the year 1758 was published the famous book of Helvetius, *De l'Esprit*. Diderot wrote of this book that "it is a robust blow with a cudgel on superstitions of all kinds." In fact, Helvetius's book was a criticism of all the arguments put forward by the defenders of the feudal system. He exposed the parasitism of the ruling classes—chiefly the aristocrats, and the clergy. He reserved his strongest blows for his attack on religion, and the Roman Church which was blessing serfdom and supporting the absolute monarchy.

It is not difficult to imagine the reception of his book *De l'Esprit* in such quarters. By order of the royal court Helvetius was bitterly prosecuted. His book was banned, proclaimed "dangerous, obscene, scandalous and depraved."

The Archbishop of Paris declared that Helvetius aspired to teach the people to revolt against their lawful king (Louis XV). To the faithful the Archbishop addressed this threatening proclamation: "We positively forbid to all persons of our Archbishopric the reading of, or having in their possession, the named book, under the penalty of lawful punishment."

The Pope Clement III also anathematised the book. The Jesuits even demanded the execution of the author.

On February 4, 1759, the book was publicly burned by sentence of the judges of the Royal Court of Justice.

It was reported at the time that Helvetius was so shocked by threats of persecution that he decided never to write again. But if this were true this weakness was of short duration. He wrote again a book even more bold, *Concerning Man*. But this was not published until after his death. Among other of the more important writings of Helvetius is an atheistic poem, "Happiness," also a book entitled *God, Nature, and Man*.

Summarising the views set forth in his writings, it may be said that Helvetius, among many other things, denied the doctrine of the Church on the divine origin of the royal power, of feudalism, and the poverty of the great mass of the population. He was a materialist, teaching that there are no divine powers in the world, that everything existing is a variant of a single, endless, eternally-moving, and developing matter. All our conceptions, taught Helvetius, were not the gift of God, but the result of the influence of the outward materialistic world upon human feelings. From this idea he arrived at a striking conclusion: to change human beings for the better, and to inspire correct ideas, life has to be changed, and the evil legislation and laws abolished or altered.

Man is not born vicious, he said; man becomes wicked and criminal because of the defective government and evil

laws. All human beings at birth possess equal capacities. Whence then comes inequality in the community? Helvetius's reply was: because of the evil laws, the inequitable governing of rulers.

Helvetius also struck heavy blows at the religious teaching concerning morality. True morality, in his words, cannot be founded on religion. All human beings aim at happiness, and there is no harm in this. The interests of every single being must be fulfilled with the condition that it does not harm another; in other words, the personal interest must be in harmony with the interests of the community. Only by acting thus can one attain to the moral revival of humanity; certainly not by the instructions of the clergy. But first it is necessary to abolish the unwise, and unjust, feudal system, in which the blessings of the aristocrats and the clergy are attained at the price of the sufferings, even the torture, of the mass of the people. Helvetius called on all men of goodwill to struggle against religious teaching which had bemused the mind and the conscience of the people, and thus prevented them seeing where their own interests lay.

The teaching of the Church about the immortality of the soul, about Paradise, and Hell, were considered by the philosopher as fairy-tales invented with the purpose in view of keeping simple folk in slavery.

With great force Helvetius attacked the clergy which in this day in France ranked first of the upper classes, the "états," and were receiving from the government huge sums of money. The clergy were also the possessors of almost a third-part of the entire land. Helvetius called for the taking back from the Church the riches that that body had robbed from the general population; the separation of the Church from the Government, and, generally, for that tolerance which would give the people freedom in the matter of faith.

In Helvetius's day an attack on the Church was considered a crime, and was punished by the severest reprisals. As an illustration of this in 1766, a young aristocrat of 19 years of age, the Chevalier Jean-Francois La Barre, was put to death for the only "crime" of mutilating a crucifix (Larousse), or, as was generally believed, of not taking his hat off when meeting a religious procession carrying the Host (the god-biscuit). He was decapitated and then burned. A statue to La Barre is at the top of Montmartre, in Paris, opposite (most appropriately) the Eglise Sacré Coeur. It was this sort of thing that provoked Helvetius to write: "The Church is a tiger. If he is in chains of the Law—he is meek. But if the chain is broken—he becomes possessed by fury." We have been warned.

Chapman Cohen on Prayer

Every now and again we have a day solemnly set aside and prayers are ordered for rain, or for fine weather, or for something else that is considered advisable. Those who engage in these dissipations believe that God Almighty runs the universe and, therefore ought to consider such petitions unnecessary. They are just giving the Lord thinly veiled advice as to what he ought to do, what he might do, or what he has neglected doing. After looking round at things we are far from denying that such hints are necessary. The unequal distribution of sunshine and rain, the casual manner in which things happen, all point to the need for suggestions to deity, and the form in which prayers are cast is perhaps as polite as any. But why not call this crowd of praying humans "An Advisory Committee for Distressed Deities"? That would be doing things in a sensible manner. The only religious objection to the idea would be its obvious straightforwardness.

Correspondence

LOGIC AND CAUSALITY

May I point out some rather irrational statements by D. G. Holliday in his letter. The sequence: object, light, eye, nerve, is not discarded by the mentalist, since this is the sequence which the mind constructs when describing the way in which we "see" things, i.e., the way in which we receive certain sense impressions. This sequence does not show the dependence of the mind on external activity any more than the sequence of letters we call the alphabet shows the dependence of the letter S on the letter B.

He states: "If there is no causality there can be no logic." This is a most illogical statement. Causality is a conception to "explain" why certain sequences of sense-impressions occur. Logic deals with the validity of conclusions drawn from given assumptions and data. Hence logic is not a result of causality but causality is a result of logical thinking from certain assumptions.

"Without logic one cannot prove anything." This is true if by "prove" D.G.H. means "proof" in, say, the mathematical sense. It should be pointed out that *with* logic one *can* prove almost anything, depending upon the assumptions made.

"In particular (i.e., without logic) one cannot prove the validity of mentalism." The same applies to materialism, theism, etc. These are theories concerning the physical universe and as such their validity can only be demonstrated, not proved, by recourse to experience and experiment.—Yours, etc.,

W. SCOTT.

FROM AN AGNOSTIC

Your issue of July 30 is full of meat. As an agnostic I must say there is much wrong interpretation of Bible statements on the part of Atheists. For example, Christ (if he lived) never taught that we must hate our relatives. It is wrongly translated and simply means we should not allow them to come before what we believe to be right. Christ also taught us to love our enemies, not love the wrong they do.

I feel *The Freethinker* ought to encourage anything we can agree with in any religion. I see in the Humanitarian, Ethical, and even Unitarian and Quaker movements some steps away from creeds and dogmatic teaching.—Yours, etc.,

T. R. CAREN.

[The word "hate" is so translated in both the A.V. and the R.V. Would Mr. Caren produce the *evidence* that it is wrongly translated?—Ed.]

A REPLY

My critic, Mr. Sunley, writes: "Perhaps Christians look upon God as a poet who has realised that the most beautiful poem must contain tragic as well as comic elements." If they do, are they not implying that God is devoid of ethical considerations and therefore wicked by every standard of decency we know? One is reminded of the words of Winwood Reade: "If indeed there were a Judgment Day, it would be for man to appear at the bar, not as a criminal, but as accuser" (*The Martyrdom of Man*).

This is the sort of unhappy position in which believers land themselves when they seek to justify the existence of sickness and suffering in a world divinely created.—Yours, etc.,

G. I. BENNETT.

MIND

So it has happened at last! The Editor, commenting upon my letter, states "Physiology now recognises at least 20 different receptor-elements in the human body." Surely, this is the first time in history that a Materialist journal has recognised the existence of extra-sensory perception. Now that science has been forced to accept it the leopard is forced to change its spots also. Not so long ago contributors to *The Freethinker* became almost apoplectic whenever I dared to mention the possibility of extra-sensory perception.

Regarding the Editor's comparison of heart and heart-beat with brain and mind I am not myself convinced that some elementary form of mind, i.e., purposeful activity, is not present in *all* organic matter and it may well be that without this mysterious mind-force Life cannot exist. What else is the distinguishing factor between living and inanimate matter?—Yours, etc.,

W. H. WOOD.

[We said nothing about "extra-sensory" perception. There cannot be perception without sense-terminals. For an elementary treatise on sense-receptors see *Human Physiology* (Butler and Karwoski). Mr. Wood has jumped to the conclusion he *wanted*, like so many opponents of materialism. The distinctions between living and non-living matter can be made without departing from the language and concepts of materialistic science (see, e.g., Hogben's *Nature of Living Matter*).—Ed.]

FREE THOUGHT PLUS CLEAR THOUGHT

The suggestion that we should drop our religious criticism and concentrate on other things suffers from a misunderstanding of what our standpoint should be. Fundamentalism is far from dead, and that the religion of to-day is as crude as ever is shown by two instances—the matter put over the radio, and the recrudescence of the Second Coming propaganda put over by various sects. But the main error is in supposing some incompatibility between our militant anti-religious work on the one hand, and social and economic activities on the other. The answer is that they have always been united, and the N.S.S. and *The Freethinker* are to-day continuing this work. We must realise that the crudest anti-scientific and reactionary social views are gaining ground to-day and the comparison with, say, 20 years ago in this respect is certainly not in our favour. Billy Graham with his attack on evolution and his insistence on the Genesis creation myth is only one aspect of the so-called religious revival. Sweet William could not give an opinion in England on McCarthyism, his mission being purely spiritual, but in Germany the mask was off and the brand of politics paid for by his backers was openly preached, and while one is glad to note that the political aim behind the revival is opening the eyes of thinking people we must never forget that to ignore the amount of the penetration of fundamentalism to-day is blindness to one of the chief social menaces.

There is no such thing as religious reaction as distinct from social. Religious reaction *is* social reaction.

Overshadowing all this in its importance is our relation to and intercommunion with the international movement in every country where it exists. Much is being done by reprinting articles from freethought papers of other countries, and having our representatives present at international conferences. We must see that all ties of this kind are strengthened, and must forge others. India is a case in point, illustrating both this necessity and what can be done in non-European lands. Rationalists on delegations to countries which for some reason have not sent representation to the World Union of Freethinkers in recent years should try to get into touch with societies and individuals and carry greetings from English bodies, and also bring back news.

In conclusion, I would remind all concerned that the danger is compromise, the future hope vigilance.—Yours, etc.,

J. H. MATSON.

IN PLACE OF RELIGION

Religion can occupy a great deal of time and attention, and often is a great influence on the whole life. When a believer asks: "What is there that could take its place?" it is quite useless to offer nothing. If a person is very fully occupied with religion, it appears as a silly offer of a vacuum, in place of the religion which often fills his thoughts and rules his life. Also it is absurd to illustrate religion as a painful disease (which everyone wants to get rid of). No one asks for something to take the place of toothache, only for its removal, but no believer asks for the removal of his religion, which he values; and at a suggestion of giving it up, very naturally asks for something better to put in its place.

At one of his last lectures Chapman Cohen, when asked "What can you offer in place of religion?", answered: "There is plenty. In place of falsehoods, I would put truth; in place of fiction I would put facts; in place of imagination, I would put reality; in place of supposition, I would put investigation; instead of blind faith and ignorance, I would seek evidence and knowledge."

This was a much better answer than not offering anything to take the place of a religion which may dominate the mind and the whole life.—Yours, etc.,

J. LEROI.

The Authority of Scripture

"Two hundred years ago the books of the Old and New Testament were held in universal veneration. No doubt was entertained of their authenticity. Moses was the unquestioned author of the Pentateuch; Solomon of Proverbs, Isaiah, Daniel, and the other Prophets of all that bore their names; the Evangelists and Apostles, of the writings of the New Testament respectively assigned to them. But their principal author was the Holy Ghost, for they were all inspired, and inspired in all their parts. . . . If once we admit error in the Scriptures," said St. Jerome, "what further authority can they possess?" "The whole structure of the faith totters," added St. Augustine, "once the authority of Scripture is shaken."

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