

# The Freethinker

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Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

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IN a recent article in an Irish contemporary, a learned Catholic theologian, Father Robert Nash, S.J., examined what he termed, the "credentials" of that rather strange American cult, usually described as "*Jehovah's Witnesses*." Fr. Nash evidently does not think much of the "Witnesses" and of their claims to be the recipients of a special revelation from the venerable *Jehovah*, "The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob"!

With all the metaphysical subtlety and logical aptitude, for which the Jesuits are deservedly famous, the reverend Father proceeded to demolish the claims of "Judge" Rutherford's followers to be, either "the one true Church," or, indeed to be any kind of Christian Church at all: as the present writer holds the opinion, also held by the Founder of *The Freethinker*, Mr. G. W. Foote, that Catholicism is the most logical alternative to Atheism, we think that it may be relevant to conduct a similar examination of the "credentials"—to employ the same term as our Irish theologian—of the Roman Catholic Church itself.

## Catholic Theology

The Roman Catholic Church, as a worldly-wise institution with vast experience of the vagaries of human nature, has long ago realised that fundamentally, people can be divided into two categories: the educated and the uneducated. To meet the past and future requirements of these two, so different, human categories, Catholicism, in practice assumes quite different forms. For the ignorant masses, it gives ritual, saint worship, and the fear of Hell fire! For the educated minority, it gives a severely logical and highly abstract philosophy, based on Aristotelian metaphysics, and buttressed with, what McCabe once described as, "the vast arsenal of Catholic apologetics." For the benefit of readers, not perhaps acquainted with the niceties of theological reasoning, we hasten to add, that the ensuing paragraphs deal *exclusively* with the second, intellectual system of Catholicism, as is generally known, "popular" Catholicism like popular religion in general, is often as primitive as the people who profess it, and is, in any case, the very reverse of logical!

## Faith and Reason

As McCabe pointed out long ago, it represents a common opinion amongst Freethinkers to assume that Rome *rejects* the use of reason altogether in matters appertaining to Faith, and that it *contraposes* Faith to reason as irreconcilable opposites. McCabe went on to point out that this view is false, and that, in his own words, "The Church of Rome prides itself on its *intellectual* (our italics—F.A.R.) credentials." It is true that in Catholic Theology, if we may so express it, Faith always has the *last* word, but equally, in the official Theology of the Church of Rome, reason always has the *first* word, since the Vatican Council of 1870—an Ecumenical Council of the Universal Church

and, accordingly, infallible in Catholic Theology—it is a *dogma* of the Church that the primary dogmas of Christianity, the existence of God, the Immortality of the Soul, and the Divinity—and, of course the historicity—of Christ, can be proved by the *unaided* human reason, and *without* any recourse to revelation, moreover, the Church also teaches that any self-styled revelation must be

*reasonable*, that is, not *contrary* to reason, before it can be accepted. For example, Nash has little difficulty in proving the incompatibility of *human* reason with the bizarre tenets of "*Jehovah's Witnesses*." Similarly, in Vacandard's standard French encyclopaedia of

Catholic Theology the article on Mormonism subjects the "revelations" of Joseph Smith to a rationalistic critique which would do credit to the *Freethinker*!

## Reason and Revelation

Strictly speaking, it is impossible *ipso facto*, to criticise revelation, whether the Catholic variety, or any other, for a *revelation*, by definition, comes from a world of which, and of the existence of which, we have no experience nor means of experiencing. All that one can logically do is to criticise the rational *proofs* of such an alleged revelation. The Catholic Church recognises this, and its "vast arsenal of apologetics" is intended precisely to deal with such criticism. No theologian has any idea what God is actually like, for all Catholic theologians agree that, when one ascribes *human* attributes to the deity—as, of course, one has to do in order to talk about such a being at all!—they speak solely in terms of "analogy," since it is a fundamental proposition of Catholic theology that God is absolute being, "Pure Act," and that he can neither experience passion physically nor, intellectually, acquire any *new* experience. (From Father Bernard Boedder, S.J., *Natural Theology*).

Well! That is basic Catholic Theology. What are we to make of it?

## Hobbes' Critique of Revelation

In the vast corpus of the theological system of the Roman Catholic Church, as it has come down to us across the centuries, there is *one* fundamental proposition that *must* be established if the whole gigantic edifice of ingeniously constructed logic is not to come down like a "house of cards." That is, of course the actual possibility of *revelation* itself. According to the Church, human reason *alone* can prove the existence of God, both from material and moral phenomena. But it can only tell us anything *about* God as a result of revelation. Accordingly, perhaps, the most *fundamental* critique of Christian Theology ever made by anyone was, probably the devastating criticism of the old English Atheist, Thomas Hobbes: "If any man says that God has spoken to him in a dream. 'What is this but to say that he dreamed that God spoke to him?'"

# — VIEWS and OPINIONS —

## Catholic Credentials

By F. A. RIDLEY

The above criticism has always appeared to the present writer to represent the most devastating criticism ever directed against "revealed" religion as and when applied to the Catholic theological system, to Catholic "credentials" it cuts its life artery, for, if one cannot prove that revelation is both possible and objective, the whole pyramid of "revealed" dogma necessarily falls to the ground.

### Catholic "Evidence"

Assuming that revelation as such is ruled out, on account of the impossibility of ascertaining its objectivity, so tersely demonstrated by Hobbes, we are merely left with "Natural Theology," that is, those theological propositions of which since the Vatican Council (1870), it is now dogmatically asserted that they can be proved by the unaided human reason without any recourse to revelation. Three of these propositions are fundamental; the existence of God, the immortality—and therefore, the existence of the soul, and the divinity of Christ, as proved by the credibility of the Gospels, when considered as purely *historical* documents. To the readers of the *Freethinker* who are *au fait* both with Biblical criticism, not to mention modern astronomy and modern psychology based on evolutionary theory, all these *self-evident* (sic) truths of "Natural Theology" rest, we imagine on somewhat shaky foundations. To describe as "self-evident," propositions which are definitely rejected by the majority of mankind—that is, by the large majority of the possessors of the "human reason," to which they are supposed to be "self-evident"—appears to be "more than somewhat" dubious from both the factual and the logical points of view. The more so when one considers how many eminent thinkers and scholars, nowadays, reject these demonstrable proofs. The "proofs" of the

existence of God, as adumbrated by Catholic Theology, referred to the *mediaeval* Universe, they have little validity in relation to the Universe successively revealed by the researches of Galileo, Darwin, Freud, and Einstein.

### Rationalising Christianity

Actually primitive Christianity *started* as a very primitive "revivalist" sect without any component system of Theology. As it came into contact with and gradually acquired influence over the centres of ancient civilisation, it had to veil its primitive beliefs under a cloak of intellectual sophistry. Theology, in particular, Catholic Theology, in its most elaborate form, applied the logic of the pagan Greek rationalists to its own antiquated and pre-scientific beliefs; the Church, in brief, "civilised" Christianity, as Mr. H. Cutner has so admirably phrased it. It is a long intellectual road from the primitive exorcisms of the earliest Christians to the elaborate intellectual sophistries of Father Boedder and Father Nash! We imagine that the primitive Christians who believed that sickness was due to diabolical possession, and that the end of the World was due some time next week, would not have impressed these learned Jesuits much more than do their equally primitive successors, the "Jehovah's Witnesses," who still reproduce the original New Testament mentality, virtually unchanged, and whom no Church, affected by secular culture has ever tried to "civilise"!

Undoubtedly, Catholic "credentials" *sound* a lot more impressive than do those of Jehovah's modern American disciples. They emerged in a more civilised social atmosphere, that of Greek philosophy. But we doubt if at bottom, they are really more convincing.

## The Passing of Hell

By G. I. BENNETT

IT is, I think, less than a century ago that Hell as the abode of the damned started to become unpopular. Prior to that time, it was fashionable to believe that unrepentant heresy in religious matters could but end in fire and brimstone beyond this life. And there was a long tradition for thinking thus.

The Church Fathers were, probably without an exception, believers in Hell. Justin Martyr asserted that, if the wicked were not subjected to everlasting fire, then God did not exist. Tertullian envisaged among the Christian joys in the Day of Judgment the spectacle of witnessing the rich and powerful groaning in nether regions; of philosophers burning with their deluded followers; and of actors and poets being consumed in the flames. St. Basil had visions of unquenchable fire and noisome worms that never died. St. Cyril of Jerusalem declared that the body of the sinner was immortal so that it should burn without perishing. St. Augustine asseverated that all the unbaptised, including the veriest infant, descended at death into the smoking depths. . . .

For century upon century the doctrine of Hell persisted, and the Reformation did little or nothing to mitigate it. One thinks of Calvin and of Luther who were as convinced as any could be of the ghastly horrors that awaited sinners and unbelievers (the two have, from time immemorial, been conveniently linked) beyond this world.

The terror of Hell has certainly held a long sway over the hearts and minds of men and women. But its day is passing, if it has not already passed. And now, throughout

the length and breadth of Christendom, there seems a palpable reluctance amongst clergy of all denominations—except Roman Catholic and Fundamentalist clergy—to talk about Hell.

Heaven, of course, is as much in the picture as ever. It is still the crown and prize to be won by devout life and faith. Men and women may still, in some obscure way, be saved by "right belief." But what happens to those who, thinking for themselves in religious as (let us hope) in other matters, reach heretical conclusions? Romanists and Fundamentalists may know—or think they know. But what of the remaining official spokesmen for Christianity? One could wish they did not leave the whole thing so disturbingly vague. Can it be that they do not believe in Hell? Yet what justification is there for believing in Heaven either? Here Romanists and Fundamentalists are, within the framework of their respective narrow creeds, more consistent and thorough-going: to them Hell is as much of a reality as Heaven.

We have had odd men out like those eminent Anglicans, Drs. Barnes and Inge, who would not commit themselves to any confident statement of belief in personal survival. But it would appear that most of our ministers of religion to-day incline to the view that piety is rewarded by eternal life, and that impiety courts the threat, and perhaps the certainty of oblivion, instead of life, after death. If only they would say so, we should know where we stood. But I venture to think that many of us would scarcely regard as dire punishment for unbelief the prospect of ultimate extinction. An ethereal life without end is difficult for earth-bound mortals like ourselves to visualise. And, speaking for myself, it is not a thought that would put a spring into my step, or fill me with joyful expectancy and brimming enthusiasm.

# Billy Graham in Scotland

By REV. JOHN L. BROOM, M.A.

ON Saturday, April 30, the American evangelist, Billy Graham, completed a six weeks' campaign in Scotland with a mass meeting at Glasgow's famous Hampden Park. Perhaps your readers might find interesting some comments on the doctrine and methods of the crusade, from an independent, if not altogether unbiased, observer.

One interesting and significant fact might be noted at the outset—the extraordinary sensitivity of most of Graham's followers to any criticism whatever of their idol. After the opening meeting in the vast Kelvin Hall, a leading Glasgow journalist wrote a scathing denunciation of the proceedings in an evening newspaper, describing Billy, with perfect accuracy, as a "super insurance salesman." For weeks afterwards there appeared the most scurrilous, abusive and above all irrelevant rejoinders in the paper's correspondence columns from the pious supporters of the campaign. The same violent reaction pervaded even the sedate columns of the *Glasgow Herald* following the publication of a brilliant debunking article by Alistair Cooke reporting on Billy's last appearance at Madison Square Garden. A Glasgow minister, one of the few who dared attack Graham from the pulpit, had his service interrupted the following week by two of the evangelist's saintly converts. Billy himself, of course, refused steadfastly all along to enter into any debate with, or reply to, any attacker. Subconsciously no doubt, he realised what a hiding he would receive. In an address to the students of Edinburgh University he frankly informed them that in order to accept his message they must commit "intellectual suicide." The reactions of the learned professors gathered with Billy on the platform on this occasion was, unfortunately, not recorded.

The Graham doctrine is of course a crude and unthinking fundamentalism. In a B.B.C. interview during the campaign Billy denied that he is a fundamentalist, but a man who has to be assisted to his home every evening by considerate friends, must not complain if we smile derisively when he asserts he is not a drunkard. For all practical purposes, Graham believes that every word of Holy Scripture was inspired by God and is therefore infallible. He has never denied the truth of a single line in either the Old or New Testaments. As far as he is concerned, the devoted labour of generations of Higher Critics from Tom Paine onwards, might never have been undertaken. It is not that he has studied their writings and decided on logical grounds that they have failed to establish their case. Billy, as has been said, gives all forms of rational discussion a wide berth. He simply affirms dogmatically that the Bible is true and there's an end on't. Its manifold contradictions and absurdities he either does not see or believes naively that they will somehow "come out in the wash." Not even his most ardent protagonists could claim that Billy is a scholar or even to any degree well-read. His sermons and books certainly do not give the slightest indication that he is familiar with any literary or religious writings. In spite of all the learned gentlemen who have given their support to the "Tell Scotland" campaign as it was called, its most obvious characteristic is cultural and intellectual ignorance.

The essence of Graham's doctrine can be stated in one phrase—salvation through faith in the shed blood of a slain god. Again and again he reiterated in the Kelvin Hall that the living of a good and sincere life is not enough. "Mere ethics" he proclaimed without the personal acceptance of Christ as Saviour is of no avail. One would have thought that it requires little imaginative understanding

to perceive that such a belief is diametrically opposed to every enlightened code of morality. It implies, of course, that, for example an unorthodox Christian such as Albert Schweitzer, or a saintly Hindu like Gandhi, are for ever debarred from the celestial courts to say nothing of the countless noble unnamed souls who have throughout the ages lived lives based on kindness, honesty and tolerance. Since such good people are not in heaven they must be in hell, as Billy being a staunch Protestant recognises no intermediary state. And when the converse of this doctrine is considered, its immorality becomes even more striking, because it means that a man who has been cruel, vindictive or selfish during his earthly course will, provided he accepts Christ as his Saviour on his deathbed, join the angelic hosts above, while Schweitzer, Gandhi and the other non-Christian saints are being tortured in the nether regions.

The hopeless contradiction at the heart of Graham's message was well brought out in the television service relayed from Glasgow on Good Friday, when with one breath he announced that God is a loving heavenly Father, and with the next implied that he is willing to send millions of his children to hell. An earthly father who was prepared to torture any one of his children even for a moment let alone eternally would rightly be regarded with the utmost abhorrence by his fellow-men and would indeed be lucky to escape with life imprisonment. In preaching the reality of hell, Billy is, on theistic grounds, a blasphemer, since he implies that God is less ethical in his actions than the majority of human beings.

Some misguided people, rightly revolted by such doctrines, have attacked Billy's message on the grounds that it is unchristian. But of course as all freethinkers (but, also few Christians) know, Christ himself is explicitly represented in Mathew 25 and elsewhere as teaching the literal existence of a place of eternal punishment for those who refuse to accept him as God. In one sense, then, as Billy himself has pointed out, his doctrine could not be more fully Christian. At the same time, it must be noted that in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is shown as proclaiming an ethic completely opposed to the notion of hellfire—that of overcoming evil through the power of love and good works. Now, Graham, being a fundamentalist, has to accept the Sermon on the Mount also as being literally true, and hence arises the fundamental inconsistency in his beliefs, commented on above. The God of love of the Sermon on the Mount, commanding us to requite evil with good, cannot also be the fiend of the "Last Judgment" passages who cheerfully returns evil with a far greater evil—that of everlasting torture. But even fundamentalists, irrational though they are, cannot rest content in such an impasse. Although in theory they may affirm they accept both doctrines, in practice they are forced to emphasise one at the expense of the other. They must either cling to the high ethical principles of the Sermon on the Mount, or they must base their beliefs on salvation by faith with all its immoral consequences. Graham, in common with most of his kind has chosen the latter alternative. On the difficult, controversial and revolutionary parts of the New Testament (the only portions worth attending to), Billy refuses to dwell—those are problems of "mere ethics"—let's beat a hasty retreat to hellfire and the Judgment!

(To be concluded)

**ROBERT TAYLOR.** The Devil's Chaplain (1784-1844). By H. Cutner. A detailed account of a remarkable Freethinker and his work. Price 1s. 6d.; postage 2d.

## This Believing World

One of the B.B.C.'s broadcasts to schools was delivered recently by the famous archaeologist, Sir Leonard Woolley, who, of course, dealt with Ur and the excavations made by him before the war. Ur is always associated with Abraham, and it must have been with quite a pang that Sir Leonard had to admit that *nothing whatever* was found there about this well-known Patriarch. We wonder whether he really expected to find anything? Though we are told Abraham came up from Ur, this actually means no more than saying that Mr. Pickwick came from London. Both Mr. Pickwick and Abraham are just fictions.

Naturally, Sir Leonard talked also about a "flood," the evidence for which he claims he discovered at Ur—but he was most careful *not* to say that this flood was Noah's. He knew better than that. Floods have always occurred—even in England; but when people talk about the Bible and a "flood" they mean *the* Flood, the one in which everybody in the world was destroyed save only Noah and his family, a few animals, and a comparatively small Ark. And did Sir Leonard find anything about these? Not a thimbleful.

The B.B.C. also produced a lady archaeologist, Miss K. M. Kenyon, who lectures on Palestinian archaeology at the University of London—and the way she spoke was meant to give the impression that after 100 years of extensive digging in Palestine all sorts of things corroborating the Bible had been found. Unfortunately, she was unable to find any corroboration whatever except some of the rows the kingdoms of Israel and Judah had with each other or with Babylon. Not a scrap of evidence has ever been produced to show that even Solomon's Temple had been in existence, or that there ever was a David or Solomon.

To eke out her extremely meagre information, Miss Kenyon—who appears to believe everything in the Bible—read out portions of the Book of Kings as if that proved anything. The truth is that the more archaeologists dig in Palestine, the more they find that the Biblical narratives are nothing more than pure fiction—except when corroborated by outside evidence. And that is precious little.

After nearly 2,000 years of intensive campaigning for Christianity by the Churches, the Rev. Dr. W. E. Sangster, bitterly complains in the *Sunday Times* that very few people—if any at all—know what exactly Whitsun stands for. Actually, they know very well that it stands for—a holiday on Whit Monday and the hope that it will be fine; the religious reasons, even among all the converts Billy Graham made from the Christians who heard him, are a matter of supreme indifference. Dr. Sangster, following Billy's eternal cry—"Has God in the Person of the Holy Spirit come into your life?"—moans, "The Christian religion will never be real to you until it is *in* you." Isn't that the way to talk about a good meal? Surely Dr. Sangster is not becoming a blatant and effete Materialist?

That grand old story in the Gospels of Jesus washing the feet of Peter—here even the formidably religious Dr. B. Graham has never followed his Master—is just the kind of thing religious Hindu ladies appreciate; for recently, 100 of them not only washed their husbands' feet but offered them flowers, "and lay prostrate before them as a priest read prayers in the revival of an ancient ceremony of husband worship." We should have liked the story better if the priests had washed the feet of some manure-sodden Yogis and grovelled before them.

And talking about Mr. Graham and, for that matter, Mr. Harry Edwards, these gentlemen will have to look to their laurels. A 64-year old lady, suffering from an incurable cancer, was completely cured at a "faith-healing" service at the "Full Gospel Mission," Little Lever, conducted by the Rev. Norman Wright. As far as we know, Mr. Graham has never cured anybody, his speciality being to get God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit into you. Mr. Edwards cures all incurable diseases through "spirit doctors"; but here we have Mr. Wright curing cancer through the power and glory of Jesus Christ and a complete Fundamentalist doctrine in which science and evolution are despised. What have Mr. Graham and Mr. Edwards to say now?

## Northern Notes

By COLIN McCALL

THE North recently had its first opportunity to see two of Graham Greene's dramas; the play *The Living Room*, which enjoyed a successful run in London before coming to the provinces, and the film version of his novel *The End of the Affair*. Both show Mr. Greene's strength as a writer; but they also reveal weaknesses that derive from his Catholicism—unorthodox though that may often be. I am not thinking so much of the "sense of sin" which is an integral part of his works, but of his failure to do justice to the opposition. Mr. Ivor Brown thought that *The Living Room* contained "serious debate, intelligently and infectiously conducted." To me, the psychology expressed by the psychologist in debate with the priest sounded little better than parody. Worse still, in *The End of the Affair*, is the presentation of the atheist propagandist. He is not in any sense a freethinker, but a "hater" of God. And the reason?—he was born with a disfiguring birthmark! This is really descending to the childish, and it ill becomes a writer of Mr. Greene's ability.

\* \* \* \*

Another play—and a very fine one indeed—had its British premiere in Manchester before opening in London. *The Lark* by Jean Anouilh, translated by Christopher Fry, will impress all audiences and should be of special interest to Freethinkers. The characterisation in this well-staged story of Joan of Arc is quite exquisite. Joan and the Dauphin, in their different ways, are splendidly done. So, too, are the various clerics, notably the fanatical inquisitor and a sex-obsessed celibate to whom, without doubt, the devil has often appeared as a naked woman. This latter character could only have been created by a Frenchman; it is a superb psychological study in itself.

\* \* \* \*

The gross arrogance of the Roman Catholic Church and the pitiful timidity of the B.B.C. were obvious in the recent exchange of letters resulting in Sir Ian Jacob's apology to Cardinal Griffin for his "grave error" in presenting the play *Family Portrait* on Easter Sunday. Sir Ian's abjection was alarmingly reminiscent of the behaviour of politicians in Catholic countries. It was heartening, therefore, to read *The Manchester Guardian* leader on the subject (6th May, 1955.) The point at issue, it remarked, is not the play's tone but its theology. Cardinal Griffin complained that its interpretation of Mark 3, 32 ("Behold thy mother and thy brethren without seek for thee") is "contrary to sound scholarship and the beliefs of all Christian bodies . . . at any time . . . repellent to millions of Christian viewers" etc. "This is surely something of an over-

(Concluded on next page)

# THE FREETHINKER

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THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, £1 4s. (in U.S.A., \$3.50); half-year, 12s.; three months, 6s. Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

## 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.

F. SIMPSON.—H. F. Amiel was greatly admired by G. W. Foote. We are printing an article on this noted French writer by Mr. G. I. Bennett soon.

H. CRAIG.—British Israelites interpret Saxons as "Isaac's Sons."

## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### OUTDOOR

- Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Every Sunday, 7 p.m.: F. ROTHWELL.  
Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park).—Every Sunday evening, 7-30 p.m.: HAROLD DAY.  
Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Every Sunday at 8 p.m.: J. W. BARKER and E. MILLS.  
Manchester Branch N.S.S.—Every Sunday, 3 p.m., Platt Field; 7-30 p.m., St. Mary's Blitzed Site: Speakers, Messrs. McCALL, MILLS, or WOODCOCK. Every weekday, Deansgate Blitzed Site, 1 p.m.: G. A. WOODCOCK.  
Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Every Wednesday at 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.  
North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Every Sunday, noon: L. EBURY and H. ARTHUR.  
West London Branch N.S.S.—Every Sunday at the Marble Arch from 4 p.m.: Messrs. RIDLEY, EBURY, O'NEILL and WOOD. *The Freethinker* on sale at Marble Arch.

### INDOOR

- Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Satis Café, 40, Cannon Street, off New Street).—Sunday, June 12, "What do you know?" Send your posers to the Secretary.  
Friday Discussion Group (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—June 10: Group Meeting.  
South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, June 12, 11 a.m.: JOSEPH MURUMBI of Kenya, "The Colour Conflict."

## Conference Reception and Demonstration

ON the Saturday evening prior to the N.S.S. Annual Conference in London, a reception of members and delegates was held at the Royal Hotel, affording an opportunity for the usual fraternal greetings and conversations. The entertainments were again home-made and much enjoyed, including a variety of games arranged by Miss J. B. Warner, the secretarial assistant of the N.S.S., and Mr. Morris.

After the Conference, which will be reported separately, a grand open-air demonstration was held at Marble Arch, an extension of the normal activity of the W. London Branch.

Three platforms, nicely dispersed among the many meetings, were in use, the speakers being Messrs. Ridley, Ebury, McCall, Barker, O'Neill, Mills, Arthur and Wood. The extra provocation appeared to elicit Christian opposition greater than usual, particularly on the two unaccustomed sites, and our speakers are to be congratulated on maintaining the Freethought position so effectively. In keeping with the occasion, a new high record of sales of the *Freethinker* rewarded the efforts of those responsible for this great regular service to the Movement.

G.H.T.

## Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund

Previously acknowledged, £861 9s. 5d.; A. Mitchell, 12s. 6d.; W.H.D., 5s.; W. J. Mackay, £1 2s. 6d.; I. Barr, 11s.; J. Moorhead, Canada, £1 5s.; Miss D. G. Davies, Cardiff, £1. Total: £866 5s. 5d.

Donations should be sent to "The Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund" and cheques made out accordingly.

## The Tablet

THE Memorial Tablet to the late Chapman Cohen in the Crematorium at Golder's Green is as follows:—

IN  
CHERISHED  
MEMORY  
OF

CHAPMAN COHEN

BORN 1ST SEPTEMBER, 1868

DIED 4TH FEBRUARY, 1954

ILLUSTRIOUS AMONG THE WARRIORS OF  
FREETHOUGHT

HE DEDICATED A GREAT MIND, A GREAT  
HEART AND A LONG LIFE TO THE WAR AGAINST  
INTOLERANCE AND SUPERSTITION, FEARED AS  
AN ADVERSARY, HONoured AS A LEADER  
AND BELOVED AS A MAN

## Ceremony at Golder's Green

ON Whit Monday, following the Conference, a party of Freethinkers assembled at the Crematorium before the tablet dedicated to the late Mr. Chapman Cohen. Mr. P. V. Morris, who organised the function, read and commented on the excellence of the memorial tablet. On behalf of the Leicester Secular Society, Mr. Kirk expressed satisfaction with the tablet and asked Mr. Morris to convey the best wishes of his Society to Mrs. Cohen. Photographs were taken by several present to commemorate the occasion.

H.M.R.

## Northern Notes

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statement," comments *The Manchester Guardian*, "The literal reading of the passage in Mark is contrary to the beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church among others; it is not contrary to the beliefs of all Christian bodies. The question is whether the B.B.C. should avoid broadcasting at times like Easter, matter which goes against the beliefs of some (not necessarily all) Christian Churches." "Many things," it continues, "medieval miracle plays, for instance, or the pictures in some illuminated bibles—are likely in some of their details to go against the present beliefs peculiar to one denomination or another." And it concludes: "The B.B.C. will run the usual risk of playing safe and falling into the tedium of the lowest common denominator. It should certainly resist any attempt to make it satisfy everybody on every day of the year." *The Manchester Guardian* deserves our thanks for this clear and timely warning. It is impossible to please all of the people, but the B.B.C. seems bent on pleasing some of them all of the time.

## Please Note

Owing to the present emergency, we have been unable to despatch any orders for books and literature received since the 27th ultimo, but as soon as ever circumstances permit, these will be sent forward with all possible speed.

# The Monument of Ancient Fear

By MIMNERMUS SECUNDUS

RELIGION, in the final analysis, is the monument of ancient fear. And, since religion itself has become a huge vested interest, it has also become the life work of a very large body of priests to perpetuate that sense of fear. To primitive people the approach of darkness was as the coming of death. The potent forces that produced night, the equally potent forces that routed it, they regarded as beings whose moods supplication and genuflections could affect. For untold ages that fear of the unknown has been the secret of religion, and it is still the secret to-day. It is the ultimate source of the priests' wealth, which, in its turn, is the cause of their power. So long as there is religion, the lever of fear will always be used, and the priests are always going back to it.

In the matter of demonology, the ecclesiastics of the great Christian churches and the witch-doctors of Africa are brothers under their skins. It is due entirely to the machinations of Priestcraft that in countries pretending to some civilisations the belief in a terrible devil, a frightful hell, and demons, still persists. The Roman Catholic Church, the most powerful church in Christendom, still preaches a literal hell of burning fire, and the Protestant Salvation Army endorses a similar horrible belief.

When, some years ago, May frosts did serious harm to fruit trees in the Ely diocese, involving fruit growers in serious financial loss, the Bishop attributed the damage to the crops to "discarnate rebellious spirits," and spoke of "an evil influence causing wickedness in the world. It is not unlikely that nature also has wickedness and evil tendencies caused by the demon element. That is what I mean when I say that I believe there are angels and demons both in the human world and the world of nature."

Such beliefs have the support of the Christian Bible, which is saturated with primitive demoniac superstition. The story of the Garden of Eden, so fervently believed in by Billy Graham—and presumably by his great admirer Eisenhower—contains relics of serpent worship. And the Gospel story itself is full of demonology, from the account of the Temples to the story of the Gadarene swine.

Billy Graham, in his book *Peace with God*, ascribes the evil in the world to the work of a personal devil!

What is all this but pandering to popular superstition? It is worthy of a Christian Church which christens battle-ships, blesses regimental flags, and which invokes divine assistance for fine and wet weather. But it is wholly unworthy of great nations with some culture and some pretences to civilisation, and it is a complete anachronism that such a savage survival as Christianity should be regarded as the State religion of an educated people.

Indeed, the whole elaborate edifice of Christian salvation, the alleged fall of mankind, which necessitated the alleged sacrifice of Christ, rests upon a Babylonian legend and an error of observation. Belief in the immortality of the serpent was due to the periodic shedding of its skin. In the Babylonian story there is a wonderful tree in the fields of the blessed, and its fruit conferred the gift of immortality. Before man could eat this precious fruit it was devoured by the serpent, which thus obtained the gift of immortality intended for man. Theologians have transformed this primitive legend, and made it the basis of the most mischievous superstition that the world has known. Historic Christianity always threatened unbelievers with the terrors of hell. Our ancestors even visualised this devil as a being with horns, with a tail, and with cloven hooves.

The Christian clergy exploited this widespread ignorance of their congregations, and made money out of the fear of

death. According to these pastors and masters, death was the king of terrors. They heightened the effect by appealing to the fears of their hearers, and used this imaginary devil and his fireworks as a lever. For very many generations the clergy addressed people who could not read nor write, and this made their sorry imposition the easier. Their sermons, archaic in thought and inflated with sheer nonsense, dealt in the grossest generalities and exaggerations. "The wages of sin is death" they wailed, and it is the bitterest criticism to add that this sort of nonsense was their idea of wisdom. Happily, the "cure of souls" is now passing into the physician's hands with the cure of the body. But for centuries nobody was there to tell people the truth, except a small number of devoted Freethinkers, who were accursed by all the churches of Christendom.

What use are the tens of thousands of Christian clergy who endorse such antiquated and mischievous rubbish as the alleged demoniacal influence in human affairs? Their minds are as empty as that of their coloured prototypes in uncivilised countries. If demons produce late frost and other seasonal aberrations of Nature, they are also responsible for earthquakes, hurricanes, typhoons, and other natural phenomena? On the whole, the African witch-doctors command more respect than our clergy. They are savages addressing savages, but our pastors and masters pretend to be "the heirs of all the ages," and yet talk the same abracadabra as the barbarians.

It is basically the same superstition whether it is put out by a professional preacher on £5,000 a year and a room in the best hotel, or by the fear-oppressed followers of the witch-doctor.

What a commentary on our boasted culture, and of our over-rated and expensive system of education. Britain will never be a really civilised country, in any real sense of that much-abused word, until it has rid itself of a Priestcraft which retails mediaeval ignorance and checks ordered development and progress.

## Atheism

By A. YATES

IN his letter, "Atheism" (*The Freethinker*, April 22), S. W. Brooks says: "There is all the difference in the world between saying 'I know of no God,' and categorically asserting 'There cannot be a God; the existence of such a being is an impossibility, a consistent Atheist must adopt the latter position.'"

A distinguished Rationalist philosopher thinks otherwise. In his address to the R.P.A., May 20, 1949, Bertrand Russell said: "I do not think there is a conclusive argument by which one can prove there is not a God. When I say that I cannot prove that there is a God, I ought to say equally that I cannot prove that there are not the Homeric gods . . . If you were set to work to give a logical demonstration that Zeus, Hera, Poseidon and the rest of them do not exist you would find it an awful job. You could not get such a proof . . . In regard to the Christian God, I should take exactly the same line. There is exactly the same degree of possibility and likelihood of the existence of the Christian God as there is of the existence of the Homeric gods. Therefore, speaking to a purely philosophic audience, I would say I am an Agnostic."

Of course one cannot prove that the Homeric or any other gods do not exist, for the simple reason that, if a thing

is non-existent, there is nothing to prove it. We are up against a logical *impasse*. If we are thus unable to prove that a god does not exist, what becomes of S. W. Brooks' "categorical" assertion that such a being *cannot* exist. By what argument does he prove it? He says: "If there is even the shadow of a doubt that gods do not exist, Atheism, as I have defined it, cannot be 'true' in the sense that the proposition 'two plus two equals four' is true."

He overlooks the fact that however strong our disbelief in the existence of a god may be the evidence for it must still fall short of such an objectively demonstrable certainty as that "two plus two equals four."

As an Atheist I do not assert that there *cannot* be a god, but that there is no positive proof that there is such a being. My Atheism rests on no evidence other than that afforded by inference. As, for instance: If there is a God and he intended that we should know of his existence, why has he not furnished such evidence of it as to make conjecture needless, and doubt or denial rationally impossible? Why has he hidden himself behind an inscrutable veil leaving his creatures to wander hopelessly in speculative blind alleys, or to delude themselves with all kinds of fantastic and conflicting beliefs concerning him? Is it probable that an omnipotent being whose purpose it was to be known would act thus? We are not sensible of the want of such knowledge, for no penalty or disability, mental or bodily, is attached to it. Nothing necessary to life and well-being is involved in or affected by our ignorance. Our whole experience teaches us that it is not upon our knowledge of a god, but upon our knowledge of Nature that our existence depends.

In short, we can reason only from what we know; and in the entire absence of proof that there is a god, I infer that such a being does *not* exist.

## C. Cohen's Critique of 'God'

By GREGORY S. SMELTERS

THE most abiding achievement in the critique of religion by Chapman Cohen, the late editor of *The Freethinker*, will, in my opinion, be his devising and applying of deadly logic to the fundamental argument of theological scholasticism to the category-mistake argument as the nation of the extra-mythological "God," first presented in *Theism or Atheism* (1921) and then, in a revised form, in *Agnosticism or . . . ?*, long before the term "category-mistake" was invented and the argument resumed to destroy the religious meaning of "mind" by Professor Gilbert Ryle of Oxford in his revolutionary book, *Concept of Mind* (1949).

We can do homage to Chapman Cohen's memory as a great Freethinker, a most trenchant and cogent reasoner, by making his logical method of quashing the "transcendent" God more widely known and applied by Rationalist speakers and writers alike, until it sinks permanently in the British people's consciousness. To that purpose I shall present below the original passage (*Agnosticism or . . . ?*, p. 8) which comprises the category-mistake argument, adding, for a better comprehension of wider implications, the headings with the principles involved, and words in brackets to complete the author's sense:

I—*Things are single, terms are collective. The principle: There is no one extra member of a class apart from all the members of that class.*—"Let us, as the professional evangelist would say, get back to God. And I begin with something that everyone actually does believe. The world as we know it—which is the only world we can deal with—is made up of *things*, or as some would prefer to put it, of events. But all events, whatever they are like, or wherever they occur, are single in their existence. We have collective

terms such as 'tree,' 'man,' 'bird,' and so forth, but there is not a (*extra*) tree separate from (*all*) particular trees, or (*another man called*) 'Man' distinct from (*all*) particular men."

II—*Application: There exists, therefore, no one distinct god called "God" apart from all the particular gods.*—"I stress this consideration because a great deal of the confusion connected with (*the fallaciously capitalised collective name*) 'God' is due to its neglect. There are a multitude of gods in the world, as there are a multitude of trees, and in the earlier stages of civilisation gods are contemptibly common. Many of them have passed away, and many new ones have been created; but THERE IS NO SUCH CONCEIVABLE THING AS A (*god called*) 'GOD' THAT IS DISTINCT FROM (*all*) PARTICULAR GODS. The gods can be collected, tabulated, and their common characteristics noted, just as one can collect different men, brown, red, yellow, white, tabulate them and indicate what features they have."

III—*The category-mistake of confusing words used to refer to characteristics (class names) with words used to refer to individuals (proper names).* *Application: "God" is not a proper name, but a misspelled collective name "god."* *Therefore, there exists no god called "god."*—"Abstract words (*used to refer to characteristics*) are very often useful instruments of thought. Without them human thought could not get very far. But when we mistake abstractions (*i.e., class or collective names*) for (*proper names referring to*) concrete existences (*i.e., individuals*), confusion is certain to follow."

IV—*Denial of all particular gods leaves no extra god "God" to be asserted to exist.*—"Now the gods of the world are as well known and as well understood as the trees of the world. And if we were to take all the gods that have ever existed and add to them the gods that do exist (*in books and oral tradition*), the Agnostic would not hesitate to dismiss them one after the other as mere figments of the imagination. In the end he would become a decide on the most elaborate and comprehensive scale. More than that, in terms of his Agnosticism, he would deny the existence of any other god that any people could ever conceive or worship. The gods of existing savages, the gods of the Mohammedan, the Jew, the Christian, would all go. But if all gods, past and present, and future, are rejected as having no better existence than the ghost that haunts the old baronial castle, what has he in mind when he says that he does not deny the existence of (*an extra god called*) God? He is denying the existence of any conceivable god, and an inconceivable proposition is just non-sense (*i.e., a self-contradiction*)."

## THE EVANGELIST

Ill-clad, with fiercely burning eye,  
The length of Regent Street he trod,  
Bearing his Gospel banner high—  
"Prepare to Meet Thy God,"  
Cursing the while with flaming breath,  
"Know Ye the Wage of Sin is Death,"  
No mikes or cars had he, no cash,  
No vast arena crammed to bursting,  
Loud-speakers boomed no blatant trash,  
Where mobs for righteousness were thirsting.  
But, of his Message unaware,  
The crowds surged on to Leicester Square.

ARTHUR F. THORN.

—NEXT WEEK—

COMBATING CHRISTIANITY

By H. CUTNER

## Correspondence

### THE FUND

The Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund is reaching the first £1,000 mark at a snail's pace. As the Fund is still £150 short of that figure, what about 150 of us subscribing £1 each, or 75 at £2, or 50 of us at £3 each.—Yours, etc.,

J. HUMPHREY.

### SPINOZA'S GOD

E. G. H. Crouch (May 20), referring to my letter of April 22, represents me as saying that the two propositions, "God does not exist" and "Two plus two equals four" are equally and identically true. What I actually said conveyed the directly opposite impression.

My whole point was that these two propositions are *not* on the same logical footing.

Mr. Crouch asks me for a "definition of God." Discarding as irrelevant the anthropomorphic nonsense of the organised religions, the best one I know is that of Spinoza. (In spite of the late Chapman Cohen's attempts to claim Spinoza as a fellow-atheist, I must regard him, on the evidence of his published works, as nothing of the sort.)

Spinoza defines God as "causa sui" (cause of itself), that is, a self-evolved entity whose existence is not derived from or conditioned by the existence of anything else.

Spinoza is a thoroughgoing monist and determinist, and, perhaps, the most rigorous and uncompromising rationalistic philosopher ever to speculate; he regards everything as falling within a single, logically-deduced system entirely explicable to the natural human reason. The word "supernatural" has no place in his vocabulary. However, he cannot be legitimately described as an "Atheist," any more than Thomas Paine.—Yours, etc.,

S. W. BROOKS.

### WHAT IS AN ATHEIST?

The Church in its effort to bring all people within the range of believing has narrowed the definition of Atheism to the impossible situation of actually *knowing* that there is no God. Since no one actually *knows* (has definite evidence) this means that there are no atheists and of course should be a great comfort to the Churches. Using the same strict term to define a religious person would leave the world without any theists as no person actually *knows* that there is a God. In any argument with theists about there actually being any theists, this point should be stressed as it breaks down their argument by following their definition to its logical conclusion.

The whole definition should centre on the word *belief*. If a person *believes* that there is a God then he is a theist or believer. If he *believes* that there is no such thing as a God then he is an atheist or disbeliever. Whether or not either side has definite knowledge is immaterial. It is his *belief* that counts.

My own definition of God is: Something (Superman, spirit, intelligence, anything you want to call it) that created the Universe and controls it. I personally *believe* that this something does not exist. I *believe* that the Universe, which by its own definition means everything there is, has always been here and always will be.—Yours, etc.,

California. ANDREW MENICK.

### AUSTRALIAN REACTION TO MRS. KNIGHT

Australians like to be credited with the reputation of being the world's leading sportsmen, but if we are to judge by the result of a recent Gallup Poll on the question of radio criticism of religious belief, the claim would seem to be vain indeed. It is not enough to be capable exponents of games or to show prowess in athletics; sportsmanship should extend beyond the field of competitive endeavour and be a part of our ordinary relationships; it entails the principle of giving the opponent a "fair go." We find, however, even in so wide a sphere as the religious that liberty of thought or expression must not be granted to those who dare to question orthodoxy of any kind. Have the protagonists of age-old ideas so little faith in them or their own strength that they fear an odd half-hour on the air would suffice to undermine them?—Yours, etc.,

COLLIN COATES.

### FIGHTING CATHOLICISM

I am all for organising a Freethought pressure group if it is confined to: (1) Criticising the totalitarian nature of the Roman Church's structure; (2) Drawing attention to the unwholesome effects of Catholic power within modern democracies, especially our own.

These are fair and square targets which would be understood by the ordinary man in the street with his sense of fair play.

If the usual controversial questions arising from Belief and

Unbelief are pushed too much then one section of our allies (non-Catholic believers), and another section (those not interested in "highbrow" arguments of any description) will vanish into thin air.

Once a general feeling of revulsion against the Catholic hierarchy is established *then* will be the time to exploit the bankruptcy of religion in general.—Yours, etc.,

R. H. BROWN.

### ARE CHRISTIAN MYTHS NEEDED?

"Are Christian myths needed?" Yes—to scare or coax them into being "good." That's the implication of a recent letter under this head. The results? Look at the Age of Faith, with its ignorance, crime and cruelty past belief. See the jail rosters. Practically every man a believer, with the Catholics far outnumbering all the rest in ratio, with all their faith and myths. No one *can* believe he'll roast in hell for ever, hence the weakness of the myth as moral sanction. Religion is all words; I think folks have more common sense than our friend seems to suppose.—Yours, etc.,

Toronto, Canada.

J.F.K.

### FAMILY PORTRAIT

Under "This Believing World," May 20, the Roman Catholics seem to get away with the story of the brothers and sisters of "our Lord" as his cousins, given in Matthew 13: 55, and Mark 6: 3, inferring that Jesus was the only child of Mary, but they have nothing to say when Matthew 1: 25 (P. and R.C. Bibles) says: "And (Joseph) knew her not till she had brought forth her first born son": and he called his name Jesus.—Yours, etc.,

A. R. HILL.

## Points from Letters

As a life member of the R.P.A., I greatly share the criticisms which have appeared in *The Freethinker* about the *Literary Guide*. It has become more of a literary paper (of which there are sufficient already) . . . I have been an Agnostic for fifty years.—W. EDWARD MEADS.

I note the N.S.S. has no declared policy on the question of supporting the principle of national sovereignty. May I ask your readers to submit opinions to you on this matter so that it can be settled as to whether the N.S.S. is "internationalist" or "federalist" in outlook?—E. G. MACFARLANE.

## N.S.S. Executive Committee, 25th May

Present: Mr. Ridley (in the Chair), Mrs. Venton, Messrs. Griffiths, Ebury, Taylor, Hornibrook, Tiley, Johnson, Corstorphine, Barker, Cleaver, Draper, Arthur and the Secretary. Eight new members were admitted to the Parent, North London and Nottingham Branches. Final Conference arrangements were made, and correspondence concerned with future business was deferred for consideration at the next meeting. It was reported that Mr. C. S. Knight of Hartley, Southern Rhodesia, a generous supporter of the Society for many years, had died last August and that he had remembered the N.S.S. in his Will. News of the Memorial Tablet to the late Chapman Cohen at Golders Green Crematorium was given, and the Secretary was instructed to convey the Committee's pleasure at the news to Mrs. Cohen. P.V.M.

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