

# The Freethinker

Vol. LXXV—No. 34

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Fourpence

At a religious revival meeting in Florida, on July 25th, a preacher picked up a poisonous snake to prove that his faith in God gave him protection.

Unfortunately God was off duty. The snake bit him, and he died. His death was listed as suicide. He had apparently been obsessed with the passage in St. Mark (XVI, 18):

"They shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them."

Possibly, however, the snake had not read this passage; hence its disobedience to the will of its Creator.

The handling of snakes at religious services is actually forbidden in Florida and other states (*Sketch*, July 26) because of several deaths which have occurred. In other words, a secular law has to be passed to protect Christians from their own credulity. It has thus become illegal to trust the Almighty too far!

When lightning hit a race meeting at Ascot recently, God apparently failed to discriminate between believers and others, and included a noted evangelist among his victims, thus spoiling a splendid chance of a miracle—which would have given revivalist preachers the material for many an outpouring on this subject.

## The Savage in Our Midst

At a road safety service in the village of Blaston (Leicestershire) on Sunday, July 24, the Rector walked along a row of cars parked in the main street and sprinkled Holy Water on each one as he gave it his blessing.

Yes, this is in 1955, and no doubt the onlookers at this ceremony would be highly amused at the religious antics of some African tribes.

Now the chances of any of the cars of a small village having an accident almost immediately after being blessed—or washed, for that matter—are many thousands to one against. So you might think God was on a safe bet here. But no. One of the blessed cars left the road and overturned on the way to Leicester, in which city many unblest cars were travelling without mishap.

Now consider what would have happened if the snake had shown more respect for the man of God, or if the lightning had missed the evangelist, or if the Blaston cars had all escaped misadventure. It would all have proved, in Christian eyes, the efficacy of God. Ardent believers would have written in triumph to *The Freethinker*, and sermons and articles would have proclaimed the discomfiture of the infidel.

Not that the disasters will have much effect on the faithful. The awe-stricken morons who are prepared to goggle credulously at a line of motor cars undergoing a divine bath, are not likely to have the grey matter stirred by any subsequent disaster.

## The Christian "Answer"

And there is always the Christian "answer." They "didn't pray hard enough." Or "there was an unbeliever

present." Or "it didn't suit God's purpose." Or "it is a mystery we must not try to fathom." And the biggest mystery is how the "men of God" get their dupes to swallow it.

Don't blame God for disaster, says The Padre of the *Evening Mail*, because "God won't answer back." And so the Padre will answer for him. "Ask the Padre," says his headline, and one wonders why. I have yet to see him give an intelligent answer to an intelligent question. Anything in the way of a premise, a definition, or a thought sequence appears totally beyond him. His method seems to be to quote a question and then lose it in a swamp of inconsequent patter.

"I do not think God likes disaster any more than we do," he says, "but however much a parent may love his children there are occasions when children meet with disaster which even the loving parent is quite unable to avoid."

## God Limited

So in place of God Almighty the Padre is now giving us God as a Limited Liability Co. His example is: "Apparently we cannot have the warm fire of the drawing room without the possibility of an accident." But this is a human analogy, and the Padre's God is surely not measured by human standards—certainly not when it suits. "God" is allegedly higher than human, and capable of achieving his purposes *without* involving the slaughter of the innocents. With all the power at his command, is God without even the minimum intelligence necessary for doing the simplest job without bungling it?

And if "God" cannot be blamed for disaster, how can he be given the credit for success? If God cannot avoid bad harvests, why credit him with procuring good ones? If he has not the power to prevent bad crops, how does the Padre know he has the power to ensure good ones? If shipwrecks and car crashes are outside his province, why bless ships and cars and then praise him for their safe delivery? The Padre can't have it both ways. He cannot absolve God from all blame for disasters and then proceed to give him the credit for the rest.

As a first test of God's power, let him put some sense into the Padre. But perhaps that is asking too much. Hear him: "That God could go through the world chastising us with a big rod I haven't the slightest doubt." And perhaps the first victim of the rod would be the Padre, for the offence of making his God look like a simpleton.

In a world where man is aiming to overcome and avoid disasters, not by holy water but by secular and scientific means, the show put on by God and the Padre, Ltd., is one of tragi-comedy. To meet the challenge of disaster man must think out his own means and fashion his own tools; he will be helped neither by the "Hand of God" nor the pen of his partner, the Padre.

VIEWS and OPINIONS

## Axe of God

by G. H. TAYLOR

## The Wisconsin Heresy Trial

We are indebted to our American correspondent, Merrill R. Holste, for press information and personal comments on the recent trial for heresy of a young Lutheran minister, the Rev. George P. Crist, in Milwaukee.

The *Minneapolis Star* lists the 14 points (counts) against him, reporting that he :

1. Had abandoned fundamental principles of Scriptural interpretation which guided Martin Luther in the Reformation.
2. Denied that Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary.
3. Denied the physical resurrection of Jesus.
4. Denied the oral reception of the actual body of Christ in the Lord's Supper.
5. Held a doctrine of baptismal regeneration in conflict with the Lutheran Confession.
6. Denied the historicity (authenticity) of a number of miracles.
7. Denied the historicity of the transfiguration and the resurrection.
8. Denied the efficacy of intercessory prayer except insofar as it leads the petitioner to be active in service to others.. Refused to approve the direct address of Jesus Christ in prayer and does not believe that Jesus Christ hears prayer.
9. Denied the efficacy and usefulness of all prayer except insofar as it enables the petitioner to help himself or to be of active service to others.
10. Publicly taught that children should not be encouraged to sing "Jesus Loves Me" or to think of Christ as loving us here and now except in the sense and to the extent that one of us loves another unselfishly.
11. Violated the sanctity and evaded the responsibility of the pulpit by adulterating the word of God ; that is by mingling freely and openly with Scriptural word his own opinion and surmises, even when these lack any support from the Scriptures or were contrary to the Scriptures.
12. Failed contrary to the Holy Scriptures to set forth the gospel in its fulness in his preaching and has neglected and ignored major emphases which are called for in rightly dividing the word of truth.
13. Confused law with gospel and he tends to substitute the law for the gospel. He has failed to proclaim the wrath of God against sin and wickedness and to this extent he has failed also to proclaim the law as well as the gospel.
14. Does not believe that Adam was responsible for man's sinfulness.

The *Minneapolis Morning Tribune*, August 3, 1955, carried an item entitled : "Chief Suspends Pastor Found Guilty of Heresy". The Rev. George Crist, Jr. was found guilty last week on nine counts of "doctrinal deviation", was notified of his suspension in a letter from Dr. Paul Bishop, president of the North-west synod of the United Lutheran church.

At the same time, the Rev. John Gerberding, Menominee Falls, Wisc. was ordered to stand trial on similar charges.

In notifying Mr. Crist of his suspension, Dr. Bishop said, "He no longer is recognised as a minister or a pastor and is disqualified from preaching, teaching or performing ministerial acts".

Mr. Crist said that "unless I can be shown that my views are wrong or untenable, I will not change my views".

In his capacity as secretary of the Twin City Secularists,

Mr. Holste sent the following to the Minneapolis newspapers :

"To those of us who know the history of heresy trials, the present ones seem pretty tame, even seem to have a decided flavor of the comic-opera about them. In the old days, when the churches had things all their own way, Rev. Crist would have been lodged in the dungeons in chains during the trial. Torture would have been used if that seemed necessary to assure a full confession as to his deviations as to doctrine and other heretics known to him. He would have been held in prison and brought forth to hear his sentence—maybe burning at the stake or excommunication. The latter sentence would have meant that all his property would have been confiscated and he and his family thrust forth penniless beggars. Every man's hand would have been against him, and it would not have been a sin for anyone to slay him if they felt like doing so.

"The contrast between then and now is due to the fact that today the power of Secularism is dominant over the power of Clericalism. Certain very wise believers in Secularism—Washington, Jefferson, Franklin, Madison, Paine, *et al*—made certain of that when they wrote the Constitution for this country. Present-day Secularists should take note of the fact that certain churchmen in Spain have hinted that they would like to see the Inquisition started up again."

### Physician, Heal Thyself

THIS year's President of the Methodist Conference has had some unkind things to say about "spiritual healers" who are here today and gone to-morrow. Speaking recently at the Albert Hall, Manchester, Dr. Leslie Weatherhead remarked, "It is truly wicked to invite a person, for example, to expect recovery when the very machinery which God devised for the healthy functioning of the body has been destroyed."

As a Christian, Dr. Weatherhead must believe that God created the mechanism of the body in the first place. If God allows the machinery subsequently to come to destruction it is part of God's Will and there is obviously no point in praying to God to change his mind and restore the body machinery to a healthy condition. But this places prayers for the sick in exactly the same category. It is merely a difference of degree whether one prays for recovery from a condition in which the nervous system is ravaged and destroyed by cancer or T.B., or one prays for the removal of a boil on the back of the neck. There is the strongest Christian authority for the belief that "all sickness is a visitation from God" and an equal warranty for believing that prayer to God can cure all manner of illness. Even Jesus believed in his power to cast devils out of men. But if the Rev. Dr. Weatherhead is right, then the Christian Church has been barking up the wrong tree all along. We Freethinkers have been saying exactly the same thing for years but it is not often we find the president of the Methodist Conference in agreement with us.

A puzzling feature is that in the City Temple Dr. Weatherhead "cured" many people by prayer, but in his own case he had to retire for some time under medical orders, while a cure was worked by more mundane methods. It would be interesting to know whether Dr. Weatherhead has ever tried laying his hands on a number of his fellow-members, in the interests of the nation? But perhaps prayer is not so effective against mental weakness.

J. GORDON.

## Zen Buddhism

by Rev. JOHN L. BROOM, M.A.

The sect of the Mahayana or northern school of Buddhism called in Japan Zen (in China, Ch'an), is very little known or appreciated in the west. Only in the late 1920's did the work of Dr. D. T. Suzuki, the world's leading authority on Zen, begin to be available in this country, chiefly through the efforts of Mr. Christmas Humphreys, perhaps the best-known English Buddhist. Since then, however, the doctrines of this remarkable movement, principally by means of Suzuki's works, have given food for thought to an increasing number of intelligent men and women; in view of its essentially atheistical character I believe an outline of its philosophy might be of interest to readers of this journal.

The origin of Zen is said to go back to the time of the Buddha himself. One day, a disciple handed the Master a golden flower, asking him to preach the Gospel. The Buddha, after contemplating the blossom without speaking for a time, suddenly smiled, and this smile embodying the faith of Zen has been transmitted by the Zen masters to this day. Less charmingly, but no doubt more truthfully, we can say that Zen began as a movement of reformation against the dogmatism and excessive ritualism into which the Buddhism of the first few centuries of our era had degenerated. The Indian sage, Bodhidharma, the 28th Zen patriarch, is generally regarded as by far the greatest of the early masters, and he it was who introduced the sect into China in the 6th-century A.D. The period of the great T'ang dynasty (c.620-910) witnessed Zen's greatest triumph in that land, and it undoubtedly inspired, and indeed formed the essence of, the exquisite art of that era. It was in Japan, however, to which country it spread from China, that Zen took firm root and where today it is still widely practised.

The object of Zen is to transcend the intellect and so experience the moment of enlightenment, liberation and serenity which Zen calls *Satori*. To achieve *Satori*, it is necessary to discard the normal appurtenances of religion such as infallible Scriptures and images, ideas such as those of God the soul or immortality, and Saviours like Christ or Buddha. These concepts are hindrances rather than helps in the task of self-liberation because they encourage the seeker to depend on extraneous means of assistance instead of on his own resources. Prayer and meditation are likewise of no value. Asked by his master why he sat and meditated all day long, a pupil answered that he wished to become a Buddha. The master thereupon picked up a brick and began to rub it. The puzzled pupil naturally wanted to know what he was doing and the master said he was trying to make a mirror. "But no amount of polishing a brick will make it a mirror," objected the novice. "Even so, no amount of sitting cross-legged will make thee a Buddha," replied the sage.

Equally to be condemned is the blind following or conventional rules of morality from the promptings of "duty feelings" or the desire for respectability. Two Buddhist monks one day came to a stream on the banks of which stood a pretty girl afraid to cross because she might wet her clothes. One of the monks promptly picked her up in his arms and carried her over the water. The pair then resumed their journey, but the chivalrous monk was subjected for many miles to the outraged abuses of his companion, who considered he had violated the Buddhist rules of propriety. At last the first monk turned to his critic as if only suddenly aware of his complaints. "That girl?" he said. "I put her down across the ford. Are

you still carrying her?" According to the Zen masters, the approach to life which is most fatal to the attainment of *Satori* is that of a solemn, pompous, self-righteous, orthodoxy. The average Zen sage is quite unlike the usual conception of the saint, having a permanent twinkle in the eye, a strong sense of humour, a liking for outrageous expressions of opinion and no aversion from so-called "bad language." As Mr. Gai Eaton in his valuable book *The Richest Vein* put it, "They are kindly, but they refuse to take others more seriously than they take themselves. Indeed, seriousness seems to them rather suspect, if not an actual obstruction in the way of enlightenment."

The philosophy of Zen, though atheistic, differs from that of the rationalist and secularist in holding that the reason, while of immense value in the field of science and in exposing the absurdities of orthodox religion, is unable to apprehend the ultimate truth about the universe and the destiny of man. The function of the reason is to define, but to define is to limit and so, by its very nature, it cannot describe that which is limitless. Religious disputation is stimulating and often fruitful so far as it goes (in, for example, disposing of the normal theistic arguments) but in the end the final problem remains unanswered with each disputant even more settled in his theistic or atheistic convictions. The intellect can no more comprehend *Satori* than the emotions can solve a jigsaw puzzle. There comes a time, claim the Zen practitioners, when every honest thinker realises that he has reached a point beyond which the laws of logic can serve him no further.

To assist in this realisation, Zen has devised two "aids to enlightenment," the "koan" and the "mondo." Both of these aim to drive conceptual thought to its limits and so transcend it the latter by a speedy question and answer cross-talk between master and pupil, the former by presenting a problem which the intellect cannot solve. Examples of Zen koans are "Two hands when clapped, make a sound. What is the sound of one hand clapping?" "If all things are reducible to one, to what is the one reduced?" "There is a live goose in a bottle. How to remove the goose without hurting the bird or breaking the bottle?" "A man hangs over a precipice by his teeth which are clenched in the branch of a tree. His hands are full and his feet cannot reach the face of the precipice. A friend leans over and asks him 'What is the essence of Zen?' What reply would you make?" To object that these koans are nonsense is unwittingly to have grasped the whole point—sense being a product of the mind has to be suspended and replaced by something which is "nonsense." "The mind, the mind has mountains, cliffs of fall, frightful, sheer, no-man fathomed," says G. M. Hopkins, and when, after its unceasing operations on the fundamental problems of religion and philosophy, it halts baffled at the edge of these cliffs, the faculty of "Buddhi" or awareness can come into being, and liberation be achieved. As the psychiatrist Dr. Graham Howe puts it "when you come to a precipice, why stop, go round, or go back? Why not go over?" This metaphor illustrates the instantaneous immediate nature of the attainment of final spiritual knowledge. It is not the result of a long process of ascetic training or self-discipline (Zen abhors all such practices) but comes upon one suddenly, at any moment, through an oath, a laugh, or even a blow.

I can imagine at this point the average secularist asking

(concluded on next page)

## This Believing World

According to the "Sydney Morning Herald" the Church is going to advertise Christianity in Australia. Obviously, if you can sell soap, patent medicines, and lipstick, through clever publicity, it should be much easier to bring people to Jesus Christ through well written advertisements. Trained advertising men and women are going to sell Christ, and already the Rev. Alan Walker has addressed 750,000 people at his meetings and many millions over the air (for which he has been given an O.B.E.) and he has been invited to go to America and bring its teeming Christian millions, so far not converted by Billy Graham, humbly to accept Jesus.

Whether this great rival of the better known Billy will succeed is another matter, though thousands of pounds have so far been spent on advertising—advertising that is, either Mr. Walker or Jesus Christ, we are not quite sure. In the meantime, all Christians are at one in describing Australia as a land which *must* be saved at all costs. "Everybody agrees," we are unctuously told, "that Australia is seriously weakened by rampant dishonesty and immortality generally." Exactly like poor old England before the egregious Billy took a firm hand and converted the dishonest and immoral Christians he addressed to Christianity.

The Bishop of New York is adamant that the right sort of plumbing is "one of the inescapable consequences of the right sort of religion," which is an admirable variant of "Cleanliness is next to Godliness," and has no more to do with the Christian religion than with tomatoes. Dr. Donegan insisted that German theology and Moral Rearmament—that is, Buchmanism—are "socially weak." They concentrate too much on "personal ethics" rather than on "social ethics." All this shows how thoroughly Christians agree on "interpretation."

We all seem to have missed another great Campaign for Christ now taking place. It is called the Faith and Action Campaign, and began at Easter, and one of its "great achievements" was the "proclamation of the Gospel to people who would not otherwise hear of it." This surely is most intriguing. Where—apart from those parts of the world which have never been invaded by priests—can any people be found who have never heard of the Gospel? Why, from the moment one of the people is born, it is almost impossible to get away from the Gospel in some shape or form. Even Jews who contemptuously reject the New Testament cannot get away from it, and Freethinkers are constantly discussing it.

According to one of the active organisers, a Mr. William Gowland, the people in Luton where the campaign is active now know that they mean business. Mr. Gowland has been interviewing "converts" and he has never known in 20 years anything "more fruitful." What he means is that Christians who have been rather slack now attend church a little more—that's all. And this is called bringing the Gospel to the people who have never known it!

If Mr. Gowland and other organisers for Christ are really serious—why do they not try and bring the Gospel to people who know it as well as he does, and who laugh at its out-of-date nonsense? How many educated people

has he approached who previously did not believe in a Devil flying about with Jesus, now believe that enchanting story? How many of his converts who previously loved their parents now hate them, as Jesus solemnly told them to do? One could ask a hundred questions—but neither Mr. Gowland nor his converts would dream of answering them.

## ZEN BUDDHISM

(concluded from previous page)

impatiently, "But what is this *Satori* experience you keep referring to vaguely as enlightenment, liberation, ultimate spiritual knowledge and so on?" The question unfortunately cannot be answered satisfactorily either by the present writer or the greatest Zen master. The reason should by now be clear—since *Satori* lies beyond the intellect any attempt to describe it in intellectual terms must, in the nature of the case, fail. But of course those are the only terms in which an answer could be attempted through the medium of words either spoken or written. Thus, there remains only silence—by remote analogy the silence which overtakes all of us when confronted by the beauty of a work of art in painting, music or literature. When we have *Satori* we experience the "eternal moment," the "still point" of Mr. Eliot's "Four Quartets," beyond such categories as time and space, reason and unreason, appropriate to the phenomenal relative world. The nature of *Satori* can neither be affirmed or denied—all we can say of it is the Sanakrit "neti, neti," not this, not this, but of course even in uttering these negations we go too far and give a completely false view of *Satori*. The rest *must* be silence.

Several Zen aphorisms and stories illustrate the above point. "An old pine tree preaches wisdom and a wild bird is crying out truth." Once a Zen master was about to preach a sermon. Suddenly a bird began singing close at hand. Thereupon, the sage came down from his pulpit saying that his sermon had been delivered. It is said that to those who know nothing of Zen, mountains are just mountains, trees are just trees and men are just men. After one has studied Zen for a little, mountains are no longer mountains, trees are no longer trees and men are no longer men. Their illusory nature is perceived. But to him who fully understand Zen, mountains are once again mountains, trees once again trees, and men once again men. The third of these emphasises the difference between Zen and orthodox Buddhism. According to the latter, enlightenment or "Nirvana" is envisaged as an escape from continual reincarnations on the wheel of birth and death, *Samsara*. But Zen maintains that to regard this world or life as evil or illusory is to be still in a state of *avidya* (ignorance). *Satori* can be attained here and now, on this earth at this moment, and is not an eternal condition of bliss in the unforeseeable future. To hate and despise material possessions is as great an error as to believe they are the be and end-all of existence. The Zen master enjoys the good things of life without being dependent on them for his happiness. "Do not get yourself entangled with any object," said one sage, "but stand above, pass on and be free."

To most readers perhaps Zen will appear merely so much mystical mumbo-jumbo. I can only say (and here I speak from personal experience) that those who have studied Zen seriously have gradually undergone a kind of "rebirth" and have attained a serenity of outlook in which life appears the same and yet wonderfully different (the mountains once again mountains, etc.). Zen, I venture to conclude, is atheism, plus. And the modern world has a desperate need of its spirit.

## THE FREETHINKER

41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.  
Telephone: Holborn 2601.

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.

### 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, 7.30 p.m. Sunday, August 7: HAROLD DAY and other speakers.

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 Fields: 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.

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Pierhead).—Every Wednesday and Sunday at 8 p.m. Messrs. PARRY, THOMPSON, and other speakers.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Every Friday 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 and WOOD. *The Freethinker* on sale at Marble Arch.

#### INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Satis Café, 40 Cannon Street).—Sunday, August 28, 7 p.m.: G. BRIDGEN, "Priests and Pestilence."

### Notes and News

On September 25th Mrs. Margaret Knight will be speaking for the Ethical Society at Conway Hall. She will be the Guest of Honour at a Reunion at 3.30 p.m. and then address a Public Meeting in the Large Hall at 7 p.m. on "Morals without Religion". Admission if free.

### Branch Line

#### MANCHESTER

Mrs. Margaret Knight is to speak under the auspices of the Manchester Branch of the National Secular Society on December 11th. It was not easy to contact Mrs. Knight, who was visiting Austria, but on getting her agreement the branch secretary, Mrs. Hilda M. Rogals, immediately engaged Chorlton Town Hall for the occasion, which it is hoped will attract support, not only from Manchester, but from the surrounding area.

There will be a reception on the Saturday evening prior to the meeting, and it is expected that local press representatives will again look in on the Manchester branch, as was the case last season.

It is learned that there are now distinct possibilities that Mrs. Knight may again "break the sound barrier" and do another broadcast in the Winter.

Visiting the Manchester area recently, Mr. G. H. Taylor had the pleasure of joining the branch speakers, Messrs. McCall and Mills, on the speaking sites in Platt Fields and Deansgate. Mr. Jack Clayton was also a welcome addition to the platform on one occasion.

Under the earnest and energetic leadership of the President, Mr. C. McCall, and the organising efficiency of the Secretary, Mrs. Rogals, the branch would appear to be in as healthy a condition as excellent team-work can make it.

## The Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund

Previously acknowledged, £919 3s. 9d. L. Sanderson, 5s. 0d.; A. Clunas, 5s. 0d.; A. Hancock, 1s. 0d.; S. J. Barker, South Africa, £5 0s. 0d.; A. N. Richmond, 3s. 3d.; total to date, £924 18s. 0d.

Comparatively very large audiences are being attracted to the meetings, and in Mr. Mills the Branch have a most promising young speaker now in his first season. Mr. G. Woodcock, with help from Mr. Billing and others, continues his yearly service in selling literature, an indispensable element in successful branch activity.

Arrangements are now going ahead for monthly indoor meetings in the New Millgate Hotel during the coming indoor season.

G.H.T.

### Faith and Reason

By A. YATES

IN a recent letter, "Fundamental Faith" (*The Freethinker*, July 8th), E. G. Macfarlane, takes exception to Mr. Cutner's statement that "Freethought recognises no gods." He says "Men like Mr. Cutner assume that Freethinking is the sole prerogative of the Atheist, whereas a more agnostic (and rational) view of the situation would accept the fact that there is room for argument about the ultimate nature of the universal."

Whether Freethought, as a phase of unbelief, recognises no gods is open to question. Atheists are Freethinkers, but many who call themselves Freethinkers are not Atheists.

Mr. Macfarlane's view of Agnosticism is a little faulty. The Agnostic excludes *all* reasoning on the ultimate nature of the universe. He contends that, if there be a god, he is *unknowable*, and as such, cannot be the subject of any argument *pro* or *con*.

"The best service Freethinkers can render human society" says Mr. Macfarlane, "is to provide a common platform for all bases for rational living." But many self-styled Freethinkers are at variance among themselves as to what constitutes a basis for rational living. For instance, Mr. Macfarlane condemns Mr. Cutner for his Atheistic views of the "nature of the universe." He tells us "In the realm of faith—which is fundamental to *all* rational action—we are perforce concerned with unprovable assumptions or premises . . . this means that Atheists as well as Theists are in the position of having to guess where they cannot know."

If faith is belief without evidence, how can it be fundamental to all rational action which *as such*, must be founded on reason? Faith is essentially irrational—it is belief in defiance of reason. Tertullian, a Father of the early Church, declared "I believe because it is impossible"—that is Faith, viz. irrationality. In the absence of direct proof, probability is our only guide. When a thing is probable there is, according to the degree of probability, a *reason* for belief. If the dogmas of religion were founded on their probable truth, belief in them would cease to be faith; it would become a *rational* act, and would lose all its supposed merit. To assert therefore that "Atheists as well as Theists are in the position of having to guess where they cannot know" is to misunderstand both Atheism and Theism.

The *unbelief* of the Atheist is founded on what he regards as evidence; the *belief* of the Theist, on his hopes and fears. The one is rational, the other is emotional—neither is guess-work.

## The Procurator of Judea

By F. A. RIDLEY

IN England, a Christian land, anti-Christian literature is usually confined within a restricted circle. Occasionally a famous writer such as George Moore or Somerset Maugham published a book with a markedly anti-clerical tendency; even occasionally an anti-religious satire striking at the very roots of Christian belief. Moore's devastating satire on the Resurrection, *The Brook Kerith*, is an outstanding example. However, even when tolerated for the literary standing of the author, such books do not receive a very cordial welcome from the wider literary public. Socially, if not theologically, we live in a Christian land.

In Europe, and in particular in France, things are very different. There, where the totalitarian form of Christianity, Roman Catholicism, prevails, religion becomes a political issue. Ever since the French Revolution the anti-clerical party has energetically combatted the repeated efforts of political Catholicism to recover its former ascendancy of the state and over French culture. This perennial conflict has extended to the domain of literature. A series of French novelists and poets have used that incomparably lucid instrument of expression, the French language, to satirise clerical pretensions. Such names as Voltaire, Hugo, Zola and Anatole France will occur in this connection.

The most recent, and one of the greatest of this Constellation of brilliant anti-clerical writers, was Anatole France (1844—1924), most of whose works have a markedly anti-clerical tendency. One recalls those two magnificent satires, *Penguin Island* and *The Revolt of the Angels*. The former is, indeed, one of the most devastating satires ever penned, a veritable Rogues' Gallery; in the whole vast canvas of Humanity there appear only two honest men, the short-sighted monk who baptises the penguins by mistake, and the anarchist who blows up the industrial metropolis with a pre-atomic bomb. *The Revolt of the Angels* is a modern account of Lucifer's rebellion against God, very amusing and decidedly "not for Children," as our German friends describe such Rabelaisian romances.

Perhaps, however, the keenest satire ever penned by this great writer was the splendid short story, *The Procurator of Judaea*. Indeed, it would be difficult to find a more effective anti-Christian satire anywhere. Neither Voltaire nor Hugo ever composed anything more deadly than this tremendous satire on Christian origins. The concluding paragraph, where Pilate cannot even remember the name of his most famous prisoner, is absolutely devastating, and for sheer effectiveness is one of the world's classics.

The plot of the famous story takes place in the first century. It is of course quite impossible to reproduce the brilliance and irony of the original French, which moves with superb art to its inevitable climax. Indeed, like all great stylists, much in Anatole France is lost in even the best English translation. A Roman nobleman, Lamia, has returned from extensive travels in Rome's eastern dependencies. This long absence had not, originally, been a voluntary one, but the result of a youthful amorous escapade incurring the anger of the puritanical Emperor Tiberius. After the Emperor's death his successor had permitted Lamia to return home after eighteen years' exile. The story opens with the returned prodigal looking out over the bay of Naples from the fashionable seaside resort, a Roman Torquay. Our Roman aristocrat is recalled from the scenic marvels before him by the appearance of an elderly Roman gentleman being carried past him on a litter.

Lamia at once recognises him as his old friend and former host, Pontius Pilate, formerly Procurator (governor) of Judaea, who had entertained him at his official residence in Jerusalem while Lamia was making his compulsory visit to the East. The recognition is mutual, cordial greetings are exchanged, and Pilate informed Lamia that he had now retired and was at present taking the waters as a cure for the rheumatism from which he had suffered since his return. He invited Lamia to dinner at his villa overlooking the Bay. The invitation is accepted for the following night and they part on cordial terms with expressions of mutual pleasure at their unexpected meeting.

At the appointed hour Lamia duly turns up, and after an excellent dinner the two old friends sit at the window of Pilate's villa overlooking a splendid view of the coast, and exchange reminiscences. Pilate, who does most of the talking, makes a bitter attack on his former subjects, the Jews, describing them as ignorant fanatics, without gratitude or culture and obsessed by their devotion to their tribal god Jehovah. He did his best, but eventually the incessant intrigues of the Jews at Rome had forced him, very reluctantly, to hand in his resignation. The new Emperor Caligula, was surrounded by Jewish cronies, whose hatred continued to pursue Pilate and prevented his getting another post, so disillusioned and rheumatic, the old Procurator of Judaea had retired to spend his last years in the pleasant surroundings of the Bay of Naples. Upon Lamia timidly suggesting that he had heard that Pilate had perhaps been a trifle severe in his dealings with his Jewish clients, Pilate angrily declared that people who talked about treating Jews leniently didn't know what an impossibly stiff-necked breed they were. Such people had to be dealt with in a drastic manner. He, Pilate, had only done his duty as a Roman official, and he thought that the authorities at Rome had let him down badly, and the Emperor should have stood by his officials.

Lamia hastened to agree with his indignant-host. Certainly Pilate should have been backed up by Rome in the disciplinary measures he had been compelled to take in order to restore law and order. Everything he had done was no doubt for the Jews' own good, and of course everyone knew they were an impossible crowd, while their religion was a particularly barbarous and fanatical cult of a tribal god, one Jehovah. Of course, like a cultured Roman gentleman, he was prepared to make allowance for eccentric barbarous cults, but from what he had seen and heard Jehovah and his worshippers were quite outside the pale of any civilised community. However, Lamia went on, while the Jewish men were nothing but a lot of savages, their women were more agreeable. Some in fact were quite good-looking. One in particular, he added nostalgically, had greatly impressed him by her voluptuous beauty and her superb Oriental dancing! her name was Mary of Magdala. She had ended up by rather suddenly joining the followers of a young wonder-worker from Galilee, Jesus of Nazareth. "And I have since heard that he was later executed for his part in some sedition or other. Perhaps, Pontius, you may remember the case?"

"Pontius Pilate furrowed his eyebrows and raised his hand to his head like a man racking his memory for some forgotten incident. 'Jesus,' he remarked thoughtfully, 'Jesus of Nazareth. No, I can't remember anyone of that name.'"

Comment is superfluous! This is the irony which kills.

## Mysteries Ancient and Modern

By COLIN McCALL

The University of Oxford is traditionally the home of lost causes. Nevertheless it was with some surprise that I read a recent statement of belief by Prof. H. H. Price, Professor of Logic, given at the annual conference of Modern Churchmen in Oxford in July. According to the *Manchester Guardian* (29/7/55), Prof. Price believes in ghosts and haunted houses, though he does not think they are so common as psychical researchers might wish.

It is true that the findings of Mr. Geoffrey Gorer in *Exploring English Character*—through the medium of a questionnaire to readers of the Sunday newspaper, *The People*—led me to expect a belief in ghosts in about one-sixth of the population, but I was sufficiently naive to think that this fraction would be composed of somewhat simple-minded folk, nor did I expect it to include an Oxonian Logician. Prof. Price seems to have been perfectly sincere in expressing his views; unfortunately I have no means of knowing the basis for them. Mr. Gorer informs me that one-seventh of us have actually seen ghosts. Whether the Professor is to be reckoned among these or the remaining one forty-second who apparently believe in ghosts at second-hand, I cannot say. It is disconcerting either way.

No doubt we have all had strange experiences, particularly in childhood, and there is a strong animus to attribute these to mysterious causes. The mysterious has a peculiar fascination for the primitive mind, child or adult, and ghost stories, fictitious or allegedly factual, remain as popular as ever. Yet the history of civilisation is very largely synonymous with the elucidation of mysteries. For primitive man most things are mysterious; ghosts and spirits abound and are responsible for the happenings around him; they inhabit natural objects as well as animals (including human beings). And there is a certain rude logic about such savage beliefs that is absent from modern spiritualism (even that of a Professor of Logic!). Tylor—to whom we are most indebted for information about primitive animism—made this pertinent observation: "But the modern vulgar who ignore or repudiate the notion of ghosts of things, while retaining the notion of ghosts of persons, have fallen into a hybrid state of opinion which has neither the logic of the savage nor of the civilized philosopher."

It is common knowledge that Prof. Price believes in Extra Sensory Perception or, as he terms it, "paranormal cognition," and he referred to it at the conference. At present, he said, telepathy and clairvoyance are not subject to voluntary control but they might be when we had learned more about them. "The most that can be done is to provide conditions which are favourable for their operation. This is probably the point of curious traditional practices like crystal-gazing which seems so utterly silly to hard-headed persons. Such practices are probably rough and ready methods for encouraging unconscious mental contents to come to the surface." It is possible, of course, to bring one's "unconscious mental contents" to the surface by concentrating one's attention upon a crystal ball, but I fail to see what this has to do with telepathy, clairvoyance or, indeed, fortune-telling. It is a more or less haphazard way of probing one's unconscious memory; it does not enable one to "read" somebody else's mind, "see" what is out of sight, or foretell the future.

What psychical research needed, continued the Professor, was a philosophy—a set of concepts which would unify the paranormal facts. The difficulty was that the facts so far

discovered by psychical researches conflicted in certain ways with what was called the scientific outlook. People assumed that there was something more real in what was publicly observable, and the queer facts which the researches had discovered were very difficult to reconcile with this materialistic theory. (Thus the *Manchester Guardian*).

I do not think it is true to say that people assume there is greater reality in publicly observable facts. We all accept the existence of many "real" phenomena that are not publicly observable: thoughts and toothache for example. But if the word "reliable" is substituted for "real," Professor Price's remark becomes significant. What is publicly observable is generally more reliable than what is recounted. And so far as ESP is concerned, most people who believe in it have not seen it demonstrated publicly (except perhaps on the variety stage where deception is easy); they have only read or heard about it.

Granted, most of our information is received at second-hand, but that which is acceptable is either credible or, at least, not incredible. I have never been to New York and, in consequence I have to get my knowledge of the city at one remove. Sufficient evidence of this kind is available to make it reasonable for me to accept the existence of New York, its harbour, its skyscrapers, its inhabitants and so on. This is not the case with ESP. I hear many stories of coincidental happenings that have been interpreted as telepathic or clairvoyant but they are mostly unreliable or unsupported. I have occasionally participated in simple ESP experiments without witnessing any remarkable results, and my own highest percentage was achieved by the straightforward repetition of cards in a specific order, viz A B C D E, A B C D E, A B C D E, and so on. On the other hand I have found simple, credulous people to be the most fervent believers in crystal-gazing, fortune-telling, clairvoyance, telepathy and spiritualism.

The name of Dr. J. B. Rhine is likely to occur in connection with such matters, for it is widely accepted that the "parapsychologist" of Duke University has experimentally proved extra-sensory perception. Dr. Rhine, like Dr. S. G. Soal in this country, makes much of the mathematics of probability and, when he achieves results far in excess of what this would lead him to expect, he infers telepathy or clairvoyance as the case may be. But the late Joseph F. Rinn (who spent a lifetime investigating spiritualism and ESP without finding them valid), pointed out that Dr. Rhine "was not justified in using mathematics in judging a case into which fraud could intrude and the laws of chance were nullified when he had to depend on the honesty of individuals, a factor that did not enter into chemistry or life insurance." And a questionnaire sent to members of the American Psychological Association in 1938 brought only 5 favourable replies on ESP out of a total of 360. Furthermore there is little doubt that Dr. Rhine can be hoodwinked. The medium, Mrs. Eileen Garrett, achieved extraordinary results in telepathy and clairvoyance at Duke University but utterly failed to repeat them in London for Dr. Soal.

Where Mrs. Garrett failed, however, Dr. Soal believes

—NEXT WEEK—

H. CUTNER ON TELEPATHY

An Atheist Doctor on Religion

that others (two out of the hundred and sixty subjects to be precise) have succeeded—in telepathy though not in clairvoyance. Here again, though, the results are dependent upon mathematical probability and this in itself is insufficient. Mr. Rinn made suggestions for eliminating fraud, such as the substitution of a pack of blank cards instead of those bearing symbols, without the knowledge of the subject or "sensitive." If he continued to call out symbols when blank cards were dealt it would rule out ESP. Dr. Rhine refused to avail himself of the various safeguards proposed by Mr. Rinn, apparently because the latter was a magician and not a mathematician. Even more significantly, Dr. Rhine declined an invitation to conduct experiments under independent supervision at John Hopkins University, with all expenses paid.

Instead we are expected to take on trust stories of amazing runs of card-guessing, either as the card is turned or before it is turned, and we are told how impossible these are in relation to "mathematical probability." Dr. Soal's mathematics are no doubt sound (he is Lecturer in Mathematics at the University of London), though the probability theory has been questioned; but this is not merely a matter of figures. There is still the human element even when the agent and subject neither see nor speak to each other; even when a third person gives the signals to the subject. Maybe I am "hard-headed" but I am unable to accept the validity of experiments like these at second-hand. And I am convinced that the doctors need the help of magicians in performing them.

## Correspondence

### THE SOUND BARRIER

The observation in "News and Notes" about the proposed broadcasts by Humanists is ungenerous. Both H. J. Blackham and Hector Hawton are outspoken Freethinkers in the broad sense. H.J.B. is our friend and worked for many years with Chapman Cohen on the Secular Education League. A more appropriate comment would be that we congratulate the Humanists upon their success in penetrating the sound barrier, and we hope that it will soon be the turn of the Secularists.

A. D. CORRICK.

### ASTROLOGY

Mr. Ridley, off his subject again, is talking nonsense in talking about "astrological determinism." There is no such thing. He has confused determinism with fatalism. Mr. Cohen made no such confusion.

H. J. GRATOREX.

### THE BASIC CAUSE OF WAR

Mr. Reader's article is a very fine one indeed and perfectly true. He says that "religious neurotics deliberately stimulate and provoke young people to have large families." They do this by blessing Human Love and Sex in Marriage and cursing it outside marriages. And they deny the right to contraception to those too poor to marry. The Naturists do not have large families—they have more commonsense.

R. L. HUMPHRIS.

Mr. E. H. Grout is to be commended on his excellent opening article on "Romanism and History." I read it with the greatest interest and appreciation. This is a facet of Romanish mendacity seldom explored by many freethinkers.

The controversial works of the late Dr. Coulton should be read for a really convincing exposé of the rhetorical "histories" of Romanish writers of the Belloc mentality.

ALFRED ALMOND.

### THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

"Hibernicus" (July 1) refers to an article on the problem of evil in Mind. I assume the reference is to "Evil and Omnipotence" (April, 1955) and would mention that this also states "If you are prepared to say that . . . there are limits to what an omnipotent being can do, then the problem of evil will not arise." Omni-

potence does not include the ability to do anything inconceivable. Prof. J. Wisdom, in the same journal, has argued that if this is the case, then there might be something in this world of great value involving evil as a logically necessary condition of it, and if so, that God could not prevent the evil because he is limited by the laws of logic. I must add that he also says that it is probable that some of the evils in the world are not logically necessary to a compensating good, because there are so many evils.

C. W. CLARK.

### THE WISDOM OF THE UPANISHADS

Most Freethinkers know that the Catholicism of the Breton fisherman, the Portuguese vine-dresser, or the Irish milk-maid is in a class apart from the urbane and sophisticated subtleties of St. Thomas Acquinas and the Monseignors and Rev. Fathers who follow in the footsteps of the "Angelic Doctor."

Similarly, the crude polytheism of the Indian masses is only the "popular" aspect of Hinduism. The cultured and wealthy Brahmin caste possesses a completely different creed; a subtle and highly philosophical pantheism.

The "Upanishads" are various Sanskrit writings composed between 1,000 and 500 B.C. being roughly contemporary with the Hebrew writings known as the Old Testament, and it is interesting to compare the calm and serene dignity of Indian thought with the frenzied and neurotic Hebrew preoccupation with "sin" and "atonement," with guilt and suffering and self-reproach.

The following is my summary of Upanishadic teaching:

All existence is one; all selves are aspects of one Self.

Any division of existence into "good" and "evil" manifestations is meaningless; that which is, is necessarily so, and cannot be otherwise.

The Self is essentially impersonal; it cannot assume any identity until it is clothed with material attributes. When the Self discards material attributes ("death"), it ceases to possess any separate identity. Therefore the Self is not an isolated entity, such as the theistic conception of "God"; it can only be conceived by contemplating Nature in its entirety.

Here is a translation by Max Müller from one of the chief Upanishads:

"There is no other seer but he, there is no other hearer but he, there is no other perceiver but he, there is no other knower but he.

This is thy Self, the ruler within, the immortal."

S. W. BROOKS.

### MY THREE BOOKS

God And My Neighbour is "tops" for me, as model argument and for writing craft. McCabe's *Rationalist Encyclopaedia* is up close, for scholarship and inspiration. The Cohen essays have to come in the three, for courage, dash and clear thought. No reasonable man, having read these, could remain a believer; that's a certainty. They pack great thought by men who could write.

Canada.

J.F.K.

## MORALS WITHOUT RELIGION

By MARGARET KNIGHT

(of B.B.C. fame)

Price 6/-

Postage 3d.

Pioneer Press, 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1

### Special Book Offer

While stocks last we can offer the following parcel containing: *Lift Up Your Heads* (Kent) published 3s. 6d.; *Has Humanity Gained from Unbelief* (Bradlaugh) published 1s.; *Marriage, Sacerdotal or Secular* (Du Cann) published 1s.; *Rome or Reason* (Ingersoll) published 1s.; *Age of Reason* (Paine) published 2s. 6d.; *What Is The Sabbath Day* (Cutner) published 1s. 3d. The whole parcel (valued 10s. 3d.) offered to readers of *The Freethinker* for 7s. 6d. post free. Cash with order. Strictly nett.

FRIENDLY informal international house. Plentiful food, company. Moderate terms.—Chris & Stella Rankin, 43 West Park, Eltham, S.E.9. Tel.: ELT. 1761.

WANTED at Headquarters, female clerk with general office experience. Knowledge of typing essential, some shorthand desirable. Active Secularist preferred.—Write giving full particulars, past experience, stating age and wages required to "Clerical," Box F, 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.