

The Freethinker

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Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

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SOME years ago I saw a film (Catholic-sponsored, if I remember aright) entitled *The Song of Bernadette*, which was prefaced by the words: "For those who believe in God no explanation is necessary; for those who do not believe in God no explanation is possible." To the latter part of this statement, on which it is not my purpose to comment here, the atheist might well demur. But to the first part of it he would, I think, raise no objection. All sorts of things that those of us without an all-embracing faith would question, qualify, or reject, are accepted unhesitatingly and uncritically by men and women who believe in another order of reality than that of which we have knowledge and experience.

The Roman Catholic may well hold the view there are healing forces active at Lourdes that admit of no physiological or psychological explanation; he has no time for or patience with those who think otherwise. But despite divisive doctrinal differences, all Christians (possibly even Unitarians, to whom the application of the name Christian is, perhaps, something of a misnomer) share to a greater or less extent with the Catholic, tacitly or avowedly, this notion that "no explanation is necessary" in matters regarding which a rational explanation is surely desirable. For the Christian has one postulate, one certitude, that explains all so far as he is concerned—*God exists*. Why cudgel your brains seeking the wherefore of a variety of phenomena when this momentous "fact" makes everything clear and perfectly intelligible?

Theology and the "Why"

How did life originate? Why are we here? How did the universe come into being? What meaning has it, and what meaning our world? These are questions the theologian loves to raise in order to provide a neat and ready answer. That there may be no Why? and no meaning of any significance for man is either something that has not occurred to him or, if it has, something he dismisses as slightly absurd. Issues that have engaged the astutest minds, but which, at the present stage of our knowledge, they have had to leave unanswered, present no great difficulty to the theologically-disposed. In that remarkable classic of rationalist inspiration, *The Martyrdom of Man*, Winwood Reade puts it this way: "Where did the atoms come from? How were they made? What were they made for? In reply to these questions theology is garrulous but science is dumb."

Science versus Theology

For those with celestial faith the conception of God as Father of Humanity furnishes a sound and sufficient reason for every dispensation and felicity of Nature, and inspires, even in the case of natural evil, the consolation that there are Divine workings for ultimate good that are not to be perceived or understood by our finite minds. No laboured thought, no tentative theorising, no meticulous research, no statement carefully weighed and based scrupulously on verified data, are called for. Those who, by patient study of

phenomena and a sedulous marshalling of fact, would strip the universe of the obscurities that still partly enshroud it and hinder a complete intellectual understanding, are on the wrong track. They may be learned and clever men. That is not in dispute. But they have the outlook and approach of fools, nevertheless. For the whys and wherefores of existence are sufficiently revealed to even the humblest mortal who has the requisite belief in the Unseen. To him and all of his kind no explanation, other than one simple straightforward one, is necessary to account for the most wonderful and ineffable things that man has experienced and beheld. . . .

The Age of Faith

I write these lines on a mellow October day as I sit surrounded by high grey walls, forlornly beautiful in

decay, that form the ruined cloisters of an old Cistercian abbey, three miles or so from the madding centre of a large manufacturing city in Northern England. This place, which I have often frequented, is pleasant and peaceful, a silent witness to a vanished medieval world in the midst of the rush and roar of our modern machine age. For four centuries the inmates of this once prosperous monastery lived the quiet uneventful lives of men who had renounced the world, animated by the singular conviction that they knew the great truth about life and death, never doubting that "knowledge" of God's existence was the only "knowledge" needful to explain all that is on earth and in heaven. No stirring or imaginative thought, no original or radical ideas, ever issued from within these—or from within other monastery walls. The most that can be said in favour of the monks (I speak of monks in general, not of any particular community or order) is that they may have helped to keep burning, through long centuries of cultural twilight, the feeble flickering rushlight of learning, inherited from far-off classical times, but so nearly—so very nearly—extinguished by the chill winds of the Dark Ages. Whether these pious abjurers of the world were truly disseminators of education and scholarship, as H. A. L. Fisher in his *History of Europe* has suggested, is a moot point; but the copying and storing of manuscripts were certainly two, even if but relatively minor, of their activities. Yet, however empty and futile in other ways we today may deem their lives to have been, this much at least is to be advanced in their defence: they lived before that great intellectual ferment, the Renaissance, which so profoundly affected the social and cultural life of Europe. They belonged essentially to the Age of Faith when it was not only natural, but respectable and prudent, that a man should believe implicitly and unequivocally all that the Church decreed he should believe.

An Extraordinary Medley

Four or five centuries have come and gone since then; and, incredible as it will doubtless appear to the future historian, there are many still who live by faith, not light—who presume to think that everything worth knowing about

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

For Those Who Believe in God

By G. I. BENNETT

everything that is can be found in that extraordinary medley, the Christian Bible. How long we must wait for the dawn of Universal Enlightenment I do not know, although—despite the many discouraging signs and tendencies prevailing today—I am sanguine enough (I hope not unjustifiably so) to think it will dawn some day. But when that time does come the mental outlook characterised by the attitude, "For those who believe in God no explanation is necessary," will have been finally swept away to be replaced by man's adult reliance upon himself, as the light of his mind spreads its broad, illumining beam and makes possible the fashioning of a civilisation really worthy of *homo sapiens*.

Bradlaugh and the Monarchy

By F. A. RIDLEY

THE recent hullabaloo about the prospective marriage of Princess Margaret with a "commoner," Captain Peter Townsend, does not confer much credit on either the British Press or the British people who read it. The persons concerned play no important part in the life of the nation, and any publicity that they may receive is due solely to the accident of birth; surely a somewhat peculiar recommendation in what is, at any rate, supposed to be "the century of the common man and woman." The only really interesting feature about the marriage (if it ever had come off) is one not surely, calculated to arouse much enthusiasm in the pious breasts of Lord Beaverbrook and his fellow press readers, that is, of course, the fact that Captain Townsend, as a divorced person, albeit an innocent one in current ecclesiastical jargon, cannot re-marry legally in the eyes of the most powerful and vocal section of Christian opinion. Accordingly, whilst we hardly expect the gallant captain to apply for membership of the National Secular Society, his marriage at any rate would have been a victory for secular conceptions of morality, is it perhaps to console them for this "spiritual" setback, that the clergy of the Anglican Church have just received a rise in the "filthy lucre" which they receive in material cash as a reward for their exclusively "spiritual" services?

Neither the present writer nor, one imagines, his readers, takes any personal interest in the royal alliance beyond expressing approval for the vindication of secular morality that such an alliance, if actually achieved, would embody. However, what we may perhaps, term the campaign of gossip and of cheap publicity which has surrounded the whole affair, indicates one of the most unhealthy features of present-day British society, what one may call the cult of "royalism," the snobbish adulation which surrounds, often in the most ridiculous forms, the persons, not only of the reigning monarch and of her consort, but of her whole family down to "the third and fourth generation." Very ordinary people whose mental attainments would never attract the smallest attention in private life, are loaded with praise that would be extravagant even if applied to men and women of outstanding ability and of *real* value to Humanity. The immense diffusion of the popular press has enlarged this cult to fantastic proportions. The present writer is no novice in political studies, and he is well aware of any serious arguments that can be attributed in favour of the monarchical principle, even though as far as most freethinkers are concerned, it is unlikely that they carry much conviction.

But the sort of oriental sycophancy which the Princess Margaret—Townsend affair has produced, has got nothing to do with political science, and reflects absolutely no credit on our national character.

Time was when the English speaking freethought movement was republican almost by definition. It is sufficient in the above connection to recall the names and writings of its two most famous representatives, "Tom" Paine and his "*Rights of Man*," and of Charles Bradlaugh and his "*Impeachment of the House of Brunswick*," that is incidentally of the *present* royal family and I have often considered that it is a very great pity that one of our more "advanced" publishers does not reissue the latter work, the last edition of which, personally revised by the author, is dated 1881. Much water has flowed under Westminster Bridge since that now distant year, and, if the impeachment of the House of Brunswick" is not now a serious political prospect, the book itself deserves re-issuing, if only as an historical classic. Joseph McCabe's extraordinary judgement that, "Bradlaugh was a man of slight culture," finds no support in this mine of historical information, not about, say, Russian Tsars, but about *English* monarchs! Its reissue would furnish republicans with Ethical weapons, and even supporters of the monarchy could only benefit from learning how it has actually worked in the not so very remote past.

"Is She by God."

In his critique of the British monarchy, Mr. Bradlaugh directed the same deadly logic based upon the most accurate research against the Hanoverian Dynasty, 1714, as, in other fields, he argued in opposition to the Biblical dogmas of the Old and New Testaments. Cleaning up cesspools is an unpleasant but absolutely necessary task of social hygiene. There were many such in the annals of the early Hanoverians, and one rises from a perusal of the Bradlaugh narrative scarcely crediting that such an unpleasant crowd as the first three Georges could ever have existed. They may, as our author starts by affirming, have been actually less dangerous to social progress and to civil liberty than had been their predecessors, the Catholic Stuarts, deposed by the "glorious revolution" of 1688. But "The House of Brunswick" lacked the romantic charm which whatever their faults, has caused the ill-fated Stuarts to retain some measure of personal affection. The Brunswickers, contrarily, were just sordidly contemptible. In which respect even the first three Georges were surpassed by George the Fourth, so signally ill-named "the first gentleman in Europe." Of the many flashes of (mostly unconscious!) humour with which the "Four Georges" periodically entertained their loyal subjects; one recorded of the Fourth George assumes preeminence. This king, it will be remembered, was on very bad terms with his wife whom he had prevented by force from entering Westminster Abbey during his coronation—a guard of professional pugilists were hired for that purpose. The next year (1826) Napoleon died in St. Helena, upon which auspicious occasion courtiers informed the king, "your majesty's greatest enemy is dead." To which the relieved monarch replied: "Is she by God."

It is in the *Impeachment* that there occurs Bradlaugh's famous description of German princes who—then and now—wander round the courts of Europe looking for crowns and royal marriages, much as other humbler unemployed frequent the labour exchanges.

"I loathe these small German breast-bested wanderers whose only merit is their loving hatred for one another. In their own land they wither and vegetate unnoticed; here we pay them highly to marry and perpetuate a pauper prince-race. If they do nothing they are good. If they do loyalty gilds the vice till it looks like virtue" (1881 edition, page 99). The whole booklet, heavily documented

represents a mine of information and if only to redress the balance which is always tilted in favour of kings and governments, ought to be made a required reading for all students of modern English history.

On the whole it is probable that the misfortunes of most of their continental relations have reformed the morals and malpractices normally practiced by the earlier monarchs of the present line, since Edward the Seventh—to whose current activities as Prince of Wales Bradlaugh chiefly refers—the monarchy has been free from personal scandals, and the two last Georges certainly did more to “earn the rate for the job” than the first four of that name did. At the same time certain new contradictions have arisen since Bradlaugh's day, one of which, at least, one may assume he

would have noted: the early Brunswick monarchs were the officially Christian kings of a Christian people. Whilst today we have the grotesque anomaly of a compulsory Christian “Head” of a “Commonwealth” of which eighty per cent. are not Christians at all, and of which ninety-five per cent. are not members of the established churches of England and Scotland to which the “Head” is forced to adhere. Bradlaugh would hardly have neglected so obvious a point, at least, that the marriage of a divorced “Commoner” with Royalty would weaken the link between the monarchy and its official membership of the Church and it may indirectly serve the cause of progress. But one may reasonably doubt if the wedding issues of the popular press would draw the attention of their vast public to this incidental result of the marriage.

The Future of Rationalism

(A report of the Address delivered by Mr. Hector Hawton, Managing Editor of *The Literary Guide*, to the Ethical Union Conference, 1955.)

A JOINT Development Committee consisting of three members each from the RPA (Rationalists) and the Ethical Union (Humanists) was set up some time ago to consider practical measures for closer co-operation in the formation of groups and the holding of conferences. It was therefore natural to ask what remaining differences of opinion, if any, existed between rationalists and humanists. Mr. Hawton said that in his own opinion—and it should not be taken that he was speaking officially for the RPA—he could find no real difference between humanism and rationalism. He had written a pamphlet, *Humanism Explained*, and if the title were altered to *Rationalism Explained*, he would not feel obliged to alter a single line. He thought that far too much attention was paid to possible shades of theoretical difference in the two terms. What was important was that rationalists and humanists should see eye to eye on practical issues. Rationalism and humanism were different labels for the same wine, but unfortunately this led to confusion. For legal purposes, it was necessary to have a name and a definition of aims, in support of which legacies might be left, but a verbal definition gave much less information than did the concrete fact of an organization with a history.

Defining the meaning of labels was a waste of time; they must be taken in relation to a concrete organization. When the RPA was founded, the term “rationalism” was adopted in preference to several rivals. It was defined as “the mental attitude which unreservedly accepts the supremacy of reason and aims at establishing a system of philosophy and ethics verifiable by experience and independent of all arbitrary assumptions or authority.” Mr. Hawton did not think that this formula was any use today unless taken in the context of the RPA's record. From the start the RPA was representative of various shades of thought and was therefore a coalition. It constituted a united front against religion, but Charles A. Watts rigorously avoided the political issues that divided so many who were opposed to supernaturalism. This policy was fully justified by its early successes. The cheap reprints and subsequently the Thinker's Library reached a large public. But after the last war a change in the climate of opinion had taken place which was unfavourable to rationalist propaganda of the early type. This created a new situation which must be realistically faced or the rationalist movement would die out. With the dwindling of the movement the early policy had become falsified. The once flourishing freethought movement on the Continent had

been almost destroyed by Communism. In the USA humanists were smeared as “Reds.”

A new generation had grown up in this country without a religious background and so they were not interested in an anti-religious movement. Some of them—often the children of rationalist parents—were returning to the Church. It was naive to suppose that intellectual arguments could prevent people from returning to the Church for emotional reasons. This was one of the weaknesses of the older type of rationalist propaganda, which was based on pre-Freudian psychology, and to wish to win arguments against religious people was rather childish. The great advance of science in the past 50 years had not altogether favoured the anti-religious line. Those who believed that such Biblical stories as the Flood had no base whatsoever were shocked when archaeologists produced evidence. This situation was exploited by apologists, together with the discoveries in physics which rendered the older type of rigid materialism out of date. It was argued that in such a mysterious universe “anything could happen.”

Rationalism, in Mr. Hawton's view, failed to interpret the changes in the scientific picture quickly enough to the general public. It was no use worrying about Darwin. The Darwinian controversy was over and we were living in the atomic age. The younger generation was concerned with practical issues rather than such abstractions as “the supremacy of reason” which nowadays had a somewhat eighteenth-century flavour. Mr. Hawton believed that there was a considerable public today which was not interested in religion or anti-religion, but which sought a way of life appropriate to the modern world. It was true that the broadcasts of Mrs. Knight had been a surprising success, but the silly season was on and there were no murders at the time. This public was not sufficiently catered for at present and a great opportunity was being missed. Rationalism should make a positive contribution to those who were outside the Church as well as trying to detach people from the Church, but to have two organizations—Rationalists and Humanists—seemed a wasteful duplication. The more closely they could co-operate the more effective their work would be, and it was for this purpose that the Joint Development Committee had come into existence. We must either adapt ourselves to modern conditions, or die.

Mr. Hawton's talk naturally gave rise to controversy. Some speakers were entirely favourable to his ideas, others offered critical comment, Mr. Howell Smith defended the

(Concluded on next page)

This Believing World

Twas indeed a famous victory! Whatever else has or has not been said on the matter, the fact remains that the Church of Christ on Princess Margaret's decision, has come out top—with most parsons, bishops, and cardinals, delighted that her marriage has not taken place. A "commoner" is bad enough—but a divorced commoner—really, it is infamous when "our Lord" laid down the law nearly 2,000 years ago! A "Christian" marriage is absolutely indissoluble.

But what did "our Lord" actually say? In Matt. 19, 9, we get, "Whosoever shall put away his wife except it be for fornication . . ."—the word "except" here makes nonsense of an "indissoluble" marriage. In other words, divorce is allowed by "our Lord." But few, if any, of our brilliant journalists who have written reams of commentary appear to have read the passage in Matthew. And of course, any properly instructed theologian will make mincemeat of "our Lord's" words when it comes to defending "no divorce whatever."

Nothing, however, in the daily press equals the satisfaction now of the Archbishop of Canterbury. He was most careful to announce that it was not the Church which influenced the Princess but, searching for the "will of God," she herself found it. Of course, there was plenty of "advice" pious advice, but it was the "will of God" which eventually prevailed. Our dailies, to show what they thought of God's will, published a number of letters from readers who have thrown over both the Church and the will of God. Even some of our most earnest Christians have seen through the hypocrisy which flares out always when marriage is discussed by the Church.

And what about our Prime Minister who has the task of nominating our faithful bishops? Not only is he a "divorced" person, but he actually was married, not in Church but before a secular Registrar! Even some of our most religious and voluble national dailies find it difficult to comment on that. Just as our own reverent Rationalists and Humanists will find it difficult to explain the victory of the Church when we are constantly assured that the "fight" is over, and new tactics are necessary to rope in the disillusioned believers.

The ignorant people who, in their sinfulness—and it can come only from a wicked heart—no longer believe in Eternal Punishment, should take heed of the solemn warning of Pope Pius XII. In a message to Catholic Jurists, he said that "Eternal Punishment is a dogmatic fact." Of course it is. If the Christian Church did not have a policeman handy or, as Burns put it, "a hangman's whip," even Roman Catholics might laugh at "eternal Punishment." And once a believer begins to laugh at religion—God help Jesus! No, that could never be allowed; and frizzling in the fires of Hell will always remain a dogma of the true Christian religion.

Alas, with pain we report that the Pope, who has not been very well, repudiates with scorn the solemn injunction in the Epistle of James that he should call for the "elders of the church; and let them pray over him anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord." This appears to be a far too dangerous proceeding for the Pope's doctors who

prefer to give him some purely materialistic tonic injections instead. On the other hand, James ought to be good enough for all other good Catholics—and Protestants for that matter. The Bible is God's Precious Word, every dot in it is necessary for Salvation, and any Christian who does not follow all its pious behests—in spite of tonics—will go to that horrid place where there will be, as Jesus promised, weeping and gnashing of teeth for eternity.

Backed up by the whole Christian world Bishop Sherrill of the U.S.A. insists that the whole world must be Christian. It cannot be part Christian and part Pagan. With that beautiful tolerance which characterises true Christianity, the worthy Bishop points out that Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, and all the other fancy religions are Pagan—the one true religion is and must be Christianity. But there are 392 sects of the true Christian religion, all bellowing at each other that they are wrong. What about a Roman Catholic going for a Calvinist, or a Presbyterian going for a Mormon, or a Christian Scientist going for every other religion, Christian or Pagan? What is Bishop Sherrill going to do with them?

THE FUTURE OF RATIONALISM

(Concluded from page 363)

policy of the early RPA, in which the keynote had been one of challenge. Mr. Lloyd (Ethical Union) thought the terms Humanism and Rationalism were far from being synonymous, to which Mr. Hawton, in line with his main position, re-affirmed that the theoretical differences in terminology were not significant if in fact Rationalists and Humanists had the same general aims.

Mr. Hawton's insistence that the progress of science had weakened the case for arguing against religion was, surprisingly, not challenged. But he made, in his talk, a reference to *The Freethinker* which here calls for some correction. He spoke of "the British journal, *The Freethinker*, which has always preached that religion, and religion only, was the one great enemy," going on to say that young people today were more interested "in their private lives and how to stop war, and in birth control, divorce law, capital punishment and so on." We must remind him that these matters form part of the programme of the N.S.S., in connection with which *The Freethinker* was dealing with them before Mr. Hawton came into existence.

G. H. TAYLOR.

AT MUM'S KNEE

"Mother told me so," is a very good reason up to a certain point. She is likely to tell her child the truth as far as she knows it. But outside the sphere of her interests and affections she is very rarely a thinker. Even in religion it is the worship, and not the doctrines, to which she is really attached. The truth is, she tells the child what the priest tells her. She is an unwitting instrument of deception. She unconsciously promotes a wretched imposture. She enslaves the beings she loves to an ensnaring superstition. She does not know that she is a tool in the hands of designing priests, who prey upon her and, at the same time, use her to rear a fresh generation of victims. —G. W. Foote.

NEXT WEEK

REMOVE THE DEAD HAND!

By R. A. RIDLEY

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.

To Correspondents

R. McGRATH.—Please send address (not for publication) and publication will follow.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

- Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park).—Every Sunday, 7.30 p.m.: Messrs. DAY, WHARRAD, NEWTON, SHEPPARD and MURPHY.
- Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Every Sunday at 8 p.m.: J. W. BARKER and E. MILLS.
- Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every weekday, 1.0 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK and CORSAIR. Every Sunday: 8 p.m.: Messrs. MILLS, CAVANAGH and others.
- 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. ARTHUR, EBURY and WOOD. *The Freethinker* on sale at Marble Arch.

INDOOR

- Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Satis Cafe, 40 Cannon Street). — Sunday, November 20, 7 p.m.: Prof. P. S. FLORENCE, "Religion and Poverty."
- Bradford N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, November 20, 6.45 p.m.: C. W. KEARMAN, "The Early Pioneers of Astronomy."
- Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1.). —Tuesday, November 22, 7 p.m.: D. R. MORIARTY, "The Challenge of Mau Mau."
- Glasgow District R.P.A. (Central Halls, 25 Bath Street).—Sunday, November 20, 3 p.m.: DR. R. S. MEEK, "Marxism and Rationalism."
- Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, November 20, 6.30 p.m.: B. BRADLAUGH BONNER, "The Abortion Problem Today."
- Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street). — Sunday, November 20, 2.30 p.m.: A. HOWARD, "An Enquiry into the Nature of Scientific Thought."
- Secularist Discussion Group (121 Caledonian Road, 5 minutes' from King's Cross).—Tuesday, November 22, 7 p.m.: "Women and Secularism." Discussion opened by Miss K. Lamb.
- South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1.).—Sunday, November 20, 11a.m.: A. ROBERTSON, M.A., "Three Great Historians: Gibbon, Carlyle, Macaulay."
- West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1.).—Sunday, November 20, 7.15 p.m.: G. WESTON, "Catholic Dogma."

Notes and News

THE Manchester Branch of the National Secular Society opened their indoor season at the New Millgate Hotel with a lecture by Mr. G. H. Taylor on "The Freethought Parties and the Future," visitors coming from various places outside the city, and from as far away as Preston and Accrington. Thanks to the courtesy of Mr. Hector Hawton the

The Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund

Previously acknowledged, £1,011 Os. 1d.; T. P., £1; T. H. Derrett, 7s. 6d.; J. Scarlett, £5 5s.; J. Humphrey, 10s.; A. Hancock, 1s.; R. Morrell, 5s. Total to date, £1,018 8s. 7d.

meeting had also been noted in the *Literary Guide and Rationalist Review*, which at the same time gave an advance notice of Margaret Knight's forthcoming Manchester lecture under the auspices of the Manchester Branch N.S.S. Mr. Taylor also appealed in his lecture for a wide publicity for Mrs. Knight's meeting (Dec. 11th).

* * * *

Mrs. Knight's meeting at Glasgow on Oct. 16th has given rise to a storm of controversy in the *Glasgow Herald*. The following day there was a brief but factual report, with the accent on her remarks about the Catholics and delinquency. Criticisms followed, and Mrs. Knight was not only given a rejoinder half way through the controversy, but was allowed a lengthy last word to close the correspondence on Oct. 29th. It goes without saying that she conducted her case in her characteristically skilful manner.

* * * *

The *Aberdeen Press and Journal* also took up the controversy, from the angle of Billy Graham's Fundamentalism and that of Catholic delinquency. The Rev. John Gibb, of the Manse of Tough, Aberdeenshire, accused Mrs. Knight of "denying the sanity of Peter, Paul, Augustine, Martin Luther, John Wesley and even the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland." That is apparently the last straw. Mrs. Knight was again given a full reply, heavily headlined and with a picture. For the prophet to gain honour in his own country is indeed an advance. And there is now little or no evidence of the type of abuse which greeted Mrs. Knight's January broadcast. The editors are now accepting her as a controversialist of national prestige. The "Unholy Woman" of January has become the scientific humanist reformer without having decreased her militancy one iota.

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Mr. Colin McCall has now taken up his post as General Secretary of the National Secular Society, and communications for the N.S.S. should be addressed to him at this address.

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Will freethinkers in or near Accrington who are interested in joining the Accrington Discussion Group please communicate with us?

* * * *

Is this a record? Mr. Ernest Smedley informs us that he began reading *The Freethinker* at the age of 18 and has read every issue since, being now 87 years old. Long ago he thought nothing of walking seven miles each way to Nottingham to hear Bradlaugh, Holyoake, Watts, Foote and others. He says he "still reads *The Freethinker* every Friday with interest and pleasure, and any other Freethought reading I happen to get hold of. I am far from well and have recently been in two hospitals. At times I feel as though my celestial number is up. But I must carry on if only to read *The Freethinker*." Well, we certainly hope he will be reading many more issues yet!

The Bible Handbook (10th Edition). By G. W. Foote and W. P. Ball. Price 4s. 6d.; postage 3d.

The "Roots" of God

By H. CUTNER

A PAMPHLET produced by the Modern Churchmen's Union entitled *Return to the Roots*—"A study in the Meaning of the word 'God'" by John Wren Lewis is, I take it, specially directed to those waverers in Christianity who are not quite satisfied with the current explanations, or with the irrefutable proofs for the existence of the Deity which have so impressed—among others—the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Salvation Army, and Dr. Billy Graham.

Mr. Lewis is a mathematician, a physicist, and a theologian, but looking through this pamphlet I should say he is far more impressed with theology than with either mathematics or physics. What he claims to have done in this pamphlet is "to have stripped away the wrappings fastened upon it (God) by superstition and sentimentality and to have exposed something of the meaning it had for the writers of the Old and New Testament." This, put in plain language, simply means that Mr. Lewis is at variance with almost the whole of the 1,963,784 books and pamphlets and articles which have been written to prove that God exists. His own little work is naturally not packed with "superstition and sentimentality."

He begins by asking you and me and all Christians, "Do we really understand Christianity?" This seems a strange kind of question to ask us, for that Divine Religion comes straight from God as his Church on earth will tell you; and if God can't make us apprehend the Beautiful Truths of his own Religion, who can? Why has he given us his Precious Word? Does not the Bible contain everything we ought to know for our salvation, couched in the simplest and most beautiful language? Christianity has been with us for nearly 2,000 years, it has, and has had hundreds of thousands of paid and unpaid teachers to spread its marvellous truths all over the world and, according to Mr. Lewis, it is at least doubtful whether we understand it. He does, of course.

He tells us that in England "there is more spiritual hunger more dissatisfaction with what is ordinarily called materialism, than there has been for generations." Exactly how he knows this, or on what he bases his conclusions, he does not tell us—rather strange for a mathematician who is, in that science, forced to *prove* his answers to problems.

The truth—and he does see this quite well—is that most people are sick to death with claims of Christianity and its miracles, as well as its nonsense about a "life of eternity," its "trust in God" and "follow our Lord" propaganda. They know as little of Materialism as Mr. Lewis—or for that matter, as little as he knows of Atheism. The majority of people; in fact, suffer from apathy and complete indifference. And he actually thinks that if only they know exactly what the word "God" means, back they will go into the Church in their millions! This is the kind of ignorant optimism which distinguishes Dr. Billy Graham—and even his most fervent admirers are most reluctant to credit him with much intelligence.

How many books have been written about the "design" argument for the existence of God I do not know—but overboard it goes when Mr. Lewis has to deal with it. I find it most disingenuous to read, "it is doubtful whether we are not arguing in a circle when we say we find 'design' in nature, for is not 'design' simply the name we give to whatever we do find?" Poor old Paley—there at one fell swoop goes his celebrated watch argument! And I can add, poor old Jeans, and Eddington, and Aquinas, and of course the Roman Church, who all have powerfully supported the Design Argument.

Incidentally, Mr. Lewis has discovered that while the majority of mankind "have stood life on its head," Jews and "the Christians who took up their mission" have always "got it the right way up." Marxists will be justifiably angry at having their own original thunder stolen like this.

Arguing in this way, Mr. Lewis insists that once we recognise the "direct knowledge of ourselves being created by a power between man and man" and that, as St. John said, "God is love" will increase "our ordinary estimate of love," we are well on the way to know that God exists. (At least, I think that is what he wants us to know.) Some people will, of course, claim that Mr. Lewis thus throws overboard "the personality of God," but this only shows their ignorance. And he quotes Prof. Webb's Gifford Lectures on "God and Personality"—and surely, who should know better than Prof. Webb? Why, if he had not known, he would not have been allowed to give his Gifford Lectures! The eminent professor says:—

It is so often taken for granted nowadays that the Personality of God is a principal tenet of Christianity, that it is not without surprise that we find this expression not only entirely absent from the historic creeds and confessions of the Christian Church, but even, until modern times . . . regarded as unorthodox . . . We have . . . as historians, to note this fact: that, while the affirmation of Personality in God has been a characteristic of Christian theological terminology since the third century of our era, the great majority of Christian theologians have not affirmed in so many words the Personality of God.

So that, whatever it is that Mr. Lewis and Prof. Webb regularly pray to, it is not to a Personality. In other words, God is not a Person.

It is interesting to note also that Mr. Lewis, and the Jewish prophets, and the apostles, and the Church Fathers, looked upon *false* religion as their true enemy, not Atheism. And it is *false* religion to look upon God as a "Father," or that the "Controlling Intelligence" behind the scenes of the Universe ought to be imagined as a "father." What then is the "Creative Source of our being"? It is "Love." It is even "the Transcendent Sonship of Love Himself." (I am sure this particular term has some meaning, but in my ignorance I have not grasped it.)

Once, however, Mr. Lewis gets on the subject of Christ and his "Sonship" and his Church, we are in the midst of the usual unintelligible gabble of words which comes from all Christians whether professors of science or not. Everything about Christ is true, from his "Message" to his "Resurrection," And "God" and its (or his) meaning are lost in the disquisition.

The brilliant proofs that God exists are that when "the Hebrew people"—this always looks nicer than "the Jews"—asserted that "our Creator, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is author and controller of the physical and biological aspects of life," it really was not "vindicating" until "Christ rose from the dead." So now we know.

It would, I suspect, be useless to tell Mr. Lewis and his fellow Churchmen that the word "God" means nothing but pure ignorance, that Jesus Christ is a complete myth, and that Christianity has brought little but horror and superstition into the world. The sooner we get rid of it and its Deities, Devils, and Miracles, the better for the world.

Robert Taylor—*The Devil's Chaplain*. By H. Cutner. Price 1s. 6d.; postage 2d.

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A Plea for Rational Marriage

By R. READER

IN the next 24 hours some 260 people will be divorced in England, this being the end-point, perhaps, of three years' unhappy union and three years' legal proceedings. The conclusion is startling but inescapable: at any given moment there are 300,000 people in the country whose marriage will eventually end in the same fashion, to say nothing of the much more numerous category whose antagonisms will smoulder balefully for forty years without leading to actual rupture. What a chance for the Christian courts to exercise charity and alleviate suffering!

But who comes here? A man who kept his wife short of money; insulted her; struck her. He pleads that she consistently refused his embraces. No witnesses? Then he can go on pleading. It will make little difference.

And this woman who abandoned home and child? She says that her husband is depraved and forced her to submit to indignities. No witnesses? She can plead—it does not greatly matter. The Law is the Law.

Extenuating circumstances? Of course. But, the system being assumed perfect, one of the partners must be made the chief culprit. And Church and court must give the impression, however hazily, that both have failed in their duties to the rest of the community.

What should be the rational attitude? Surely that of realising that the conflict of much unhappy modern marriage has its origin in things largely outside individual control. Consider the forces working almost from birth to modify, confuse, and finally hopelessly entangle the primary urge to mate. There is the parents' attitude, sometimes inextricably bound up with economic considerations that have little, if any, relation to what is biologically desirable. There is the deafening clamour of pulpit, newspaper, cinema, radio, advertisement, novel, and those interested in provoking population pressure and war, which teaches, in defiance to all the evidence to the contrary, that marriage is an Open Sesame to indescribable bliss. Young people readily accept these suggestions because they are in accordance with the natural optimism of youth. They find, however, that once married, an entirely different set of forces takes over—things that have arisen, for the most part, during the last fifty years. For example, there is a wider choice of dress, recreation and amusement than in 1900, and women have greater economic freedom. And with this wider choice comes the greater possibility of a different choice. Hence quarrels over the spending of the family income. Again, modern travel and increased social contacts lead to the tardy thought, justified, or unjustified, that one might have done better. "Remember the marriage vows" says the moralists. Yes, it is greatly to be desired, but when one has been conditioned almost from birth, to regard marriage and life-happiness as synonymous, any subsequent disillusion is dangerous. The feeling that one is losing everything worth having in life is overwhelmingly strong—likewise the resolve to take any chance of salvaging the wreckage that presents itself.

These are only a few of a host of factors. Add to them the frequent psychoneurosis, pathological sexuality, and actual physical degeneracy of modern civilization, and is it any wonder that divorce is common? Rather is it marvellous that the present marriage system still totters on—that people can still be found to gamble with the dice so heavily loaded against them.

What should be the rational solution? Surely the breaking of this vicious circle of human suffering in which

one generation builds the misery of the next. And the way to do this is perfectly clear. First, the suppression of the lying exaggeration regarding marriage, resulting from the almost superstitious veneration of large numbers of children—a survival from mastodon-hunting days. The need, and even the desirability, for large numbers has long since vanished.

Secondly, education of women out of baby-worship into the truth that satisfactory sexual relations without children are more conducive to happiness than sexual hysteria with a whole nursery. And education of men out of the attitude that a wife is a housekeeper-nurse. Thirdly the deliberate education of both sexes in the choice of a mate along sound biological lines (at present the directives are largely given by films and novels).

Spontaneous and sincere affection and disinterested tenderness are often cramped and destroyed by the legal chains of marriage. But, human nature being what it is, we must have safeguards in the form of legal responsibilities. Let us, therefore, raise the age at which the safeguards are applied. The vital, healthy youngster, male or female, of even 25, is not ripe for irrevocable engagements involving his or her whole future life, any more than most persons of that age are fit to take complete command of a battleship. Truly satisfactory marriage, with rare exceptions, comes only when the emotions of both partners have ceased to shift and have come to terms with the rest of the world. And this they should do along the rational lines of experiment, free from the stigma of the disapprobation of those legally married, and also free from the pernicious clamour above referred to, which concentrates their attention on such things, nearly always to their disillusion and detriment. And such experiment should be backed by full medical and birth-control knowledge. What—to raise one's hand in pious horror because a future human germ has been suppressed and to prefer that it should have lived to suffer and die a violent death twenty years later!

Let us cease to bequeath tradition of unhappiness and frustration to our children and take our destiny in our own hands. The world that is (the adult's) is the world that counts. Arrange this—and the world that is to be (our children) will be better off and thank us. We shall have freed them from the cycle of suffering to which we are at present condemning them.

A FREETHINKER WHO BECAME RICH

IN the Chartist movement of 1839 there was no greater leader than Zeph Williams, freethinker and admirer of Thomas Paine. Williams was an innkeeper of Blaine in Monmouthshire. He was a pillar of the Working Men's Association of that day. It was he who led the men of Blaine and Ebbw Vale in the march on Newport on a stormy night in 1839 to demand the right to vote. Troops had been secretly placed in the Westgate Hotel and as the demonstrators approached, they were fired upon with disastrous results.

A few days afterwards, Zeph Williams was captured at Cardiff docks. With John Frost, William Jones and others, he was sentenced to be hanged, drawn and quartered; but even the corrupt government of the period dared not enforce this hideous fate, so they were banished for life to Tasmania.

It was Zeph Williams (as an old coal miner) who first

noticed that Tasmania had coal strata. He eventually became a very rich man through his discovery and thus became a benefactor to the country that had forbidden him never to return.

PAUL VARNEY.

Correspondence

God or "god"

I think you are inaccurate in indicating that because "Cinderella"; "Santa Claus," etc., are spelt with capital letters that therefore, "god" should be so spelt. Would you write "the God, Osiris" or "the god, osiris"? The distinction is that "Cinderella"; "Santa Claus," etc., are felt to be proper nouns or names—there may be 5,000 "Johns" and only one "Rumpelstiltsken," but both are names—the fact that they may or may not be imaginary beings is beside the point—"man" and "fairy" as generic terms are for the same reason spelt with the miniscule. Furthermore "Cinderella" — "Santa Claus," etc., are imaginable, if imaginary, personages with definite attributes, else the application of a proper name to them becomes meaningless, but this is precisely what "god"—especially the Christian "god" is not! If you came to look upon the word "god" as a name then your comparison with Cinderella, etc., may be arguable, but not otherwise, and in this case you should write "God, Osiris," etc. In any case I have a sneaking suspicion that you do not always accord the same courtesy to the Christian "devil"!

Yours, etc.,

S. AFRICA.

MALCOLM CLARKE.

PRIESTS DISCREDIT THEIR OWN PREACHING

The priest's standing in the educational scale—even in the remotest backwoods—has sunk that even a preparatory school pupil can nowadays demolish the parson's glaring defects in general knowledge implied in this Christian theology in the pulpit. But still it gives a freethinker a well-deserved pat on the shoulder for his thankless task of demolishing the out-moded world view before science can build a new one—when he reads of the priests forced now to debunk themselves, e.g. "It is probable that in this age the value of the sermon is declining generally. The parson is no longer regarded as the only highly educated person in the village. The specialization of knowledge along with the growing indifference to organized religion, has made for a declining interest in pulpit pronouncements. An authoritative Roman Catholic writer (F. Valentine, O.P., in *The Art of Preaching*) has recently declared that, 'The sermon is largely out-moded; but the tradition still lingers on in the clerical unconscious. . . . But this mode of preaching can never influence the modern generation nor supply its needs, and is, in fact, being discredited.'" (The Rev. R. W. Wilde, *Hobbert Journal*, July, 1955.)

GREGORY S. SMELTERS.

MINORITY VIEWS

However much one may deplore the fuss which has been made in the press about the "Royal Romance" it is a matter of some difficulty to get Editors in general to accept anything approaching the minority views—especially those which may run counter to the fulsome adulation and sycophancy exhibited by more prominent writers.

The appended points of view were among those submitted to a certain Sunday newspaper, but I am now conscious of the fact that it is only in your Forum that one might expect to get a hearing for any unconventional or unorthodox views.

When any members of the Royal family voluntarily, and deliberately "break away from the Royal herd," then surely they should forfeit all their former titles and be debarred from any financial assistance from the Civil List (this was written before the leading article in *The Times* which seems to have caused so much comment).

There is nothing "half-divine" in the present union of our Royal House, so let us keep clear of religion and all its superstitious implications.

G. H. HOLMES.

ON IMPOSTORS

In your October 28 issue it is reported that the chairman, Glasgow N.S.S., when introducing the speaker on "The Three Impostors," referred to Billy Graham, the British Labour Party, and the Monarchy as "Modern Impostors." I consider the reference to the Labour Party an insult, uncalled for, and a disservice to Freethought propaganda.

Yours in protest,

C. E. RATCLIFFE.

TELEPATHY

Re G. H. Taylor's "Freethinkers and Telepathy," would it not simplify matters if we regarded the Universe as a spiritual unit from which all forms of life get their being. There can be no separation between microbes and men materially or spiritually.

A higher plane of missionary perception can be attained in a state of semi-consciousness rather than in the full state of awareness. There are no such things as souls either for men or microbes; the force of animation is from a common pool—the life force of the Universe.

Yours, etc.,

MCKINLEY HARGREAVES.

MINISTERS DENOUNCE MOTORISTS

In a jointly-signed letter to *The Sydney Morning Herald* (Sept. 12), two Sydney suburban clergymen state that they were not surprised that the Redex motor reliability contest emerged as a farce, "because it began and ended with a considered and deliberate act of corporate insult to Almighty God in the desecration of the Lord's Day."

This is in reference to the start of the contest from Parramatta on a Sunday.

"It ought to be overlooked," they further declare, "that the farce was so nearly a tragedy when some competitors admitted that, when faced by death with thirst, they prayed to the God whom they had insulted, and He of His mercy heard their prayer."

If Divinity interferes with the affairs of the earth could it not much more worthily concern itself in other matters than being hurt and angry at the triviality of the starting-day of a motor race?

It is not for me here to attempt to enumerate some of the endless sorrows and sufferings of the human race. For one thing the Lord of the Universe might begin by eliminating the world-wide curse of cancer. Removal of the fear of the atom bomb is another service that Divinity might perform.

Very much in keeping with the statement are the many other letters that have been appearing in *The Herald* in the hope of disproving the recently-published Julian Huxley comment to the effect that in another hundred years no intelligent person could believe in a God.

By practically all these letter-writers it is contended that Huxley must be wrong because of "the universal Belief" in the God of the Bible. There never was, of course, any such universal belief; and the belief, to whatever extent it prevailed in the past, is a greatly diminished belief today. What of the once-held widely belief in the sun going round the earth?

Among those under this impression we must actually number the Lord himself. Let doubters, if there are any, turn to the Book of Joshua, and they will there read, "So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day." The very noble purpose in this was to prolong the light of day—the earth being stationary!—so that Joshua could complete the work of exterminating his enemies.

Thus, universally of belief did not prove the fixity of the earth and the revolution of the sun, even with the Almighty on the side of the believers to that effect.

Australia.

FRANK HILL.

TRUSTING THE LORD

When visiting Eire recently I found a concrete Cross erected on Bray Head, fitted with a lightning conductor! Evidently the R.C.s could not rely on their Jehovah and they still feared the thunderbolts of Jove.

Some years ago a local church was struck and the spire had to be re-built. In this case, too, a lightning rod was fitted, I presume to comply with the insurance policy. Insurance companies may be composed of Christians but they are not prepared to trust the Almighty to look after his own.

T. D. SMITH,

Birmingham Branch N.S.S.

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