

The Freethinker

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I AM AFRAID I must ask the indulgence of readers, in order to make a further statement concerning the omission of my brief television talk from the Christopher Mayhew programme, *We, the British*. From several letters I have been shown, it appears that the BBC has adopted a standard form of reply to inquirers about the omission. It is sent from Broadcasting House, London, W.1, and reads as follows:

Thank you for your letter of _____. The position with regard to Mr. McCall's statement which was recorded on film for possible use in the fifth programme in the series by Mr. Christopher Mayhew, M.P., "We, the British", is as follows:

In preparing a programme of this nature, more material is always collected than can subsequently be included in a broadcast of only thirty minutes. When Mr. McCall was recorded on film it was at a very early stage in the planning of the programme, and it was explained to him that the film sequence might not be included when the programme took its final shape. Eventually much of the pre-filmed material, including Mr. McCall's statement, had to be omitted owing to the short space of time available. Both we and Mr. Mayhew were sorry to have to take this decision, but Mr. Mayhew took account of another statement that the prevailing tendency in philosophy and amongst philosophers in Britain today was unfavourable to religion, when he concluded that "there has been a decline over recent decades in our religious faith".

I hope this answers the points you raised in your letter.—Yours faithfully,

(Signed) KATHLEEN HAACKE,

Secretariat.

Doubt

This letter is distinctly misleading. It implies that there was always a doubt that my talk would be included in the programme and—as was made clear in *THE FREETHINKER* (June 8th) and in my letters printed in *The New Statesman and Nation* (June 2nd) and *The Observer* (June 3rd)—this is simply not true. The BBC puts the emphasis on the "very early stage" at which the film was made and the caution to me that it "might not be included when the programme took its final shape." The succeeding sentence, referring to the omission of other material, gives the impression that my talk was omitted merely for reasons of time, along with a lot more.

This, I insist, is deliberate misrepresentation. Let us consider the letter a little more carefully. "In preparing a programme of this nature, more material is always collected than can subsequently be included in a broadcast of only 30 minutes." Of course—that is understood. But I suggest that the producer knew from the start that his programme would be limited to half-an-hour. I would certainly be prepared to assert that, on April 17th—only five weeks

before transmission, and the date of the agreement with me—he knew the length the programme was to be.

Dispelled

Knowing the experience of other atheists who had attempted to obtain a hearing on the BBC, it was hardly likely that I should be over-optimistic of my chances of being seen and heard. In fact, I was extremely sceptical—as were my colleagues. My scepticism was only dispelled by the letter from the BBC which has already appeared in these columns. Let me refresh your memories of the opening sentence:

I am writing to confirm our telephone conversation regarding the 3½ minute talk which you gave in the film sequence on the 11th April, *which will form part of the above programme*" ("Britain in Decline?").

The italicised portion of that sentence is, I maintain, unequivocal. On April 17th it had definitely been decided to include my talk. It was then that I made the matter known to members of the National Secular Society and to readers of this paper. There was, of course, always a chance that the BBC would reverse its decision to let me speak to 5,000,000 viewers; and I never overlooked that chance. But I did assume (here I admit to error!) that, however illiberal the Corporation might be, it would be courteous enough to inform me of such an occurrence. How wrong I was!

Your Questions Unanswered

There are two important questions which should be answered by the BBC. And, though I fear they will remain unanswered, I intend to ask them now. They are:

1. On what date, between April 17th (when I was informed in writing that my talk "will form part of the above programme") and May 22nd (when the programme was televised) was it decided to omit my contribution?
2. Who made the decision to omit it?

One or two further points should be borne in mind. After waiting for a few days expecting the BBC to explain the omission and to apologise for it, I wrote on May 25th, asking the reason for it. No explanation seemed forthcoming, so I sent letters to *The New Statesman and Nation*, *The Observer*, and *Reynolds News*. As mentioned above, the first two papers published the letters; *Reynolds* did not. On June 8th, *THE FREETHINKER* dealt with the matter in some detail, and copies were sent to the BBC Television Department.

The letters to the Press came to the notice of the BBC and were referred to in the apologetic and (professedly) explanatory reply which I received from Mr. Jeremy Murray-Brown of the Television Talks Department, dated June 12th and printed in *THE FREETHINKER* (June 22nd). The "explanation" was broadly similar to that in the letters signed by Kathleen Haacke but, at least, it con-

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

The B.B.C. — Misrepresentation

—By COLIN MCCALL—

tained an apology for "not informing you before the television broadcast of our decision not to include your filmed statement in it".

Difficult! Distasteful!

I sympathise with Mr. Murray-Brown. In the absence of Mr. Rex Moorfoot, and with the Press showing some interest in the affair, he wrote what must have been a difficult and — I like to think — distasteful letter. Our brief acquaintance had been most amicable; now he was called upon to defend an impossible position. I do not think that it was he or Mr. Moorfoot who decided to exclude my contribution: they seemed genuinely desirous of making the programme as varied and representative as possible. Whether it was Mr. Christopher Mayhew or a "higher" authority who made the decision, I have no means of knowing — and it is most unlikely that the BBC will tell. There have been some rumours, but that is all.

Expecting Too Much

We can only say that some person or persons unknown revoked the decision — already conveyed to me in writing — that my talk would be used; and that the said person or persons took no step to inform me of the revocation. We can add that I waited nearly three weeks for a reply to my written request for an explanation.

There are two further things I should like to know.

1. Amongst the other "pre-filmed material" which "had to be omitted", were there any other talks that had already been specifically accepted into the programme? If so, who were the speakers and were they

informed beforehand that the decision to include their contributions had been revoked?

2. Does not the "short space of time available" argument seem a little inadequate when the length of the included contributions by the ex-Bishop of London are considered? Might not Dr. Wand have been asked to give up just two minutes of his rather long participation in a programme of "only 30 minutes"? The Bishop ceding two minutes to an atheist — that would have been a rare example of Christian charity! (My talk was certainly not 3½ minutes, as the BBC agreement states; it was two minutes long at the outside.)

In other words, is it expecting too much that an atheist be allowed one-15th of the time on a programme to which he had been invited, and on which he was told he would appear? Apparently it is.

And Now ...

That is why the Humanist Council (of which the National Secular Society is a constituent body) has decided to launch a campaign for greater freedom of the air for the expression of Humanist views. The first meeting will be held in the Caxton Hall, Westminster, on Wednesday, October 3rd, and Mrs. Margaret Knight will be among the speakers. It is hoped to follow this meeting with others in the provinces and, with Press support, to show that there is a body of intelligent opinion in this country which is anti-Christian and demands the right to say so through the greatest propaganda medium ever invented.

Religion and Evil

By ROBERT KUTTNER

PHILOSOPHERS have long speculated on the problem of evil being present in a universe created by an all-good, all-powerful God. This dilemma has been recognised since ancient times. It was stated that God could not be all good if He tolerated evil in our world. If He resented evil but could not eliminate it, then He was not all-powerful. The attempts of theologians to come up with suitable answers to this problem border on the humorous.

Some baffled thinkers have claimed that evil is allowed to operate to test the worth of God's creatures. Another weak and insipid theory has it that God draws glory to Himself by confounding evil at the last moment to make it serve the purposes of heaven. Others say that evil is but an illusion and that this is, after all, the best of all possible worlds. These arguments are almost self-refuting.

What need has God to test the mettle of his servants? He knows which ones received inadequate characters or defective wills through His own design. And what benevolent God is served by the evil that damns so many of His creatures? As to whether evil really exists, we know it to be too apparent to be only an illusion. The existence of tangible evil contradicts God's claims to infinite goodness.

There is an important section in the works of Thomas Aquinas which purports to deal with the question of evil. Rephrased somewhat, it was asked: How can evil exist if God is infinite goodness? The very fact that God is infinite would preclude evil since, if two opposite properties exist and one is infinite, the other must be zero. A physical analogy based on space illustrates this point. If a room is completely (infinitely) filled with water, it can contain nothing else.

How does St. Thomas explain this? He doesn't. At the point mentioned, he launches into his famous "proofs" for God. He neatly side-stepped the issue and never returned to demonstrate the infinite benevolence of the Almighty.

Thus, evil can bewilder even the shrewdest saints.

Religion cannot explain disease, pain, and death without fables. To a man dying of cancer, it would take a large dose of theology to prove to him that his painful death is necessary to God. To a mosquito, God is good for having furnished so much human nourishment. But sometimes man the evil wisdom that produced mosquito netting and insecticides. It would be interesting to record a disease germ's comments about the devilish antibiotics that man has unearthed.

Primitive people, denied the light of scholastic philosophy, have been driven to explain evil in fables which, considered objectively, are no worse than the best priestly accounts and certainly are far more poetic. Among some Indian tribes, the tragedy of death was visited on the world at the behest of a bird. This myth has the bird complaining to the powers-that-be that human immortality would rob it of its nesting place among the tombs of the dead. Since one creature spoke against eternal life, the gods withdrew the gift. Even Aquinas could not improve on this!

Mankind's troubles grew out of the curiosity of women. Through the agency of Pandora's box and Eve's apple, evil gained entry into this world. But a debt of gratitude is owed to these pioneer women. They have shown that the gods we worship have an evil side to their nature which makes them unworthy of our respect. If a supernatural entity has no control over evil — or no desire to control it — then he is more devil than god. By this analysis, modern religion seems to be an inverted form of devil worship. A god who makes use of the torments of hell is too wicked to receive our prayers. The Yezedee devil worshippers of the Near East provide an interesting contrast. Their god — the Fallen Angel — they consider to be wrongly condemned to hell.

To the materialist, evil is merely one aspect of an indifferent universe. Its existence is a problem only to unscientific thinkers.

[From the *Truth Seeker*, New York.]

Review

By F. A. RIDLEY

Karl Marx: Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy.
Watts and Co. 21s. Ed. T. B. BOTTOMORE and MAXIMILIAN RUBEL.

"OF MAKING MANY BOOKS there is no end." Such was the no doubt inspired opinion of the ancient Hebrew author of *Ecclesiastes*, long before the invention of printing. Nowadays a continuous stream of books pours from the press, many of which frankly appear to be selected for publication on rather nebulous principles. Others, while in a higher intellectual category, yet appear as perhaps a trifle superfluous.

In my view the selected writings under present review are edited competently if without any particular originality, and tend to fall in the latter category. There are already in existence numerous editions of all the works of Marx, or "Dr. Charles Marx", as his contemporaries described the illustrious author of *Das Kapital*. It does seem to me a trifle presumptuous at this time of day to attempt to improve on such masterly summaries of Marxian doctrine as those provided by such eminent scholars as Kautsky, Max Beer and, more recently, D. Ryazanof. On perusing these selected writings I could not altogether escape the feeling that it had all been done before, and that the present undertaking actually rather tends to appear—to use a theological term—"a work of supererogation".

As regards these selections themselves, the editors appear to have presented a reasonably fair cross-section of the work of an encyclopædic intellect who, whatever view one may hold of his often controversial theories, must unquestionably be ranked among the most influential thinkers of the past century. Karl Marx is often thought of primarily as an economist. But he did not so regard himself; nor has posterity regarded him in this restricted light. Marx was a belated son of the Renaissance, a giant intellect who touched life at many points, a modern Aristotle who took all knowledge for his field and wrote on many subjects, from surplus value, as well as French history, to technical subjects such as windmills, upon which he wrote a learned treatise, not, unfortunately, included here. However, a very fair estimate can be obtained from these varied selections taken from the majority of the master's works. Karl Marx wrote voluminously—if not always luminously!—for upwards of 30 years. His earliest published writings appeared in the early '40's, his last in the late '70's. They embrace politics, economics, history, besides that even vaster and more indefinable subject, sociology. Marx is not an easy writer to follow. In fundamental originality he was no doubt superior to any of his "Marxist" collaborators and disciples: the very term Marxist perhaps indicates his intellectual superiority. But Engels was certainly a more lucid exponent of what is sometimes regarded as their joint doctrine; and Trotsky, if a less original intellect, was actually a more brilliant writer on Marxism than was its titular founder!

Anyone in the mid-20th century, the age of competing social systems and of revolutionary upheavals, varying, as at present, with uneasy "co-existence", finds inevitably a peculiar difficulty in evaluating the work and system of Karl Marx. For the German exile in the British Museum was not just another economist, not even, nor principally, just a political and sociological thinker of genius, a purely academic person. Like Rousseau before him, Marx was a prophet of revolution, an inspirer of movements described as subversive in the conservative world of his day, one of that select band of stormy spirits whose mission in life it

is to "cast the kingdoms old into another mould". Such, over large parts of the world, is today his role. In Fascist or Catholic lands the reading of Marx is still probably illegal. Franco and the Pope, for example, do not merely regard Marx as a German economist who taught disputable theories. Precisely because of its *revolutionary* character, Marxism has always had a millenarian, an apocalyptic, aspect which has caused many "pure" rationalists and humanists to regard even the purely theoretical aspects of Marxism with suspicion. Unfortunately, however, evolution has not yet reached that no doubt desirable point where "the evolution of revolution" has reached the purely rational stage, wherein all appeals to sentiment and to a revolutionary *mystique*, have been entirely banished. Perhaps Marx himself, who disliked Utopias and Utopians, might have held that a purely reasonable revolution had itself a Utopian ring? Certainly in his own writings, dispassionate scientific analysis jostles, sometimes rather incongruously, with passionate *ethical appeals* and denunciations. Let us leave it to the Marxists and their critics to sort out such purely theoretical questions as to how far ethical exhortations are compatible with historical materialism. They are undoubtedly present, sometimes conspicuously so, in the extant writings of this arch-apostle of an *impersonal* interpretation of history. In the volume before us we have many such interpolations, if that is the right word. As long ago as 1870 that most learned of modern historians, Lord Acton, described *Das Kapital*, only published three years earlier, as the Koran of international Socialism. One does not refer to a purely *scientific* work in such terms! But then, neither of Marx's two most important works, *Kapital* or *Communist Manifesto*, is a purely scientific work. Marx was both a scientist and a revolutionary, a theoretical observer and—dare we say it?—a revolutionary mystic, though one who confined his mysticism to the material world. It was precisely this unique combination of qualities which gave him the unique position he still holds.

Whether the best way to read Marx is via the selected writings I am rather doubtful. But every thinking person ought certainly to read Marx somehow. However, the editors have done their job and the publishers have as usual turned out an attractive book in an appropriate jacket.

QUIZ

1. Who was elected President of the N.S.S. in 1871?
2. Who was Hypatia and what was her fate?
3. Who were the leaders of the two reformist groups of Cromwellian times known as (a) the Levellers, (b) the Diggers?
4. What is the origin of the expression "Bless you!" which greets a sneeze?
5. When was the last World Union of Freethinkers Congress held in London?
6. Who wrote the banned book *Well of Loneliness*?
7. The Ten Commandments show a similarity to what previous code?

(Answers on page 249)

NEXT WEEK

TWO PROSPECTIVE SAINTS

By F. A. RIDLEY

This Believing World

Once again, the BBC staged a TV show with a parson facing four "agnostics" asking him questions, called "Continuing the Argument". The Rev. W. Gowland is always ready to answer questions both in the open air and in factories — but it is fairly obvious that his questioners were, in the main, Christians, for they showed almost literally that they knew nothing whatever of the agnostic position. Merely to say with a great deal of hesitation, "I can hardly believe that . . ." does not necessarily make one an agnostic.

★

On this particular occasion, religion and Christianity were carefully and successfully shunted nearly out of sight, most of the "argument" consisting of Mr. Gowland attacking Premium Bonds on the grounds that "getting something for nothing was not Christian"; and it was amusing to see that not one of his "opponents" could answer him. The truth is that putting money into a savings bank, or into some industrial or Government concern, which brings dividends or interest always means getting money for nothing; and nobody gets more out of its investments than the Church in this way. We half expected Mr. Gowland to say that Jesus was the greatest anti-money-for-nothing champion the world had ever seen.

★

For the rest, the "agnostics" put up a deplorable show. They allowed the reverend gentleman to get away with all kinds of assumptions. We always wonder how the BBC manages to get these agnostics, unbelievers, or reverent Rationalists. Who puts them up, or how are they chosen?

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Christians who have any "doubts" can always get them answered in the *Leicester Evening Mail* by "the Padre" — though we are fairly certain that our more intelligent bishops will find some of his "replies" give them a pain in the neck. For example, there is the Creation story, which he tries to justify. After all, the two accounts in Genesis, he tells us, are not "very far wrong in the order". And he triumphantly adds: "One thing happened after another. No intelligent person denies that fact." This brilliant piece of logic and science might well satisfy his readers, but what about his Bishop? Perhaps the padre belongs to Jehovah's Witnesses?

★

Evvington Church in Leicester was hit by lightning recently during — ye gods! — a Confirmation Service. And this, in spite of the lightning conductor attached to the steeple. Yet the number of pubs in the vicinity, to say nothing of cinemas, escaped scathless. If a Confirmation Service and a lightning conductor cannot protect a church what is the Lord thinking about? Surely he is not transferring his Love and Grace to a pub!

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However much the Catholic hierarchy may deplore the fact, Catholic women all over the country do practise Family Planning (as it is now called) in spite of the tearful pleadings of Catholic members of the Union of Catholic Women. These ladies are also dismayed at the numbers of Catholics who go to court for separation orders — most of them no doubt wishing to God that they could get a divorce. And they are by no means pleased that so many of our much publicised "gangsters", whose activities in murder and razor slashing are now occupying our courts, are Catholics. Praise the Lord, they are not Freethinkers!

★

We are delighted to report the publicity meeting organised by the First Catford Spiritualist Church. The president,

Mrs. Johnson, told the audience that she held the service to prove to sceptics that "a medium could get into touch with the spirit world." And immediately the hall was packed with spirits all doing their utmost to get in touch with her — waving handkerchiefs, or gloves, or showing auras, or saluting her. Mrs. Johnson spoke gaily to them all, "making jokes". Nobody naturally saw the spirits who were sitting on the chairs or between them or even above them; but only blatant sceptics would deny their existence for Mrs. Johnson saw them all. We hope readers will note that this is the most convincing seance we have ever reported.

The Rising Generation

IX — THE JEWISH CANON

THE WORD "CANON" here means the books in the Old Testament part of the Bible accepted by Jewish authority as "inspired" or "holy". The Bible as a whole is considered by Christians to be "inspired" by God; that is, he is responsible for it, and therefore it is "Holy" — the Holy Bible. If Christians are not quite so certain about this these days, it is because of the criticism of Freethinkers.

Nobody knows who first collected the books in the Old Testament or when they were first considered holy. Nobody knows who wrote any of the books or, for that matter, in what language they were first written in.

It is claimed (but there is not a scrap of evidence for the claim) that it was Ezra who first collected the various writings in the Old Testament. The Book of Ezra is supposed to have been written by him after the return of the Jews from captivity about 536 B.C.; but we know nothing about him except what we can gather from the books of Ezra and Nehemiah and Josephus — and he could only follow tradition. There is not a scrap of evidence that any of the books of the Old Testament were in existence in the supposed days of Ezra. It is even said that all the books of the Old Testament were lost when the Jews were taken into captivity, and that Ezra wrote the lot again under "divine inspiration" absolutely accurately. There is no evidence whatever for this belief.

In the ultimate, when the Christian Church accepted the Hebrew Bible from the Jews — Jews themselves consider that it was "pinched" from them without authority — it was ready to agree to the Jewish Canon, though it added a number of books which Jewish authority had unreservedly thrown out. This is the Apocrypha which will be found in all Roman Catholic Bibles but not in the Protestant ones. Here the Protestants agree with the Jews.

Not all the books in the Hebrew Old Testament were without question accepted by them. Some Jewish rabbis were by no means certain whether they ought to include the Book of Job, which was almost certainly written by a "pagan" or Gentile writer. The Song of Solomon was no more written by Solomon — whose historical existence is very doubtful — than the sceptical Ecclesiastes was written by Jeremiah. The books of Ruth and Esther were also hotly discussed by the Jews — though here one must be certain what is meant by the words "the Jews". What Jews? Who were they, and what qualifications had they for admitting or not admitting a book into the Hebrew Canon? No one can answer these questions.

We are not absolutely certain that any book of the Old Testament was written in Hebrew. They might well have been all translations from the so-called Greek translation of the Bible called the Septuagint — but that is another story.

H. C.

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. MILLS.—This is not a Christian journal—and therefore, if you have positive proof that Jesus was crucified on a Wednesday and not on a Friday we advise you to convert our two Archbishops of Canterbury and York, the Pope of Rome, the Moderator of the Free Churches, and sundry other eminent Christian bodies like Jehovah's Witnesses. We shall then be happy to publish your infallible proofs.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

- Bradford (Broadway Car Park).—Sunday, 7.30 p.m.: Messrs. DAY, NEWTON and SHEPPARD.
- Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street, Kingston-on-Thames).—Every Sunday, 8 p.m.: J. W. BARKER and E. MILLS.
- Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every weekday, 1 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, SMITH and FINKEL. Sundays, 7.45 p.m.: Messrs. MILLS, WOODCOCK, SMITH and FINKEL. Platt Fields, 3 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, MILLS and others.
- Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Pierhead).—Meetings most evenings of the week (often afternoons): Messrs. THOMPSON, SALISBURY, HOGAN, PARRY, HENRY and others.
- North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Every Sunday, noon: L. EBURY and A. ARTHUR.
- Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY and R. POWE. Sunday, 11 a.m.: R. MORRELL and R. POWE.
- West London Branch N.S.S.—Every Sunday at the Marble Arch from 4 p.m.: Messrs. ARTHUR, EBURY and others.
- West Ham Branch N.S.S. (Victoria Park).—Every Sunday: Various speakers.

Notes and News

MRS. JEAN MANN, the M.P. for Coatsbridge and Airdrie, has been rebuked by the Free Church of Scotland for saying in the House, during a heated debate, that the Church was "held everywhere, rightly or wrongly, in contempt." The *Monthly Record*, organ of the Free Church, swells with righteous indignation. Will Mrs. Mann now risk loss of votes by pursuing her theme?

★

A 64-YEAR-OLD Nottingham man was recently charged with being drunk and disorderly in the Old Market Square—the outdoor speaking site in Nottingham (*Nottingham Evening Post*, 14/7/56). He pleaded not guilty (having had only six pints of beer!) and said he went to the Square to hear Tom Mosley, "the religious speaker". "He is a friend of mine," continued the defendant, "but we don't argue much as he is a religious speaker and I argue politics." He was given a conditional discharge and ordered to pay 4s. costs, and the Chairman of the magistrates remarked: "Mr. Tom Mosley will be offended if you describe him as a religious speaker again." Incidentally, the defendant's "friend", Mr. Mosley, tells us that he had never seen him before.

THE concern of the pious for the impious is often touching, often irritating; sometimes it is both at the same time. Take an instance which has been puzzling us lately. Reading the N.S.S. Secretary's first letter in *The Observer*, a Walsall man wrote asking for particulars of the Society. These were duly sent. Then a further letter arrived from the same person, repeating the request for information, and a second envelope was despatched. Some time later, the Secretary received a telephone call from the *Daily Express* inquiring if our address was still 41 Gray's Inn Road. The same gentleman from Walsall wanted to make absolutely sure. Mr. McCall took no chances the third time: the package was registered and it pierced the "Iron Curtain". The membership form came back completed, and our Walsall friend has been welcomed as a member of the Society. He now writes in explanation: "Regarding the non-delivery of previous correspondence, I find that my Christian family forged the 'Iron Curtain' to my house! Apparently atheism is synonymous with wickedness, and it was 'their duty' to prevent corrupting literature from reaching me."

★

WE also confess to irritation when we read that people saved from death attribute their escape to God instead of where it rightfully belongs—to the gallantry of men. Thirty-nine members of "a religious organisation" on a sea trip round Torbay, Devon, "started to pray" as their motor-boat ran on the rocks and began to sink. They were rescued "only just in time" by a Brixham trawler. One of the grateful ladies told a reporter: "We were on the rocks but I knew the Lord would save us." Whether it ever occurred to her to ask why the Lord ran them on the rocks in the first place, we cannot say. And if Gerard Manley Hopkins could detect the hand of God in the Wreck of the Deutschland, one shouldn't perhaps be too hard on this lady member of "a religious organisation". But it still irritates us.

★

SECLARISTS in North Staffordshire and Dumbartonshire are asked to get in touch with Mr. J. W. Hawthorne, No. 1 Fairbank Avenue, Oakhill, Stoke-on-Trent, and Mr. William Kirkwood, 27 Union Street, Kirkintilloch, respectively, with a view to forming groups and—later, it is hoped—branches of the National Secular Society. Mr. Hawthorne prefers actual calls at his home (wherever possible) to letters, and we are sure that Mr. Kirkwood would concur on this. But, by letter or in person, get in touch as soon as possible, please.

ANSWERS TO QUIZ

1. Mr. A. Trevelyan, a benefactor of the society, who became "caretaker President" while Bradlaugh attended to his mounting commitments. Bradlaugh resumed the following year.
2. A notable heretic of the fifth century: she was murdered by the order of St. Cyril.
3. (a) Lilburne, (b) Winstanley.
4. It is a hangover from the belief that a sneeze indicated the departure of a worn-out soul from the body, and means, more or less, "May your new soul do you good."
5. In 1946.
6. Miss Radclyffe Hall.
7. The Hammurabi Code, Babylon c. 2100.

G.H.T.

The clergy pray for rain or fine weather, and on great occasions, such as the potato blight, the archbishop issues a special form of petition for its removal. But the clergy and archbishop are aware all the time that the evils which they pray against depend on natural causes, and that a prayer from a Christian minister will as little bring a change of weather as the incantation of a Kaffre rain-maker.—J. A. FROUDE.

The Imposture of Lourdes—1

By H. CUTNER

IN THE *Reader's Digest* some months ago, appeared a version of Miss Ruth Cranston's *The Mystery of Lourdes*. As far as this condensation is concerned, there seems to be no mystery whatever about it. She is a whole-hearted believer in the Miracles of Healing which occur so often there according to her own account. We are told that she talked with doctors, nurses, stretcher-bearers, and patients. She "verified and documented the facts she presents" and, as a good Protestant herself, she can claim to be "an impartial observer."

Now this question of healing or curing incurable cases of illness really goes far beyond Lourdes and similar pious shrines. Throughout the ages there have been men and women claiming wonderful cures by all sorts of means. The reader should read, as one of the most interesting examples in history, the life of Paracelsus (1492-1541). He can claim to be one of the fathers of modern methods in treating diseases, and he certainly had extraordinary success though a stout believer in astrology and similar magic formulas. Or one can take the Bavarian priest, Father Kneipp, who for forty years last century was beset by the sick coming from all parts of Europe, and who was undoubtedly a natural-born healer. He used herbs and the now almost forgotten water cure, and he must have had thousands of grateful patients. A Kneipp "cult" grew up, and one could buy the herbs he used and the books he wrote, to cure one's own ailments as easily as the worthy Kneipp himself did, and as successfully — though it did not work out that way very often.

Then there was the famous F. V. Raspail (1794-1878) who, wishing to become a doctor eventually ridiculed the methods used in his day by medical men, and narrowed down the art of healing to the simple use of camphor in a few special ways; and the book in which he described his methods became the Bible of healing all over France. He certainly had extraordinary success, and in Paris a famous boulevard is named after him. As for what are called "old women's" remedies used for centuries in the countryside by peasants unable to call in a doctor — they must also have had a big share in the art of healing. And we all know the working-man "bone setter" who can do things with sprained wrists and ankles and knees often denied to thoroughly-trained medical men. In short, when it comes to healing, the most wonderful cures are constantly taking place due to simple remedies, patent medicines, concoctions of herbs, and even highly-diluted drugs (as in homœopathy) which the most skilful doctors are unable to explain. There is no reason to doubt some of the cures proclaimed by Christian Science, faith healing or spirit healing. But of course the cures are never the result of reading Mrs. Eddy or the work of spirits or of Christ Jesus.

This preamble is necessary because, if any "genuine" cures are reported from Lourdes, they are at once hailed as a proof that it was the Blessed Virgin who performed them. And further, that the Roman Catholic Church is in complete touch with God, Jesus, and Mary. That some people have been cured at Lourdes is no more wonderful than that some people have been cured by the camphor of Raspail, or the buckets of water poured on them by Fr. Kneipp. But as Lourdes is the pet shrine of Roman Catholicism, and so many people on the continent are still believers in Roman Catholicism (if sometimes only nominally) it is not surprising that sick people make the

pilgrimage. When one is really ill the chance of a cure is eagerly grasped at — what does it matter how or why?

Out of the millions of sick people who have visited Lourdes since Bernadette had a chat with the Virgin in 1858, how many *genuine* cures have been reported? The percentage must be far smaller than the cures by Raspail, Kneipp, or any of our hospitals. In fact if the figures were available, I could submit that our own patent medicines have a far higher percentage of cures. I am certain that Father Kneipp was far more successful than Lourdes, using only pails of ordinary water quite unblest even by him. Kneipp put down all his cures to God, Raspail to camphor, and Lourdes to the Virgin — but nobody really knows why water has so often failed, why even camphor has had to be given up these days by whole-hearted believers in it, and why millions of sufferers at Lourdes have to return to their homes to die.

Miss Cranston's book follows on the usual lines. She swallows the story that "miracles began" almost as soon as the "people" — she tells us, "From the beginning the people believed in Bernadette" — were inspired by her intense faith. She was fourteen years old at the time so we can well understand how her "intense faith" inspired them. Almost at once the blind began to see, a dying child was immediately made to live and so on. There were of course dozens of miracles at the outset — but for some reason, not very clear, the miracles began to dwindle directly the "Bureau of Medical Verification" started to function. Miss Cranston does not question any of the cures which for her "have constituted a living argument difficult to explain away" She goes to the "archives of the Medical Bureau", and there finds the details of cures. They must be true if the archives say so.

The difficulty we have with Miss Cranston is that all through she swallows what she is told. As an example, she repeats the story that Bernadette was told by the Virgin to "drink from the spring" in the grotto, though "no spring had been known to exist there", and that she did so. "At first a mere trickle" she tells us, "it soon became a powerful stream." But — at least in the "digest" I am quoting from — she gives us no authority for this statement. The truth is that the spring was certainly known to have existed there and in his "Report" published in the *Annals* in 1879, Fr. Richard, a devout priest and a good geologist, admits that a great number of witnesses proved that to him. The reader will find it all carefully explained in *The Lourdes Miracles* by Joseph McCabe published in 1925. I am quite sure Miss Cranston has never heard of this book, or even of Joseph McCabe. She might still get the shock of her life if she comes across it.

She gives us a full account of one terrific miracle which is obvious Miss Cranston believes was the work of the Virgin herself. All the details are there — the way in which in 1900 (or 1901) a postal clerk called Gargam was almost killed in a railway accident — his spine hopelessly injured, paralysing him from the waist, and his collar bone broken. After twenty months in hospital, the doctors warned his family he was dying. His very religious mother persuaded him to go to Lourdes, and just when the nurse thought the end had come, he got up, the paralysis gone, and he was ready to eat; for over fifty years afterwards he enjoyed robust health, dying in 1952.

McCabe deals specifically with this "cure" a little

nearer the time of the accident. He does not swallow as does Miss Cranston, everything told him. In fact, this marvellous miracle was "a prolonged and severe nerve struggle against a nerve malady in circumstances of intense nervous expectation", and Gargam "recovered normal health very gradually." McCabe insists that in no instance, as far as he read Catholic books on Lourdes, "is there medical evidence of an instantaneous cure." And most of the cures were cases of hysterical women.

But a remarkable book has just been published on Lourdes by two French doctors and I hope to review it in my next article.

Who Moved the Stone? 2

By T. R. FERNANDO

IN MY PREVIOUS ARTICLE, "Who Moved the Stone?", I developed a theory to cover the alleged mystery of the empty tomb. There is, however, another possibility that occurs to me, and this supposes that Jesus was actually dead. He had rich and powerful friends (18) whom the rapid approach of the Sabbath prevented from giving his remains the solemn burial they desired. They took down the corpse and laid it hurriedly into the nearest tomb (19). The burial was temporary, for preparations were at once begun (20) for a suitable embalming which was to take place after the Sabbath was over (21). The women who undertook the embalment came and ascertained where his tomb was and how they had laid him (22). Next day came the Sabbath. On that day, it got about that the priests intended to take charge of the body (23). The friends of Jesus naturally concluded that the priests would have no scruples in dishonouring the remains of their beloved teacher. In any case, they had meant to remove the body, embalm it and bury it elsewhere. They now resolved to remove it secretly, so that the priests should not know where it was afterwards laid. The priests were powerful and the utmost secrecy was needed (24). The rich friends were from Arimathea and Jerusalem (25). Perhaps they did not know the Apostles and the women — who were all from Galilee — sufficiently to share so dangerous a secret with them. They had easy access to the tomb, which was situated in a private estate belonging to one of them. (Matt. XXVII, 60.) They went there in the dead of night, or an hour or so before dawn, took up the body and removed it. Later on, at dawn, came the women of Galilee with spices and ointments to embalm the body as had been arranged before the Sabbath. They found the stone removed, and the tomb empty (26). Perhaps, one or two of the party who had removed the body were still in the tomb when the women arrived, being left behind to fetch the linen away or for some other purpose. Possibly they were not of the secret party but some others of the numerous disciples in Jerusalem. The women found them there (27). The empty tomb amazed them. They were women, to begin with; they were women in a state of religious excitement, shaken by fear, hope, uncertainty, passionate love and trust, and equally passionate sorrow. They were familiar with the ideas of Resurrection. Possibly, there were stories afloat that Jesus would rise again (28). They promptly rushed to the conclusion that he had risen. Just then the man or men inside the tomb came out. The beams of the morning sun lit their countenances and garments. They noticed the women, and, one of them, a "young man" (29) told them to restrain their feelings — secrecy was necessary:

chatter or cries might attract attention — and that Jesus was not there. The women were too excited to understand what he said, "for trembling and astonishment had come upon them" (30). They fled from the tomb and concluded that Jesus had arisen. The story got about that he had arisen. Peter and John went to the tomb and saw it was empty (31). They saw nothing else, but came back perplexed. But they were credulous men, in a time of intense mental and religious excitement. They had no difficulty in believing in a Resurrection. Soon they did believe. Presently some of them actually thought they saw the Lord, "but some doubted" (32). The doubt did not last long; how could it? But the priests discredited the story. They held an investigation and they concluded that some of the friends of Jesus "came by night and stole" (33) the body. That view of the fact was generally accepted (34) and was never displaced by the incoherent stories of the disciples. It persisted down to the time of Justin. It was current when the writer of the Clementine Recognitions wrote his book in the second century (35). It remains to this day. The supposed apparitions were due to "the subjectivity" of the Apostles (36), and may easily be accounted for by the acknowledged "tendency of religious minds to imagine mysteries and wonders where there are none," as Cardinal Newman points out (37), "imagination, as is well-known, being a fruitful cause of apparent miracles." The disciples believed in the Resurrection firmly, so firmly that they were ready to die vouching for it — just as they were ready to die vouching for the immediate second coming of Jesus, which was equally untrue.

Matthew Arnold dismisses the evidence thus (38): "The more the miraculousness of the story deepens, as after the death of Jesus, the more does the texture of the incidents become loose and floating, the more does the very air and aspect of things seem to tell us we are in wonderland. Jesus after the Resurrection not known by Mary Magdalene; appearing in another form, (39) and not known by the two disciples going with them to Emmaus and at supper with them there; not known by his most intimate disciples on the borders of the Sea of Galilee; (40) and presently, out of these vague beginnings, the recognitions getting asserted, then the ocular demonstrations, the final commissions, the ascension; one hardly knows which of the two to call the most evident here, the perfect simplicity and good faith of the narrators, or the plainness with which they themselves really say to us: Behold a legend growing under your eyes." The sunlight of reason and criticism dissolves the mists of myth and superstition, and of the clouds which hid heaven from earth there is left but a memory!

(18) Matt. XXVII, 57; John XIX, 39. (19) John XIX, 41. (20) Luke XXIII, 54-56; XXIV, 1 sq. (21) Ibid; Mark XV, 46; XVI, 1 sq. (22) Matt. XXVII, 62-66. (23) John. XIX, 38. (24) Matt. XXVII, 57; John XIX, 38. (25) Ibid, 60. (26) Mark XVI, 1-8; Luke XXIV, 1 sq. (27) Ibid. (28) Matt. XXVII, 63. (29) Mark XVI, 5. (30) Mark XVI, 8. (31) Luke XXIV, 12; John XX 3 sq. (32) Matt. XXVIII, 17. (33) Ibid, 13. (34) Ibid verse 15. (35) Recog. 1, 42; See Lost & Hostile Gospels, Page 200. (36) Farrar, *Life of Christ*, Vol. 2, page 432. (37) *Two Essays on Scrip. miracles*, page 171. (38) *Literature and Dogma*, page 63. (39) Mark XVI, 12. (40) John XXI, 1 sq.

"In China, the Jesuits were quick to perceive that the power of resistance to proselytism lay in ancestor-worship; and they shrewdly endeavoured to tolerate it, somewhat as Buddhism before them had been obliged to do. Had the Papacy supported their policy, the Jesuits might have changed the history of China; but other religious orders fiercely opposed the compromise, and the chance was lost."—LAFRADIO HEARN.

Chosen Question — 7

By G. H. TAYLOR

A COMPARATIVELY NEW READER says he "was interested in your reply to a previous question of mine some time ago. I would like to ask you another. Though I agree with Free-thinkers in the main on questions of belief — or unbelief — it has always appeared to me that your materialism carries . . . its own disproof. You see, you believe everything to be caused. So your very belief in materialism is caused likewise. How can you ever know it to be true? Causation results in a lot of wrong beliefs. If chemical changes in one person's head cause him to believe in materialism, and another's cause him to believe in God, who is to say who is right? According to you, we don't reach our beliefs because they are true, but because . . . our brains have passed through certain changes, and we *have* to think our thoughts whether they are true or not! That is Determinism, but Free Will gives us a choice and we are *not* tied to thinking wrong things. We are free to pick the right ones. The materialist has no right to call some beliefs true and others false."

I propose to put our friend's argument in reverse, following his language as closely as possible. Thus:

You believe every belief to be *chosen* by an act of Free Will. So your belief in Free Will is chosen. If, then, you choose to believe in Free Will and the next person chooses to believe in determinism, how do you know your choice is better than his? If beliefs are chosen, then Free Will has been responsible for choosing a lot of wrong beliefs. According to you, we don't reach our beliefs because they are true, but because we choose them arbitrarily. The believer in Free Will has no right to call some beliefs true and others false.

Having said that, I must give our reader credit for putting his finger (it has been done before, of course) on a cardinal weakness of the old-type mechanistic materialism. I should describe the latter as true at the mechanistic level, and quite adequate for general purposes. It is only when this outdated type of materialism is elevated to the position of a comprehensive philosophy that its shortcomings become evident. As against the average religionist it is fully competent. The mechanists had a job to do and they did it; they advanced a sound case against the religious apologians of their day.

Contemporary Materialism, stemming from Russell and G. E. Moore, the Neo-Realists of their day, has efficiently dealt with problems of Epistemology (an important department of Philosophy), and formulates certain criteria which act as a testing ground for veridical knowledge.

This is not the place to enter into details, but it may be said, briefly, that the adjective "true" applies to ideas, propositions and beliefs. Trueness, as a property of an idea, depends on the content of the idea as agreeing with, and capable of disclosing, the object concerned in the act of knowing. A proposition is true when it reveals its object. The criterion is critical thinking. Thought cures its own difficulties, and the success of critical thinking is attained in (1) the conciliation of established facts, (2) the logical coherence of ideas, (3) the agreement of investigators and (4) control over nature. The test of true ideas is whether they give knowledge, and all knowledge-claims are to be tested. The truth of ideas is bound up with the ability of judgments based on them to give knowledge. If they do, the ideas are true because they have disclosed the object of the judgment by corresponding to it. This, very sketchily, is the Correspondence Theory. It holds the field.

CORRESPONDENCE

MR. OTTAWAY REPLIES

Mr. Cutner's pleasure at reading my letter is clearly shown by the relish with which he replies to it. How exhilarating to be a swash-buckling journalist with a dunghill to crow from once a week!

I emphatically deny that I am a hater and I continue to believe that Mr. Cutner and THE FREETHINKER are steeped in hate, and that this detracts from the value of what they have to say, and from the validity of their general approach.

Let us first dispose of the "parsons living on the Cross". There was I at the much-mocked age of 16 (surely even Mr. Cutner was 16 once). I was in the Science Sixth and had read my Shaw and Wells. I knew the vicar was a blithering old idiot — but I also knew he was very shabby, very poor and very hardworking. Sneers at such men certainly "seared my tender little soul". I still feel the same.

How dreadfully literal can you logical people be! Do I really have to have it pointed out (by another correspondent) that I am threatening to go into the arms of a God I don't believe in? When using the phrase "Arms of God", do I really have to put up a placard, "Poetic expression", to guard against misunderstanding?

You haven't the space for me to pour disinfectant on all that Mr. Cutner says, but he should realise that I am not so much *against* the views of THE FREETHINKER as against its way of expressing them. Mr. Cutner, forever tilting, assumes that I must oppose birth control, and works up a fine frenzy, at the same time describing me as "blind with hate and rage". I maintain the Neo-Malthusians need no "vindication", as your use of the word here implies that they are now shown to be right *by the fact* that the C. of E. is now beginning to agree with them. It reminds me of cases in which Bible worshippers seek to score a point by saying "Scientists themselves admit . . .". They seek to strengthen their own case by citing those whose word they deny. Does this "vindicate" Genesis — or science? Of course not.

No doubt you are the revolutionaries of atheism but I am not, and I suggest you would gain the interest and maybe the respect of many more who have no use for the supernatural if you moderated your ecstasies a little. I hope my major point is now clear — that a militant hostility in freethought is liable to antagonise more people than it attracts.

JAMES OTTAWAY.

Neither days nor lives can be made holy by doing nothing in them. The best prayer at the beginning of the day is that we may not lose its moments, and the best grace before meat is the consciousness that we have justly earned our dinner.—RUSKIN.

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