

The Freethinker

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Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

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CHRISTIAN cant and nonsense were well in evidence in the TV programme "Special Enquiry: Religion in Britain" (Nov. 29). That was only to be expected, yet it may be said that any attempt to make people re-examine Christianity cannot fail, in the long run, to have propaganda value for Freethought. The enquiry, based on London and Glasgow, lasted for 45 minutes, the production and camera work aiming at giving relief from mere talk—of which there was plenty.

Starting with the fact that fifty years ago one person in three was a churchgoer, in twenty years ago one in six, and to-day one in eight, the commentator said the enquiry was "a social investigation," without bias as to the results. We beg to differ. It was a religious inquiry rather than an inquiry into religion; the spokesmen and organisers were Christians, and no responsible Freethinker was present to challenge any statement, opinion or interpretation. Catholics, Protestants, Nonconformists and Billy Graham all strutted the stage, with some quite harmless non-churchgoers thrown in to give the impression of impartiality.

All the long-exploded twaddle was trotted out. Atomic weapons meant that man was misusing God's gifts. The Welfare State reduced the significance of the individual, a fault which could only be put right by the Church. In times of trouble the deep, deep need of something spiritual comes to the top. And so on. One thing was conspicuous by its absence. They forgot to say that materialism was dead. Undoubtedly an oversight.

The Church and the People

A number of "ordinary working" people were called in to give their comments. (The clergy, presumably, are extraordinary and non-working.) Their remarks were of the commonplace type frequently met with. "I don't go to church myself but I send the children." "Religion is all right for those who have the time." "I never go to church because you can worship God just as well outside." "I can't explain why I had my baby baptised. It's something deep inside me."

Emphasis was laid on efforts to keep the Church in touch with the people at work. Shots were taken of dinner time discussions with the parson in factories. We resist the temptation to comment on the level of these discussions, on the grounds that perhaps any discussion is better than none (though we doubt it). And there were pictures of the experiment of chaplains to five large London stores.

The Catholic Position

In this connection an R.C. priest of Stepney gave the most logical speech of the entire programme. In fact he was the only religionist who knew where he stood with certainty. His point was that the Church (R.C.) was not primarily concerned with bettering this world, except

as a stepping stone to Heaven. The Church, he said, has always been, in some measure, in conflict with the world; and *must* be. Granting his Catholic premises, Canon Fitzgerald was the only speaker who had a defensible position. We were not just working for now, but for eternity. He concluded, "In Heaven alone we meet our full success." Bang! The dust and smoke rose from a most unhealthy explosion on the picture. "But Heaven," said the commentator sadly, "seems a long way off."

With such a concern for the next world it is remarkable how the Catholics manage to keep such a purchase on this one. The Canon spoke proudly of Catholic (i.e. Romanist) activities in Trade Unions, Politics and Education. One Young cleric described himself and some of his fellows as

"thoroughly browned off," feeling that "the Church was going down the drain." We shall not stay to contradict him.

A New Billy Graham

Even Billy Graham was not so sure of himself this time. This was a new Billy. Gone was the old cocksureness and raving certainty about a revival. Perhaps he was chastened by some stern facts and figures, which showed that his influence on churchgoing in Glasgow was apparently of four weeks duration. Four weeks' dwindling response to the Message of Eternity! Net result: a sadder but wiser man.

He was not prepared to say there was a religious revival, but there was a "spiritual awakening." Was it the result of his London and Glasgow campaigns? He had "serious doubts" about this. Instead, he gave credit to the Coronation, which had had "a tremendous impact." Nor did the commentator, in his summing up, appear to place much reliance on the Billy Graham method.

Asked whether emotionalism had played the major part in his "conversions," Billy hesitated. Then he declared that the converts had come forward quietly and without emotion, and that although emotion played its part as in all human activities, it was not the deciding factor. (!)

Christian "Converts"

The word "convert" was, in this programme as elsewhere, used in a quite dishonest sense. When the National Secular Society claims a convert, it means that the new member was at one time religious. We do not count as converts all members who renew their subscriptions. When evangelists talk of converts they should, to be honest, mean people converted from anti-religion. They mean nothing of the kind. They denote people (including children out for a lark) who *already* have religious beliefs. It is a dishonest procedure and typically Christian.

Equally, or even more, dishonest, hypocritical and insufferably impudent, is the equation of Christianity with morality. Time and again throughout this programme, we

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

The T.V. Religious Enquiry

By G. H. TAYLOR

heard the expression "Christian principles," as though this is synonymous with moral principles.

Christians and Morals

The Christians have got this idea very firmly established in the public mind, and its removal should, in our opinion, be a cardinal feature of Freethought propaganda. Chapman Cohen never tired of this point, and he used it most effectively. We should not allow it to slip back into a minor issue.

There is no doubt that the "ordinary" person, hearing Christianity attacked for the first time, imagines that morality is at stake, and that the freethinker is advocating all manner of indecencies. The title chosen by Margaret Knight, "Morals without Religion," caught the Christians on the Achilles Heel.

The overriding point made by the workers questioned during the programme was that although they had little inclination to go to Church, they still believed in the need for "Christian principles." They need to be told that kindness and decency did not suddenly spring into being with the Christian religion, that people of other religions, or of none, have not been devoid of humane sentiments, that the Christian Bible is one of the most bloodthirsty in existence, that its believers have no monopoly of morality, and that the history of their religion bristles with wars and persecutions, tortures and inquisitions, crusades and pogroms, and is in its entirety an unspeakably miserable record in human behaviour.

Hamburg Dog Days

By F. A. RIDLEY

SINCE the war ended there has been much talk of re-educating the Germans and no one can doubt that the twelve terrible years of the Nazi regime had created an urgent need for such re-education in the political sphere. However, national, like individual, character is unequal; in some fields of human behaviour the Germans appear to be capable of re-educating us! One such field is that of capital punishment, revived by Hitler in a particularly barbaric form but now abolished, it is hoped permanently, in the German Federal Republic. Another is in that of blood sports and animal welfare in general. In Hamburg recently I was an eye-witness of a striking demonstration of human solidarity with, and compassion for, the "lower animals."

October 2 is, it appears, the commemoration of the birthday—or death day, I am not sure which—of the Holy St. Francis of Assisi, a 13th century saint noted for his love of animals, not a very common virtue among Christian saints. In this respect St. Francis has more and better "Franciscan" followers in the ranks of modern freethinkers than in his own Church, which has never indicated much solicitude for the "lower animals" whom God according to Christian theology, made for the express purpose of serving man in the Garden of Eden. However that may be, the "Free and Hanseatic city" of Hamburg was the scene on October 2 of a gigantic animals' procession through the heart of the city, the like of which I have never seen in my life. Incidentally, I do not quite know why Hamburg, which is a predominantly Protestant city, should have chosen the holy Franciscus as its celestial patron in this matter, since he is a Roman saint, albeit an unusually humanitarian one. Is it an example of Catholic infiltration or merely a coincidence?

At 2 p.m. the shores of the beautiful Alster, the lake running into the heart of this "northern Venice," were crowded with a veritable Noah's Ark of domestic animals. *Facile Princeps*, in this huge gathering, were the dogs of Hamburg, large and small, thousands of them, filling the air with canine melodies which ranged from the full-throated roar of mastiffs, wolf-hounds and Great Danes, to the choppy noises emitted by insignificant puppies. However, the dogs, though numerically in the ascendant, did not have the procession to themselves, for, interspersed between the various contingents of dogs, marched a strong contingent of cats, those anarchists of nature, who gazed with amiable contempt at the human beings who crowded the pavements, to see the lords of creation go by and who regarded their hereditary enemy, the dog, with a mixture of hostility and contempt. A string of splendid horses ridden, one imagines, by the children of the millionaires' quarter on the other side of the Alster, made a glittering cavalcade. A solitary camel represented with Eastern dignity the numerous oriental colony in Hamburg, and the papers announced the presence of a hyena from the Sahara, led, presumably, by a German soldier of the French Foreign Legion.

At 2 p.m. (English reckoning) a vast concourse moved off from opposite the Atlantic Hotel, Hamburg's equivalent of the Dorchester, whose plutocratic visitors got a free view of the start of the unique procession, which wound majestically, to the accompaniment of a band with sonorous accompaniment by dogs and more plaintive music by cats, along streets which, only a decade ago, were masses of charred ruins, a tribute to the deadly accuracy of the R.A.F. Not only the present generation, but some of the greatest figures in German history, marched with the dogs who had accompanied them in life. Beneath a cloudless sky shining over the blue waters of the Alster, marched *Der alte Fritz*, the great soldier and atheistic Tang of Prussia followed by his pages, leading his huge boar-hounds, by which Voltaire's royal disciple was, it seems, always accompanied. A little later came Bismarck, "The Iron Chancellor," followed by his ever faithful Great Dane. Humanitarian slogans were to be seen on all sides, urging the citizens to interest themselves in the welfare of their domestic pets in a whole variety of ways, from caring for stray cats to preventing their dogs from running across roads given over to traffic, which one thinks, would be a certain death in Hamburg, where speed limits appear to be entirely unknown, as the present writer soon found out! A feature of the gigantic procession, which held up traffic for several hours, was a melancholy procession of six thousand stray dogs and cats, all of whom, I am happy to report, found homes as a result of their appearance on this Teutonic dog day. The procession was led by an ambulance devoted solely to the rescue and welfare of animals, the property of the city of Hamburg, an unique institution. One of my friends, a South African citizen marched with her dog, Rastus, who walked with head and tail erect. However, eventually the long procession arrived at its destination with "Bismarck" carried wearily in a pony trap, and Hamburg's dog day concluded with a spate of speeches, a burst of barks and a cascade of cats! It was animals' day with human beings very much in the background, a kind of modern Saturnalia! The whole thing was a howling success in the most literal sense! I understand that the burghers of Hamburg contributed an enormous collection. What the holy Francis thought about it in Heaven I really do not know, but personally I would not have missed it for the world!

Faith and the Quest for Truth

By G. I. BENNETT

IN the heart of a busy smoke-dirty city in the North of England there is a place where you may learn the golden secret of salvation as you stand on the pavement. I stopped a moment or two to listen to the strident voice of the speaker. The world, I heard, was in a mess, and teetering on the brink of irremediable ruin. Honesty and decency had almost disappeared from our lives. There was no trust either amongst individuals or amongst nations. Contracts and pacts were made to be broken. This was the pass to which squalid materialism had brought us. One thing only could change the face of the world, change the heart of men, change every one of us, and that was an acceptance of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is an old, old story, and you know it so well. Believe and you shall be saved. Surrender yourself body and soul to an eschatological and salvationist creed that is apparently as valid for the twentieth century as it was for the first and second, and you shall know temporal peace and celestial blessedness. All the many and varied problems of life arise from a woeful neglect of, or even denial of, our Lord. But turn to Him and there is nothing that shall not be possible.

The speaker with fire in his eyes went on endlessly, hardly ever pausing for breath. I moved on, the words of an imperial sage in my mind. "Read accurately," Marcus Aurelius counselled himself; "Rest not content with vague general ideas. Be slow in subscribing to a man with a great flow of words."

Alas, how many are the people who are carried away by just such a man! Humanity at large is moved but little by modest statements of truth and the simple wisdom of an honest philosophy; but it can be led by a fellow with a ready tongue, and consumed by that excess of enthusiasm we term fanaticism, to accept almost every kind of political or religious nonsense.

Enthusiasm in itself, of course, is not to be decried. As Emerson said, "Every great and commanding movement in the annals of the world is a triumph of enthusiasm, and nothing great was ever achieved without it." But let it be enthusiasm that is allied to informed opinion and rational thought. The trouble with the cruder variety of religious experience and conversion (and the cruder variety constitutes much the greater part of the whole) is that it is divorced from thinking as such.

Only a man more ready to speak than to think would have given utterance to the puerile sentiments of our street evangelist. But by way of illuminating contrast, only a man who had thought considerably and earnestly before opening his mouth could have expressed himself in these terms:

"There are moments when we seem to catch hints of another dimension which transcends our narrow consciousness, only to lose sight of it again and doubt the possibility of its existence. . . . But it is a fragmentary insight at best, and in such moments I am far more conscious of a sense of mystery, of unplumbed depths beyond my power to comprehend, than of some illuminating vision of divine purpose."

These words by Alan Bullock are from the text of an Essex Hall Lecture given under the auspices of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association. They underline as well as anything could the difference between Unitarian Christianity in its most characteristic vein and Christianity in its traditional Trinitarian form. Now I am no apologist for Unitarianism; but I do suggest that the passage quoted at least bears the mark of honesty in approach to ultimate truth

as distinct from the crude presumptions of most Christian speakers and writers, clerical and lay. Thus, while Mr. Bullock actually speaks from within the Christian fold, he might—almost—have been speaking from without.

What is clear, however, about dogmatists (I write of religious dogmatists, but it applies to other than them) is that they entertain a fantastically narrow and limited view of the world we live in. If they could be persuaded to see life in the vastness of its evolutionary and cosmic settings, they would be unable to remain dogmatists. But broad culture and critical intelligence are what the majority of them signally lack. I do not say that broad culture and critical intelligence lead necessarily and unvaryingly to freethinking unbelief; but I do say that they prune faith of its extravagances, and promote liberality of mind and breadth of vision—qualities that are the sore need of our age.

Yet to the general run of religious zealots the dogmas of faith, however crude and unrefined, count for more than intellectual integrity and breath. Thinking, we are told, takes us so far and no farther. There are realms into which thought will not and cannot go. There are flashes of illumination, shafts of insight, into the nature of things, that are entirely independent of human reason. There is an understanding of the meaning and reality of life, and death, born only of the will to believe with whole heart and mind. It is not to the wise and learned, but to the simple and unlearned, that the highest spiritual truths are made known, and God primarily and supremely reveals Himself.

Here we have manifest that fundamental disdain of the intellect which characterised primitive Christianity, and which has always been the refuge of the Christian apologist hard-pressed in the defence of his faith. Yet to disdain the intellect is to disdain the attribute which, above all else, distinguishes man from beast, and alone made possible his long ascent from primeval barbarism.

Puny in bodily strength, possessing no great physical agility, lacking any natural protective armour, man survived in a nightmare world of a thousand formidable dangers and foes by virtue of an intelligence decisively superior to that of all other creatures of the animal kingdom. How otherwise could he have explored his environment so systematically and made himself its master? How otherwise have he experimented, invented, discovered, and strode with such sure steps and such singular fortune on the highroad of science? How otherwise have he organised and planned a stable social existence, in the absence of which no industry, no artistic achievements, no settled or cultured life, could have been? How without his intellectual faculty could he have devised the techniques of writing, of documenting, and of classifying, enabling him to amass the knowledge necessary to our present well-being and our future advance? How could he have traversed and re-traversed the worlds of time and space, and in reasoning, in philosophising, in speculative thought found the source of his keenest interest and deepest satisfaction?

Let us be in no doubt about it. Truth does not drop from the heavens like ripe fruit from orchard trees. It has to be laboured for, and quested for; and only the alert critical mind is capable of seeking out new truth, and adding to the sum of human knowledge, without which no civilisation of any sort could survive at all. Anyone who in ignorance denies that, or for tendentious reasons chooses to forget it, is unworthy of the great heritage that belongs distinctively to man as man.

This Believing World

Congratulations to Miss Marghanita Laski who, in a B.B.C. discussion on "tolerance" with Miss Pamela Frankau—a convert to Rome—roundly declared she was an Atheist. It was in "Woman's Hour," and must have caused millions of women to wonder whether they heard aright. Apart from professors like Julian Huxley and Fred Hoyle, we wonder how many men would have the temerity when broadcasting to declare themselves Atheists? A few might call themselves Agnostics or Rationalists or even Scientific Humanists—but Atheists . . .!

A T.V. "Special Enquiry" recently was on Religion in Britain, and it would not be unfair to say viewers knew no more after the show was over than before it commenced. That people still go to church can be admitted; and we are quite sure thousands of earnest young and old women can be found all of whom have found Christ somehow or other, and are now living happily after. Clergymen can also be found who fulfil social functions quite admirably, and even parsons who prefer talking about life as we have it now rather than about Christianity with its miracles, devils, angels, etc.

But where was the evidence that the good old Christianity of Christ Jesus, the backbone of true Protestantism and Romanism, is still flourishing? No evidence whatever was produced at this "Enquiry"—and no evidence can ever again be produced. The credulity and superstition of a number of Oriental sects, however admirable 2,000 years ago, can no longer form the basis of belief and conduct in the Western world; and the Churches are at last beginning to realise it.

In this connection one can turn to the latest book on "The Scrolls from the Dead Sea" by Edmund Wilson which has caused quite a number of reviews to appear in our literary and other journals. If what the author claims can be substantiated, then it is one of the most damning indictments ever produced against current Christianity. Many of the distinctive features of that supernatural religion were part of pre-Christian religious teachings, including the "Communion Supper" and the "Suffering Messiah." Moreover, parts of the Hebrew Bible found are at least "variants" from the present text—that is, the text according to Christian scholars written or inspired by God Almighty himself.

But will these new discoveries affect the beliefs of modern Christians? Not a scrap. In the *New Statesman* there is a review by its editor, Mr. Kingsley Martin, and he is certainly astounded at the way in which the Dead Sea Scrolls have made mincemeat of current Christianity. But does this in any way invalidate his conception of Christ? Not in the least. What Christ taught as given in the Gospels is still for him "Holy Writ." The idea that the story of Jesus Christ and his teachings may all have been invented exactly as the story of Adam and Eve was invented would be anathema to him—as indeed to all reverent Rationalists like him.

The Rev. J. C. Wansey of Woodford is looking forward to the great part Jews will play in propagating Christianity, and he wants Jewish sidesmen, Jewish churchwardens, and even a Jewish rector to come into the Church. Now, why not a Christian rabbi, a Christian singer of Hebrew

prayers, and a Christian proselytiser—that is, a Christian missionary converting Christians to Judaism? Why should Mr. Wansey imagine that all the conversions should be to Christianity? Why not as a change to Judaism? We wish he would tell us.

The great go-ahead mining town of a few thousand inhabitants, Ashby-de-la Zouch, has decided not to desecrate the Sabbath by allowing such outrages to an angry Deity as the presentation of a cinema film for money on Sunday. People should understand once for all that when God tells us to keep the Sabbath Day holy, he meant it, and the Ashby-de-la Zouch Rural Council are going to enforce God's Will, willy nilly. A cinema show—for money—is an eyesore to God on a Sunday and, thank Heaven, there is a truly Rural Council in Britain who knows it.

Facts for Freethinkers — 5

Materialism and Morality

THE claim is repeatedly made by the churches and their followers that the means by which better moral standards shall obtain in society is through a more universal belief in God and the various dogmas of Christianity. The superiority of a supernaturally based morality as compared with a naturally derived ethic is taken for granted by many, and others deny altogether the efficacy of a morality founded on what is often somewhat opprobriously termed materialism.

The unsoundness of the above claims is well demonstrated by the statistics relating to the incidence of venereal disease in the armies and among the civil populations under control of the Allies after the late war.

According to statistics given in a recent publication, "Social Medicine" (1953) by S. Leff, M.D., D.P.R., much the lower percentages of infected persons was to be found in the zones of Germany controlled by Russia as compared with those of Britain, France, and the U.S.A. He says: "There was a marked increase in the incidence of venereal diseases in Germany because of the behaviour of the armies of occupation. Gonorrhoea in the United States zone affected 90 per cent. per 10,000 of the population in the summer of 1946; it more than doubled in the British and French zones, to reach rates of 40 to 50 per 10,000; and syphilis more than trebled to reach rates of 32 per 10,000. The most marked and speedy decline took place in the Russian zone where the respective rates for gonorrhoea and syphilis in Saxony in March, 1947, were 10.7 and 11.4 per 10,000." There the notification of venereal diseases had been made compulsory.

In view of the materialistic culture of the Soviet Union it must be rather amazing from a Christian point of view that such a state of affairs could exist. Even if it is denied that the Russian soldier is either a more moral or a less natural human being than his Allied counterpart, the only other logical alternative is to believe that stricter methods of control were instituted in the zones controlled by the Russians. In the event of the latter being the case the social "conscience" of a nation whose government adheres to a materially based philosophy could not be regarded as ethically inferior in this respect to those nations professing adherence to ethical standards inspired by Christianity.

(N.Z. Rationalist).

The Bible Handbook (10th Edition). By G. W. Foote and W. P. Ball. Price 4s. 6d.; postage 3d.
Robert Taylor—The Devil's Chaplain. By H. Cutner. Price 1s. 6d.; postage 2d.

THE FREETHINKER

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To Correspondents

Correspondents may like to note that when their letters are not printed or when they are abbreviated, the material in them may still be of use to "This Believing World," or to our spoken propaganda.

W. MAY.—If virgin births were proved (as an extreme rarity) in humans, the only doctrine to suffer would be that of the Roman Catholics, whose historic (?) case would then fall into the natural category.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

- Central London Branch N.S.S. (Lincolns Inn Fields, Kingsway, W.C.1.)—Every Tuesday, 1 p.m.; (Tower Hill) Every Thursday, 1 p.m. Speakers: J. M. Alexander, W. Carlton, and others.
- Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every weekday, 1.0 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK and CORSAIR.
- 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 Café, 40 Cannon Street).—Sunday, December 18, 7.0 p.m.: B. BRADLAUGH BONNER, "The Abortion Problem Today."
- Bradford N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, December 18, 6.45 p.m.: J. P. ROCHE, "Papacy and Politics."
- Central London Branch N.S.S. (121 Caledonian Road, N.1., 5 minutes from Kings Cross).—Tuesday, December 13, 8 p.m. F. A. RIDLEY, opens discussion on "The Future of the N.S.S."
- Glasgow District R.P.A. (Central Halls, 25 Bath Street).—Sunday, December 18, 3.0 p.m.: J. HARRIS (Editor, Forward), "The Automation Age—and the Press."
- Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, December 18, 6.30 p.m.: T. MOSLEY, "Was Jesus a Humanist?"
- Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, December 18, 2.30 p.m.: Rev. K. WAIGHTS, "The Philosophy of Democracy."
- South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1.).—Sunday, December 18, 11 a.m.: Dr. HELEN ROSENAU, "Solar Myths in Pagan and Christian Art" (Illustrated).
- West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1.).—Sunday, December 18, 7.15 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, "Three Imposters, 'Moses, Mohammed and Jesus.'"

The Historical Jesus and the Mythical Christ. What Christianity owes to Ancient Egypt. By Gerald Massey. Price 1/-. Postage 2d.

NEXT WEEK

CHRISTMAS, A SHAM ANTIQUE

The Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund

Previously acknowledged, £1,026 18s. 7d.; A. E. Stringer, 16s. 0d.; Miss E. Lloyd, £1 0s. 0d.; A. L. Jones (Southern Rhodesia), £1 0s. 0d.; A. Hancock, 1s. 0d.; R. Stewart, 8s. 0d.; A. Addison, £1 0s. 0d.; W. Cragie, 3s. 0d.; G. W. Bilk, £1 4s. 0d.; Mrs. M. Rupp, 5s. 0d. Total to Date, £1,032 15s. 7d.

Notes and News

AS can well be imagined, Mrs. Margaret Knight's contribution to the debate organised recently by the Cambridge University Union, "That scientific humanism can do more to solve the human problems of our day than dogmatic christianity," was, according to the Cambridge Daily News "repeatedly interrupted by the undergraduates with cries of 'No,' 'Rubbish,' 'Oh, nonsense,' and hisses. Such intolerance has always been in the true Christian tradition.

Mrs. Knight said that "the kind of religion propounded by Billy Graham" was "a childish superstition" and went on to a scathing condemnation of this superstition including the statement that "Belief in God is destructive to strong morals" — which of course elicited loud cries of "Rubbish!"

Naturally, her address had to be dealt with, and the big gun appears to have been Canon T. R. Milford who came in with the admission that "Science had widened the whole scope and content of morals and no Christian would deny it. But science could not be substituted for religion—and so on. But no one need be surprised that the motion was lost by 146 for and 246 against. In Oxford and Cambridge every effort is strenuously made to preserve religion at all costs for even the Billy Graham type of infantile Fundamentalism is better than no religion at all is still taught at our Universities. But once again our congratulations to Mrs. Knight for her splendid campaign.

Something of the spirit of freethought appears to have percolated to *The Odd Fellows' Magazine* the July-August issue of which contains an excellent letter from a Brother advocating open discussion of religion within the Fellowship! He advocates "freedom of conscience for all, including the atheist. All I want to know is where the Odd Fellowship really stands; and if our Order is not a secular organisation why was the reverend gentleman [i.e. the Dean of Canterbury] told that religion is barred?" We would point out, however, that "freedom of conscience" is quite vague unless it entails freedom of speech. Would the writer, Mr. Lightfoot, go as far as to claim "fair shares" for freethinkers on the radio?

What exactly are the limits of human credulity? When we heard of the 4,500 "suckers" in the United States who have been induced to pay for acre plots on the moon we thought the limit had been reached. But the same day we received a letter from one of God's followers explaining why, in all his recent letters to us, he has been writing the holy name as "G-d," instead of "God:" He says, "I write the word without 'o' in case my letter gets destroyed, and the holy name must not be destroyed!"

WAR

What becomes of, and what signifies to me, humanity, beneficence, modesty, temperance, mildness, wisdom and piety, whilst half a pound of lead, sent from the distance of an hundred steps, pierces my body, and I die at twenty years of age, in inexpressible torments?—Voltaire.

Infernal Apologist

(A critical study of *The Screwtape Letters* by C. S. Lewis)

By the Rev. JOHN L. BROOM, M.A.

IT would be foolish to deny that Mr. C. S. Lewis is one of the wittiest and most urbane of the present-day defenders of orthodoxy. Besides his sophisticated, often ingenious, arguments, those of Sir Arnold Lunn seem crude and naive indeed. *The Screwtape Letters*, first issued in 1942, show Mr. Lewis perhaps at his artistic best.

It is one thing, however, to be a master of irony and quite another to be a master of logic. And in this sphere Mr. Lewis shows himself to be quite as vulnerable as Sir Arnold. The fault, of course, lies not in the brain of Mr. Lewis, but in the intrinsic absurdity of his orthodox Anglican Christianity which he undertakes to defend. His case is hopeless from the start. It would, incidentally, be difficult to imagine a type of mind more divorced from the primitive uneducated outlook of the first disciples than that of Mr. Lewis. The Oxford don and the fisherman of Galilee just do not mix, even though the don leaves his intellect behind when he writes on religion.

The Screwtape Letters are intended to be the epistles of a senior Devil Screwtape to his nephew Wormwood, who is on earth attempting to corrupt a would-be Christian. Mr. Lewis cleverly contrives to make Screwtape the spokesman for orthodoxy even when he seems to be most vehemently attacking it. The conception of a Devil defending Christianity is, of course, not at all strange when one considers the immoral nature of that religion!

At the outset Screwtape warns Wormwood not to use the sciences as a defence against Christianity, for they will positively encourage Wormwood's victim to think about realities he can't touch or see—there having been sad cases among the modern physicists. This of course is the familiar idea that the abandonment of the nineteenth century conception of matter as consisting of solid atoms extended in space constitutes the refutation of materialism. But materialism, properly understood, is dependent on no specific theory of the ultimate nature of matter. Mr. Lewis conveniently forgets that the greatest modern physicist, Einstein, was a profound agnostic.

A man, continues Screwtape, who thinks Christianity ridiculous because many of its worshippers behave in a stupid fashion, is a fool.

But what other criterion have we for judging the practical worth of a faith than that of the action of its adherents? The plain fact that the good and wise Christian is a rarity surely indicates that there is something seriously lacking in Christianity itself.

Wormwood is next told to encourage his victim to pray to a god of his own creation. He must never be allowed to address his prayers "Not to what I think thou art but to what Thou knowest Thyself to be." We have seen in our study of Lunn that he, too, claims we must not expect God to conform to our own moral standards, and we noted the revolting consequences to which this view led. In truth, every man invariably fashions God in his own image, and all the qualities ever attributed to the Creator (i.e., righteousness, omnipotence, omniscience, etc.) have been of human origin. And this also applies to Mr. Lewis's god, who in turn was the invention of the writers of Scripture.

Turning to problems arising from the war then raging, Screwtape asserts that Christians are always aware that "suffering is an essential part of redemption. So a faith which has been destroyed by a war or a pestilence cannot really have been worth the trouble of destroying."

This can only mean that it is wrong to object to deliberate fiendish cruelty on the part of the Almighty. The Christian moral view is so perverted that it involves supine acceptance, and indeed approval, of suffering.

Mr. Lewis goes so far to say that God permits war and earthquakes in order to preserve the virtue of courage. What a comment on the character of the Most High!

Why doesn't Mr. Lewis sally forth at once and shoot all the doctors and nurses who are frustrating God's scheme of redemption? Of course this subject is not Mr. Lewis's strong point, as was shown by that atrocious piece of special pleading, *The Problem of Pain*.

"Provided that meetings, policies, pamphlets, movements, causes and crusades matter more to man than prayers, sacraments and charity, he is ours," observes Screwtape. Here again we see how Christianity is divorced from ethics. It is more important to grovel and dispense alms than to try to make the world a better place! At times Mr. Lewis's "give-aways" are astonishingly ingenuous.

Mr. Lewis, through Screwtape, goes on to explain why God does not force people to believe in him. "God cannot over-ride a human will. He cannot ravish; he can only woo."

Thus, on Mr. Lewis's premises, the righteous part of man can no more help following God's commands than can the wicked part help disobeying them. And of course if in the beginning there was only God, the wicked part must also be his creation, which means the Creator is not all-good. In any case, the conception of God as a lover shows to what absurdities anthropomorphism can lead. This is well illustrated in his next chapter, when we are told "God really loves the hairless bipeds he has created." The countless victims of earthquakes, plagues and hurricanes may, we suspect, beg to differ.

Next in line for attack are "philosophies such as Creative Evolution, Scientific Humanism and Communism, which fix men's affections on the future, the very core of temporality."

Conspicuously absent from his list above is Christianity which, more than any, "fixes men's affections on the future"—a future state of bliss in a nebulous Heaven. This emphasis on joy unrealised, to the detriment of good works here and now, is indeed one of the most deplorable features of Mr. Lewis's faith.

In dealing with the nature of Christ himself, Screwtape points out that each generation of "reverent rationalists" wants a new kind of historical Jesus; the 19th century one being on liberal humanitarian lines, the modern on Marxian catastrophic and revolutionary lines. Each of these, he contends, is unhistorical, for "the documents say what they say and cannot be added to: each new historical Jesus has to be got out of them by suppression at one point and exaggerations at another."

Mythicists may sympathise with this satire on those who make Christ accord with their own predilections, but if Mr. Lewis imagines that he himself accepts only what the documents have to say, he is sadly mistaken. As Shaw put it in his brilliant preface to *Androcles and the Lion*, every Christian reading the Gospels "believes what he can and disbelieves what he must."

Mr. Lewis, like Billy Graham, prefers the theological Christ of the Last Judgement passages to the ethical Jesus

of the Sermon on the Mount, so he exaggerates the former and suppresses the latter.

He is of course correct in saying the historical Jesus is unhistorical, but hardly in the sense he imagines!

To the problem that if God is omniscient, man cannot be in any sense "free," since he must always act in accordance with God's precognition, Lewis (through Screwtape) replies in substance that for God time does not exist. "He does not foresee humans making their free contributions in a future, but sees them doing so in his unbounded Now. And obviously to watch a man doing something is not to make him do it." This sounds impressive, but in reality it is only a roundabout and pretentious way of admitting that Mr. Lewis cannot solve this age-old dilemma. The conception of an "unbounded Now" in which the creation, the whole history of the universe and the Last Judgement are all taking place at precisely the same instant, is as inconceivable as that of a square circle. Mr. Lewis may of course have had a mystical vision of the logical impossibility which he calls an "unbounded Now," but if he has experienced the unutterable he would, as Dr. Johnson said of a contemporary mystical poet, be well advised not to try to utter it. The theory, of course, also makes nonsense of the Christian postulate of a personal God, for personality implies limitation by time and space.

Eventually, of course, Wormwood is routed by his patient becoming as pious a Christian as Mr. Lewis himself! Such an outcome is hardly surprising in view of the feebleness of the arguments against Christianity which Wormwood, on Screwtape's instructions, has advanced. I suggest Mr. Lewis should inform Screwtape that before he attempts to lead another soul astray he should undertake a course of reading in some of the classics of anti-theistic philosophy. When he has mastered these he will find his next assignment in corruption pathetically simple.

A New Secularist Affirmation

Secularism Affirms

1. That it is the duty, right and privilege of all to seek truth in every direction; to challenge and to criticise, scientifically and objectively, every theory, belief, or creed however ancient, established, or widely accepted: and to reject as invalid and of no social value such as are incapable of being proven and substantiated.

2. That supernatural is a contradiction in terms and therefore a meaningless word, seeing that nothing is known—or can be known, or even conceived—outside of the natural order and that so-called supernatural religion is entirely without foundation, and socially valueless.

3. That all religious ideas, theories, and creeds are entirely man-made; and therefore liable to error and should be subject to vigorous, and objective examination analysis, and criticism.

4. That all the religions are based and founded in fear, ignorance and superstition and are fostered, sponsored and propagated, primarily by those to whom they afford a comfortable means of livelihood.

5. That all gods, devils, angels and spirits belong to the same category as fairies, bogies, centaurs and mermaids; that they are fabulous beings, born of the imagination.

6. That all the so-called "holy" and "sacred" scriptures of all the religions are without authority or authenticity; that they are of purely human authorship and compilation; that they have been contributed by human individuals who had little or no scientific knowledge, cultural or educational background; that no originals are available for comparison;

that they have all through the ages, been edited and re-edited, translated and re-translated, modified, revised, altered, adapted, amended and modernised, until it is now impossible for anyone to pronounce what they were originally intended, by their authors, to convey.

7. That divinity and theology, as branches of study and learning, are entirely unscientific, arbitrary, and fictitious that they deal with propositions which are incapable of precise definition and with phenomena which are incapable of observation, examination, and classification. None of the propositions of theology, e.g., God, Divinity, devil, angel, soul, spirit, heaven, hell, future life, eternity, bliss, salvation, damnation, perdition, etc., etc., is capable of being concisely stated, precisely defined or objectively examined. Good and evil are merely relative terms.

8. That every one of the professional theologian's propositions is nebulous and equally incapable of either proof, or disproof. It has to be remembered in this connection, that there does not arise the necessity of proof, or disproof, of any proposition, until the proposition has been precisely defined. The responsibility devolves therefore upon those who propound gods, devils, etc., to define and explain them and then to prove their existence. The responsibility devolves upon those who preach about future life to produce evidence of such.

9. That professional religious propagandists know nothing at all of the works they sell and that they perpetuate their appointments and privileges by taking advantage of the ignorance and credulity of their followers and by exploiting these privileges in skillfully and shamelessly evading the challenges of unbelievers.

10. That the higher the degree of intelligence in our professional clergy, the less there is of fundamentalist belief: that every clergyman whatever his intellectual accomplishments and whatever his denomination, reserves to himself the right to accept, or reject, the dogmas and creeds of his own particular religious sect, or cult, as well as of all the others.

11. That the vast majority of our beneficed clergy now accept a considerable portion of holy writ as "allegorical," "mythological," "symbolical," and parabolical and therefore not strictly factual, though none of them can be persuaded to pronounce finally on which portions are to be so regarded.

12. That all ministers of religion and so called "holy" men would be more usefully employed in activities concerned with the only life we know, in the only world we know, in the Arts, or the Sciences, in Literature, or Philosophy, in Law, or in Medicine, or in the realms of trade, commerce and industry. In their present capacity, they contribute nothing of social value.

13. That religious believers, as such, have no monopoly of the human virtues; have no higher cultural and intellectual standards or values and are not, in any way superior to believers in other religious theories, or to unbelievers, and that altruism, aestheticism and self sacrifice are not their special and peculiar prerogatives.

14. That professional religionists should automatically be required periodically to make public affirmation and defence of their beliefs and non-beliefs.

15. That man's problems are concerned with this world, and are of social, political and economic significance, which man will and must solve for himself. There can be no external assistance.

LUKE STRAIGHT

Correspondence

WHY?

Your correspondent, Mr. H. Gratorex, appears still to be very worried about the correct use of the word, "why." I confess that I, also, am worried why this gentleman finds such difficulty in apprehending my explanations in this connection. For his special benefit let me briefly summarize what I actually said:

I pointed out that I am quite well aware of the difference between Fatalism and Determinism—an academic point which appears to haunt Mr. Gratorex like another "King Charles' head." I also stated that some astrologers are fatalistic, viz. recognise no other force except the omnipotent influence of the stars; whilst others—Richard Garnett, alias G. D. Trent, in this connection—admit the modifying influence of character and environment and accordingly, qualify as *bona fide* determinists.

With regard to the famous word "Why" I do not, incidentally know *why* (1) it is necessary to repeat all this—if one accepts, say the Law of Evolution, one knows *why* men and apes still have certain organs and habits in common. I do not see how such an illusion either benefits Christianity or admits *metaphysical* postulates.

I would suggest to Mr. Gratorex that to repeat his own elegant metaphor, even a "scalded cat" might be able to apprehend such quite elementary propositions.

F. A. RIDLEY.

IMPOSTORS

Mr. Ratcliffe takes exception to my statement at a recent N.S.S. meeting in Glasgow in which I included the Labour Party in a personal list of three modern impostors. He declares this to be "an insult, uncalled for, and a dis-service to Freethought propaganda." Apparently he can stomach insults to Billy Graham and the Monarchy but not to the Labour Party.

I am freethinker enough to know that the Freethought movement is composed of all shades of political belief, but to be taken to task for any opinions I may express, as when Mr. Ratcliffe declares them to be "uncalled for," seems to me borders on the dictatorial. I unrepentantly reply that the record of the Labour Party has been a consistent betrayal of the principles and ideals of socialism. Its leaders, and aspirants to leadership, while paying lip-service to socialism, are more interested in creating a system of state capitalism with its consequent "plums of office" for its careerist officials.

J. BARROWMAN.

[Mr. R. R. Morrison writes in support.—Ed.]

A TARRADIDDLE

I have never been able to understand the antipathy of some freethinkers towards the celebration of Christmas. Surely "A tarradiddle now and then is practised by the wisest men."

ELLA BRIGHT.

DREAMS AND VISIONS

One imagines that millions of people are being hugely entertained by the authoritative pronouncement now permitted by the Press Bureau of the Vatican that at the height of the crisis in the Pope's illness the Pope DID see Jesus Christ. Roman Catholics, of course, will swallow this howler, hook line and sinker, but the question arises how many other people will swallow the dope from the manner in which the general press has passed along this message just in the same manner as though it were passing on a statement of fact. This writer has not seen any newspaper which, in reporting this outrageous claim, has even indicated that there could be any doubt about the claim. At least one national daily has further stated that the Pope in 1951 also saw the Blessed Virgin.

One supposes that at any moment now the Pope will be also seeing His Majesty The Devil, The Archangel Michael and even The Lord God Yahweh himself. And this is the XXth Century!

H. DAY.

THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

The Christian calendar contains many baffling problems, of which that of the Immaculate Conception is surely the strangest.

The Catholic calendar gives March 25 as the day of the "Annunciation"—that is to say, the day on which the Holy Ghost first visited Mary.

Exactly what passed between them on that occasion we cannot say, but at all events a child was born to the Virgin on December 25, exactly nine months afterwards. This gives a period of gestation of 275 days, the exact average of all human experience. From the mathematical point of view, therefore, it is easy to understand why the conception is termed "immaculate." What is less easy

to appreciate is why the Holy Ghost, having decided to give so astonishing a demonstration of its miraculous powers, did not, at the same time, depart from human precedents and arrange a delivery delay of, say, two weeks, or two years.

However that may be, the two main facts hang together, and the Holy Ghost may, of course, have had excellent reasons for acting as it did.

But a third date is mentioned by the Catholic calendar, completely destroying the limpid clarity of this affair. December 8 is dedicated to the "Conception Immaculée de la Vierge."

What are we now to conclude? Did the Holy Ghost employ delayed conception after the manner of a time-bomb? Or was His first appearance (on March 25) a purely formal affair, the more intimate meeting occurring on December 8? Or did the birth actually take place later than is popularly supposed? A curtain of impenetrable blackness confronts the earnest seeker after truth, and I am most anxious to know whether one of your readers can throw light on this extraordinary problem.

R. READER.

[The "annunciation" of the Virgin Mary is not the Immaculate Conception. This term is applied only to Mary who is "immaculate" because she was born without sin.—EDITOR.]

EIRE AND THE PAPACY

A friend has sent me from Eire some clippings from the *Irish Times*. They are eloquent of the influence that the Roman Catholic Church exerts in Eire. A picture taken at the Mansion House reveals the Archbishop of Dublin, the Apostolic Nuncio and other church dignitaries assembled with trade union delegates at the handing over of a large sum of money—"a workers gift to Mary." Another picture discloses new motor cars, in a display of vehicles, being "blessed" by a high church official.

That there is in Southern Ireland a lamentable degree of censorship is, of course, well known. The heavy hand of censorship, the banning of the works of authors of the highest ranking, is I am afraid likely to continue so long as the Minister of Education (General Mulcahy) makes public statements such as the following.

"The State's approach to education unreservedly accepted the supernatural conception of man's nature and destiny, and the over-riding function of the Minister was to assist parents to educate their children in religion."

A good many years ago a famous author asked "Will Home Rule be Rome Rule?" The answer seems to be Yes, Auckland, N.Z.

ARTHUR O'HALLORAN.

HUMANISM

In your "Review" of Nov. 4, Mr. Cutner opposes the word HUMANISM. Permit me to give you a definition of this word as it is understood by Dutch humanists, members of the *Humanistische Verbond* (Humanist League) in Holland.

"Humanism is a philosophy demanding the fullest possible development of the faculties of every human being in order to bring happiness on this earth to everybody, without aiming at getting a reward after death."

I can agree with your view that various religious people were, and are, humanistic in the way in which they perform their duties towards others, but they act accordingly only in the hope of an eternal reward in heaven. It is obvious, therefore, that the modern humanist who calls himself such stands on a much higher moral level than those who try to do good to their fellowmen only because they hope to be rewarded afterwards!

Holland.

J. LIEDERMOOY.

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