

# The Freethinker

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Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

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RECENTLY, the "highbrow" Third Programme broadcast a talk on "The Devil in Modern Philosophy." The talk, which I only heard in part, appeared to be of a rather technical character which, as might be expected from its background, dealt with its subject-matter from the point of view of metaphysics rather than that of comparative religion. However, the Devil is not only a "character" in himself, but has also played an important role in the evolution of religion. Today, it is true that he does not play so active a part as formerly; and may even be said to be, so to speak, on half-pay in some religious circles! Nevertheless, it would be a trifle premature, perhaps, to write off the Devil as a permanent old age pensioner.

What the Christian churches still adhere to is the depressing dogma of original sin which, however much played down in practice, still represents an "Article of Faith" in Christian orthodoxy, both Catholic and Protestant. The demon, its infernal author, must continue to lead an active theological existence.

Writing from a scientific standpoint, we shall not presume to appeal to that sentimental—one might almost add, filial—affection which every bona fide freethinker must have for "The First Freethinker" who, in the words of his Poet Laureate, John Milton, preferred to "reign in Hell rather than to serve in Heaven."

## From God to Devil

It is known that the demon Satan has, so to speak, "come down in the world"—that is, of course, in the supernatural world. For students of that branch of Comparative Religion which deals with the dualistic religions of the Orient, know that Satan started as a god; as the god of darkness; as Ahriman in Persian theology; as Set the Destroyer by the banks of the Nile. It was only when the monotheistic Jehovah-worshipping Jews came into touch with the Persian theology during or after the Babylonian exile, that Satan lost his originally divine status and was reduced to the lower rank of a created angel; as Lucifer, "son of the morning," who headed an unsuccessful coup d'état against God.

After some celestial military operations, of which the technical details are, unfortunately, vague and fragmentary, the beaten rebels were incontinently ejected from their former seats in Heaven and somehow found their way ultimately to Hell. Such, at least, is the tragic story in broad outline. It is, we repeat, unfortunate that the technical military details of this primeval celestial conflict, this primordial armageddon, are lacking. Was it the first atomic war? Were firearms used? There are many such questions which we should like to know; and the lack of which cannot be made good even by the rich imagination of a Milton.

VIEWS and OPINIONS

## The Devil and Modern Religion

By F. A. RIDLEY

### The Devil in Muslim Theology

Great theologians, men of acute intellect if of fanciful imagination, have speculated exactly why Lucifer originally fell from pristine grace. According to the Jewish bible, later endorsed on this point by the Christian church, it was the cardinal sin of pride which caused Lucifer, so to speak, to kick over the heavenly traces and to throw away his celestial halo. But Muslim theology has improved upon this by furnishing more precision to the narratives of the Hebrew bible. According to the great doctors who commented on the verbally inspired text of the Koran, Satan, Lucifer, or Eblis, as they termed him in their Arabian tongue, was not deposed and damned by Allah for pride in general but rather for a special and unique brand of pride; Allah commanded his angels, so runs the tale, to worship his creation, Adam, the First Man. Lucifer-Eblis, swollen with pride, alone refused. For which act of disobedience Allah cast him down to Hell, a theological version, one can comment, much more flattering to human vanity than is any biblical one!

### The Devil and the Problem of Evil

However, the BBC did not actually discuss the "historicity" of the Devil; their discussion centred on a higher, or at the least, a more metaphysical plane. One may, however, relevantly comment that the "historicity," the actual existence in time and space of Satan, still represents a fundamental dogma—an "Article of Faith" as it is described in the technical theological terminology of the Church of Rome, the (Eastern) Orthodox Church, and of, at least, the more orthodox Protestant Churches: with regard to these last, the Lutheran Church at least can hardly dispute the historical existence of the Evil One, since it is well known that its founder, Martin Luther, actually threw his ink bottle at him! However, there is, nowadays, an undeniable tendency in theological circles to shift the emphasis on the Devil from the historical to the metaphysical plane. It is not so much as the pristine rebel against God but as the cause of original sin; more abstractly as an explanation of the problem of evil, that the existence of a personal devil is still defended in some modern theological circles. The present writer is not, alas, acquainted at first hand with the apologetical works of that widely read author, Mr. C. S. Lewis—I have only read the science fiction of this versatile author, much more "fiction" than "science"! But I understand that Mr. Lewis and his theological colleagues defend both original sin and a personal Devil as ultimate explanations for the major metaphysical problem of evil in the universe. In which connection, even that famous playboy of the academic world, the late Dr. C. E. M. Joad, ended up as a believer in original sin, though we do not know if this included a personal devil.

### A French Critic of the Fall

The need for the existence of a personal and historical Devil for Christian theology depends finally on the dogma of the Fall in Eden. As no less an authority than the present Pope has recently reminded his flock, Christian theology teaches that the Fall is not abstract but concrete; that is to say, an actual man was tempted and fell at an actual time and place—to a presumably *personal* Tempter. The Christian scheme of salvation presumably presupposes this pivotal dogma, and is hardly comprehensible without it. However, the dogma can be shown to be a logical absurdity and the role of the Tempter to be a contradiction in terms. This has been done, I suggest once for all, by the French critic, J. M. Guyau, who in *The Irreligion of the Future* has this masterly passage:

The supreme resource of Christianity and of religion generally is the dogma of the Fall, but this explanation of evil as the result of a primitive imperfection is an explanation of evil by evil. The Fall must have been preceded by some defect in the Will itself or the Will would not have failed. Original sin is not an ultimate. One does not stumble if there is no obstacle in the way and one's legs are well made and one is walking in the eye of the Lord. Sin involves temptation, and temptation

necessarily implies that God was the first Tempter. Morally it was God himself who fell in the Fall of his creatures planned by himself. To explain original sin, which is the root of all sin, the theologians have resorted, not to temptation within the realm of sense, but to a temptation within the realm of intelligence. It was by pride that the angels fell. Pride rose thus out of the very centre of their minds. But pride is incidental only to short-sightedness. Complete science is aware of its own limitations. Pride therefore results from insufficiency of knowledge. The pride of the angels was due to God." (pp. 438-9. English edition.)

Such must be the verdict of critical philosophy when applied to the ancient myth of Satan-Lucifer. If theologians nowadays indicate a pronounced tendency to place the Devil on the retired list it is because the myth, when subjected to critical analysis, loses its ancient force. The Devil is quietly dropping out of theology—at least, of those theological systems which still take the educated public seriously. Soon, perhaps, theology itself will start to query his existence. Like their legendary Scottish fore-runner they may ask these pertinent questions: Where the Devil does he live? How the Devil does he live? What the Devil does he do?

## The Latin Priest of Today

MY FRIEND, Padre Silveiro, is the typical Latin priest of today: born of the peasantry, with a thin veneer of polish, acquired in the seminary and in his contact with the elite in the confessional and at Mass. With chest well stuck out, as if full of his own importance, puffing like the forge bellows, hands still brown and rough, in spite of his long contact with the whiteness and softness of the Host; face tanned, with a touch of blue about the shaved chin; hair thick and black as a horse's mane, teeth pearly white—his whole appearance telling of the peasantry from which he had sprung; that peasantry which today furnishes the Church with all her priests, it being the only class which still believes in her. For Padre Silveiro a clergyman's work has nothing of the spiritual—it is to him solely and entirely a civil function; he considers himself a public employee, complete with uniform, his cassock; instead of going into government office, on Sundays and holy days he mounts the altar to say Mass, and he administers the sacraments. His relations are not with the sky but with the Secretary of Church Affairs. It was he who put him in his job, not to continue the work of the Lord and guide the faithful along the thorny road to salvation, but to execute certain public work which the law considers is for the public good—baptise, confess, marry and bury his parishioners. The sacraments are, for this excellent padre, mere civil ceremonies, indispensable for the carrying on of the State: never does he look on them as of divine origin. His ignorance is delightful. His only knowledge of the Church is a few odd stories from the Bible; the flight into Egypt, the marriage feast of Cana, the transfer of the devils to the herd of swine, Samson breaking down the door at Gaza. Padre Silveiro imagines that Christianity was founded suddenly—one day, surely on a Sunday, by a miracle of Christ: and from that festive hour till today there stands out vaguely in his mind haloes of saints, tiaras of Popes. As for consoling his parishioners in their troubles, bringing peace when they fight between themselves, well, he considers these things outside his jurisdiction. These matters belong to the saints. The saints, this good man has long concluded, are a spiritual aristocracy delegated and paid by the heavens. He fulfils his duties to the State and to the Church, which he considers an appendage of the State. I was present at a sermon he gave at a city church and, considering the low price he was paid for

it, it was a good one. His oration brought in all that could lend to the glorification of St. Vincent. He unrolled all his miracles with exactitude, giving authority and dates, he narrated the scene of his martyrdom; enumerated the churches which were consecrated to him. He tactfully praised the Minister of Church Affairs. It was, in fact, an excellent sermon on St. Vincent, on which I afterwards congratulated him. His answer to my compliment was: "Thank you, but unfortunately St. Vincent was no good. He never rose in his profession, he was never made bishop. Anyway, I did the best I could for the little I got out of it."

N.F.

### A FIT-THEM-IN QUIZ

1. Fit the right debater to his opponent in three pairs: Bishop Wilberforce, Charles Bradlaugh, Chapman Cohen, C. E. M. Joad, Brewin Grant, T. H. Huxley.
2. Fit the right man to his religious belief: (a) Sir Conan Doyle, (b) Edmund Gosse, (c) Wm. Penn, (d) Sir Isaac Newton, (e) L. P. Jacks, (f) Faraday. Quaker, Socinian, Plymouth Brother, Spiritualist, Sandemanian, Unitarian.
3. Fit the right scientists to their work: (a) Rutherford, (b) Mme. Curie, (c) Heisenberg, (d) Adrian, (e) Dubois, (f) Einstein. Radium; Principle of Indeterminacy; Relativity; Electroencephalograph; atom splitting; Pithecanthropus erectus (the original "Missing Link," Java Man).
4. Jesus was (a) an Essene monk, (b) a myth, (c) a working class agitator, (d) a lunatic, according to which of these? Dr. Sanglé-Binet, McCabe, J. M. Robertson, Buck White.

(Answers on page 24)

### A PROPHECY AFTER THE EVENT

CARDINAL CREJEIRA, Patriarch of Lisbon, has revealed that Sister Lucy, the sole remaining survivor of the three children who saw Our Lady at Fatima, forecast the opening of the World War II hostilities six months before the actual event took place. For good measure, she threw in the information that Our Lady would protect Portugal. (She did, and also the nest of Axis spies who had their H.Q. there.)

—NEXT WEEK—

**FREETHOUGHT IN THE U.S.S.R.?**

By D. SHIPPER

# Robert the Rebel

By MIMNERMUS SECUNDUS

ROBERT BURNS's fame is far wider and more secure than when he died. His life is now regarded as an important event, and his poetry as a notable contribution to the world's literature. Admittedly Scotland's greatest poet, he has been lied about and subjected to nauseous adulation. Had he been a lesser genius than he was, this legend-making and fulsome praise would have exposed his name to derision.

The real Burns is not the popular and legendary poet of the Scottish manse and drawing-room. When the peasant-poet was received by the orthodox and conventional aristocracy of Edinburgh he was being patronised, and he knew it. The company that professed to admire him stood and drank the great poet's health, and Burns raised his glass and bowed his acknowledgments. But they belonged to two different nations, the rich and the poor. Francois Villon could not have been more remote from that snobbish crowd than was Robert Burns. In spite of all the glib phrase-making of the critics, Burns belonged to a very different world from that which his patrons inhabited.

Burns was not only a rebel in politics; he was also a rebel in the matter of religion. His heresies were "four square to all the winds that blow." That genial critic, Oliver Wendell Holmes, indeed, expressed surprise that puritanical and Calvinistic Scotland could take Robbie Burns to her straight-laced bosom without breaking her stays. For Burns, like Paine and Voltaire, was a Deist. Of other religion save what flowed from a mild Theism he scarcely showed a trace. In truth, one can scarcely call it a creed at all. It was mainly a name for a particular mood of sentimentalism, the expression of a state of indefinite aspiration. The Holy Willies of Scottish Orthodoxy have made the basest uses of this emotionalism, but Christians cannot read Burns intelligently without unloosening the shackles of their faith. David Hume's young Freethinking contemporary did not merely express his dissent from Presbyterianism. He struck at the heart of the Christian superstition. Seeing plainly that priests trade on fear, he sounded a true note when he said scornfully:

The fear o' hell's a hangman's whip  
To haud the wretch in order.

How he lashes the rigidly righteous!

Sae pious and sae holy,  
Ye've nought to do but mark and tell  
Your naeboor's fauts and folly. . . .

And again:

Learn three-mile prayers, and half-mile graces,  
Wi' well-spread looves, and lang, wry faces,  
Grunt up a solemn, lengthened groan,  
And damn all parties but your own,  
I'll warrant then ye'er nae deceiver,  
A steady, sturdy, staunch believer.

Burns never hesitated to make a frontal attack on religion:

D'yrmpel mild, D'yrmpel mild, tho' your heart's like a child,  
And your life like the new driven snow,  
Yet that winna save ye, and Satan must have ye  
For preaching that three's ane an' twa.

Even the idea of deity excites his criticism:

O Thou wha in the heavens dost dwell  
Wha, as it pleases best Thyself  
Sends ane to heaven and ten to hell,  
A' for thy glory,  
And no for any guid or ill  
They've done afore Thee.

Like all pioneers, Robert Burns was much alone and ploughed a lonely furrow. So early was he in the field that he could do little more than anticipate Carlyle's bitter "Exodus from Houndsditch," or his caustic reference to

Christ, "Eh, man, ye've had your day!" But what he did was sufficient for his generation. He fought at tremendous odds, and risked imprisonment, and as Carlyle says, "Granted the ship comes into harbour with shrouds and tackle damaged, the pilot is blameworthy, but to know how blameworthy, tell us first whether his voyage has been round the globe, or only to Ramsgate and the Isle of Dogs."

The noblest quality in Burns's magnificent poetry is the eternal quality of honest indignation. It comes always with no veil of invention; it is blunt, simple as daily speech, the man himself talking before us. It is this quality that makes his "Jolly Beggars." The beggars are not merely rebels; for them the laws and conventions of society have no existence. And so it was with Robert Burns himself. He rises above the network of clerical authorities like a skylark.

Fervent Scottish admirers have also tried to monopolise their Burns and protest too much that he was a dialect singer rather than a British poet, but we are dealing with a real and unmistakable genius, and not a provincial poetaster. Burns's genius alone transforms him from a purely local singer to a great poet who makes his appeal to the English-speaking world and not to Caledonia alone. This is a direct challenge to those critics who declare that Burns depends upon dialect, and that when he tried to write English he fell into mediocrity, fettered by the difficulties of an alien tongue.

Quotations from his works will modify this idea effectively. Take, for example, the following lines from a love song:

O my luv's like a red red rose  
That's newly sprung in June!  
O my luv's like the melodie  
That's sweetly played in tune.

How much does this depend on dialect? Or this?:

A fig for those by law protected,  
Liberty's a glorious feast.  
Courts for cowards were erected,  
Churches built to please the priest. . . .

Do those lines derive their force and their magic from one solitary word of Scots dialect? Burns has suffered grievously at the hands of Maudlin Free Kirk ministers, but professed literary critics might well give the corpse of defunct heresies decent burial.

## Branch News

EDINBURGH

IN HIS RECENT VISIT to Edinburgh Mr. H. Day again spoke for the local N.S.S. Branch. Mr. Wm. Cronan reports:—

We posted our platform on the Princes Street end of the Mound and were under way for fully half-an-hour when the Evangelist van arrived. They pulled the van right behind our speaker, Mr. Day, dropped the side of the van, which is a platform, and missed Mr. Day by inches — then proceeded to try to shout us down. The crowd resented this and showed it very strongly and the police had to intervene. The police made it clear one of the meetings must move, but we refused to budge because of the fact that we were first on the pitch. Therefore, with ill-grace, the Evangelists moved further away.

I would like to mention here that Mr. Day rose to the occasion admirably, and when they tried to drown him out, he led the audience into community singing with the old favourite—Harry Lauder's "Keep Right on to the End of the Road"! and so rose above extreme provocation. I am glad to say we had a splendid meeting after all.

## This Believing World

The scathing exposure of the lies the late Harry Price dug up about the "haunted" Borley Rectory must be still fresh in everybody's mind; and now comes the equally scathing debunking of a book published over 45 years ago by two "immaculate" spinster ladies, entitled *An Adventure*—a book which is still claimed as an unimpeachable witness for spooks. It purported to give an account of a scene the authors, Miss Moberly and Miss Jourdain, saw in Versailles—a scene which "re-enacted" one that took place in Marie Antoinette's time. How could anyone deny the "adventure" when we had the testimony of two ladies who were the Principal and Vice-Principal of the famous ladies' college, St. Hugh's at Oxford? It was literally unthinkable.

★  
But now comes a book written by one of their old students, Mrs. Iremonger, once a believer in the story, who, in her book, *The Ghosts of Versailles*, has riddled it out of existence. She shows these "ladies" as they really were—utterly irresponsible and one of them—Miss Jourdain—an unmitigated liar. But will this have the slightest effect on our spook believers? Not in the least. They will still believe in the Borley spooks, and they certainly won't give up the Versailles ones. A miracle is a miracle and a spook is a spook, and both are absolutely credible and authentic. As for unbelievers—who takes any notice of them now?

★  
One of the questions asked the TV Brains Trust before Xmas Day was about Christmas, and the Rev. Mervyn Stockwood, without turning a hair, admitted that the festival was well known long before the birth of Jesus, and was celebrated at the Winter Solstice with joy and feasting. The coming of Jesus gave it the Holy Touch, of course—you discard the Sun-myth, so to speak, and bring in the Son of God Almighty, and thus make it a Sacred Festival. And Prof. A. J. Ayer and Dr. J. Bronowski, who were on the panel, must have been so stunned that neither made any comment. That is how religion still prospers.

★  
If nobody else bothers very much about the "miracles" of healing reported so often in full in "psychic" papers, every now and then we get wonderful cures by people who make no claim whatever to help from spooks—like the "Cambridge-educated Harley Street specialist" doctor, an account of whom was given recently in the *Daily Express*. He makes no claim whatever to be "specially gifted," yet he heals with his hands and says "anybody can do it." No spooks, whether Jap, Chinese, or Indian doctors are needed. All you have to do is to learn the necessary technique and you also can cure incurable ailments as easily as even Mr. H. Edwards. Or can you?

★  
Both the Queen and the Queen Mother received "sprigs" from the Holy Thorn of Glastonbury this past Christmas—a custom which ceased with Charles I but revived in 1922. It was at Glastonbury that Joseph of Arimathea—actually claimed as an uncle of Jesus—settled when he came to England in 31A.D., and he left his staff there to blossom, which it naturally always does at Christmas, thus providing the Holy Thorn. It was also at Glastonbury that King Arthur was buried. Both "legends" are as "true as Gospel," though easily swallowed whole by all good Christians. Religion and credulity surely are synonyms?

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So, in spite of our change from plain "Freethought" to the more alluring "Humanism," the Church of Rome can boast of 122,000 converts in England and Wales gained in 1956. The Roman Catholic population is now 3,270,800.

Scotland has 768,420, including 3,589 new converts. All this increase is put down to the extensive advertising of the Catholic Enquiry Centre which hopes this year to rope in thousands more—as no doubt it will. Once one accepts the Christian religion of any brand, reason immediately slumps. Only fervent Faith will bring one to God and his Son, with the Devil, Angels, Hell, and Miracles, thrown in as a make-weight.

★  
We were delighted to learn from one of the congregation of a church in West Ewell, Surrey, that they were starting a "round the clock" continuous prayer. Each member of this divinely precious circle will pray for five minutes throughout day and night. This is a brilliant idea which should be adopted forthwith by our bishops, canons, deans, as well as the more humble curates. If they get tired of asking God to put Suez right for our Prime Minister (or, as the case may be, for Nasser, Israel, the Kremlin, or what have you) they could get, no doubt, many of the big guns of the Almighty trained on the N.S.S.—or even on one of our secular Humanist groups. We wonder who would emerge the victor?

## Cardinal Spellman and 'Baby Doll'

WHAT WILL BE THE REACTION of British Roman Catholics to the new American film, "Baby Doll," written by Tennessee Williams, author of "A Streetcar Named Desire" and "The Rose Tattoo"? The film is being shown in London and—at the time of writing—the Church has placed no ban upon it. In New York, on the contrary, Catholics have been forbidden to see it by Cardinal Spellman, who emerged from his semi-retirement specially to condemn it.

Evidently the Cardinal regards the film as important. He climbed into the pulpit of St. Patrick's Cathedral, New York, on Sunday, December 16th—the first time he had done so since 1949, when he protested against the imprisonment of Cardinal Mindszenty—and referred to its "revolting theme and the brazen advertising promoting it" which constituted "a contemptuous defiance of the natural law." He had not seen the film, but he declared it to be "evil in concept and certain to exert an immoral and corrupting influence on those who have seen it." Presumably some of his priests have seen it—has it corrupted them?

What a chance for British Catholics! Already able to read books which their Irish, Spanish and Maltese brethren cannot, now they can see a film which is banned to their American fellow-religionists. There is little doubt that many of them will avail themselves of this wonderful opportunity.

The Director, Mr. Elia Kazan, has said that it is "a personal story of four pitiable people" seen "with honesty and clarity." He himself has spoken with admirable "honesty and clarity" in connection with the Catholic ban. In America, he said, "judgment on matters of thought and taste are not handed down iron clad from an unchallengeable authority. People see for themselves and finally judge for themselves."

It is gratifying that a distinguished film director should openly dispute a Cardinal's contention that he speaks with "unchallengeable authority." It is to be hoped that people will see the film and "judge for themselves."

## HOWLER

UNDER the heading "Food for Thought," *The Bulletin* (Malta) quotes: "All is for the best in the best of possible worlds," and attributes it to Voltaire! Probably *Candide* is banned in Malta.

# 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.

J. ASHLEY.—In our "great" national newspapers the journalists write the most nauseating nonsense on the subject of Christmas, quite untrammelled by any acquaintance with the history of religions.

SHEILA RUDKIN.—Religion is chronologically prior to the establishment of Churches; religion pre-dates the priest. The latter merely comes along and "cashes in" on man's fears and ignorance. Cromagnon Man (30 to 50 thousand years ago) had animistic beliefs, as is evident from his artwork.

F. ALSTON.—There are pleasing cadences in the Psalms, but what does it prove? Sonorous sounds do not mean sound sense.

W. H. J. EDWARDSON.—Your Library Committee can hardly be regarded as an impartial public body if they accept ten religious papers and refuse THE FREETHINKER.

PAUL VARNEY.—Please give your authority that "the Government ordered the extermination of the Tasmanians."

H. J. W. LEGERTON.—We have your assurance that the L.D.O.S. was wrongly reported, in the *Daily Express*, as having made a protest against the inclusion of an item in the Huddersfield entertainment.

P. W. WEBSTER.—For detailed descriptions of the literal burning Hell and the tortures of children therein, some of the Catholic publications of the last century are unsurpassed. Passages from the children's books of Father J. Furniss, such as *The Sight of Hell*, dare not be printed with approval by the Christian press today.

## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (The Mound).—Every Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. CRONAN, MURRAY and SLEMEN.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every weekday, 1 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, SMITH, CORSAIR and FINKEL. Sundays, 7.15 p.m.: Messrs. MILLS, WOODCOCK, and SMITH.

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).—Thursday, 1 p.m.: R. POWE. Friday, 1 p.m.: R. POWE and R. MORRELL.

West London Branch N.S.S.—Every Sunday, at the Marble Arch, from 4 p.m.: Messrs. ARTHUR and EBURY.

### INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, January 20th, 6.45 p.m.: G. MILLS, "Evolution or Creation?"

Central London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, off Edgware Road).—Sunday, January 20th: F. MCKAY, "Behind the I.R.A. Raids."

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, January 22nd, 7.15 p.m.: Prof. H. LEVY, "The Problem of Ethical Instruction in an Unethical Social Order."

Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, January 20th, 6.30 p.m.: J. M. ALEXANDER, "The Dead Sea Scrolls."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Hall, Parliament Street).—Sunday, January 20th, 2.30 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, "The German Problem."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, January 20th, 11 a.m.: A. ROBERTSON, M.A., "Brave New World—25 Years After."

West Ham and District Branch (Wanstead Community Centre, Wanstead Green).—Thursday, January 24th, 7.45 p.m.: P. TURNER, "Astronomy as an Aid to Thinking."

## The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £167 0s. 2d.; Miss L. Pye, 10s.; B. Heckford (Australia), £1 1s.; A. Scott, 2s. 6d.; D. Davies, 10s.; A. W. Coleman, £2; H. A. Rogerson, 2s.—Total to date, January 11th, 1957, £171 5s. 8d.

## Notes and News

SHORTLY after going to press last week, we heard from Mr. Stephen Swingler, M.P., that he was regretfully compelled to cancel his acceptance of our offer to be Guest of Honour at the Annual Dinner of the N.S.S. There was a misunderstanding over dates, and Mr. Swingler had a previous appointment on February 16th. We are pleased to announce that Mr. H. J. Blackham, Secretary of the Ethical Union and Editor of *The Plain View*, has consented to be our Guest. Many readers will have heard Mr. Blackham on occasional B.B.C. discussions with Christians or have read his erudite book on Existentialism. The dinner and subsequent dance will provide an opportunity for them to meet him personally.

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WHEN the New York Ethical Movement celebrated its 18th anniversary a message of appreciation and congratulation was received from the Mayor of New York, Robert Wagner. In the magazine *Look* some months ago we recall a picture of Mayor Wagner on his knees to Cardinal Spellman. The picture showed only one of his faces.

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A NOTABLE celebration held recently in Spain was the Day of the Emigrants, instituted by the Pope through the Offices of the Holy Consistorial Congregation and held under the patronage of the Spanish Catholic Migration Commission. The Central Migration Office does important liaison work for the Vatican, keeping direct contact with 24,000 Spanish priests through Catholic Action and other institutions. Part of their work is ensuring travellers, displaced persons, etc., are kept securely in the spiritual handcuffs of the One True Church.

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AFTER 300 R.C. priests, from all over Czechoslovakia, had celebrated the fifth anniversary of the founding of the National Peace Committee of Catholic Clergy and appealed to all believers not to slacken in their fight for peace, President Zapotocky presented (on the recommendation of the Government) the order "For Merit in Construction" to ten members of the R.C. clergy. It is unusual for the potential victim to present a "Construction Award" to those engaged in setting up his scaffold.

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THE Paris weekly *France Catholique* has an article on the spread of Catholicism on the S.E. Asian mainland, and gives statistical information as follows: Laos has 8,000 Catholics in a population of 2 millions (0.4%); Thailand, 100,000 in 19 millions (0.5%); Burma, also 100,000 in 19 millions (0.5%); Cambodia, 53,000 in nearly 4 millions (1.4%); Malaya, 100,000 in 6 millions (1.6%); and finally Viet Nam (south), the country which has been the most exposed to indoctrination, over a million Catholics out of 9 millions (12.2%). In its propaganda and missionary assault on S.E. Asia, then, the Vatican would probably use Viet Nam as its H.Q.

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WILL readers in the Burnley-Nelson area of Lancashire who are interested in the formation of a branch of the N.S.S., please write to Mr. R. Hartley, 241 Chapel House Road, Nelson?

## Truth and the New Testament - 2

By H. CUTNER

THE REAL DIFFICULTY I have in dealing with such a series of articles as those of Mr. Schonfield on the "life" of Jesus is that almost all he does is to paraphrase the "life" in the Gospels, and then triumphantly exclaim that the Bible was (or is) right! The story of Aladdin and his Wonderful Lamp could be proved to be true in exactly the same way. After all, is there any difference between the story of the Geni of the Lamp flying through the air with Aladdin clinging to him, and the story of the Devil, also flying through the air, with Jesus clinging to him?

The real difficulties which all commentators, except Fundamentalists, have found in the Gospel story are completely ignored by Mr. Schonfield. For instance (as I have already said), what has he to say of the problem of "Nazareth" — always associated with Jesus? There is not a scrap of evidence that it was in existence during the "lifetime" of Jesus. What does he say about the "Virgin" birth? Not a word — he does not even allude to the famous "prophecy" in Isaiah. Over and over again, he tells us "we are told" this or that, meaning, of course, that, because we are told something in the Authorised Version, it must be so! The idea of *proving* whatever it is we are told never occurs to him — or perhaps I should say is very discreetly avoided. It has to be, for the one thing all believers in the New Testament have to avoid like poison is evidence.

What about the Devil, who comes into the story as soon as Jesus is baptised? Mr. Schonfield does not like the Devil any more than the Dove. He prefers to call him "the tempter" or "Satan" who, in any case, are as real as Jesus himself in the Gospels, but are very, very shadowy when it comes to proving that the Bible was right. "So Satan was vanquished," he tells us, "and Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee." No doubt this has some meaning, but what it really means the Lord knows. I don't.

It is also very amusing to find Mr. Schonfield telling us how wrong we are in believing that "the Christ" with hand uplifted talked "eternal verities" to a crowd of "awe-stricken rustics." He adds, "The Gospels give no warrant for such a picture, and Jesus made no such blunder." Doesn't he? What about the Gospel of John? It is packed with "eternal verities," or rather, with a lot of hopeless Gnostic nonsense supposed to have some wonderful meaning for those who understand. What about this from Mark?: "Unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables: that seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them." If more stupid teaching than this arrant rubbish can be found anywhere, I would like to see it.

The story of the Good Samaritan proves the Bible was right because "it is full of local colour." So the story of Mr. Pickwick must be true because it also is "full of local colour." As for the story of the Prodigal Son — here "the atmosphere is wholly genuine." So it must be true if the atmosphere is genuine, and once again the Bible was right.

Or let us take the famous story of Jesus telling a storm that it was frightening his disciples as they were of "little faith"; so "he arose and rebuked the winds and sea," after which there was "a great calm." Obviously, no storm, no matter how terrific, could stand a "rebuke" from Jesus, and Mr. Schonfield retells us this charming narrative without batting an eyelid. It is absolutely true. He also gives the story of the woman of Samaria getting some water from a well, who was greatly surprised that Jesus — a Jew

— asked her for a drink. When he began a conversation, she hadn't an idea what he was talking about, with his "living water," any more than we have. Mr. Schonfield tells us that "living water" means "the Water of Life and flowing water," which is equally gibberish in spite of the capital letters. Of course, the Gospel of John is mostly as obscure as the Epistles of Paul, and quite as useless. Indeed, much of what Jesus is supposed to have said is so unintelligible, that even Mr. Schonfield has to write that, in one case at least, the Apostles were wilfully obtuse." He quotes Luke, "They understood nothing of this" — which is proof that the teaching of Jesus was so simple that even a babe in arms could understand it.

Mr. Schonfield has no difficulty whatever about the two dates given for the Last Supper — the Synoptics claiming it was on the Thursday, while John says it wasn't — it was on the Wednesday. This confusion in God's Word proving that it was right is because, he says, there were two schools of thought in Palestine, and therefore the Last Supper took place on both days, or on the one you prefer, or not, as the case may be. It was all carefully planned by Jesus, says Mr. Schonfield (and he ought to know) so that Jesus would "keep the Passover with his disciples and also suffer the next day in the character of the Lamb of God." Thus he neatly disposes of the hundreds of books written by pious authorities as to why in the Inspired Record there are *two* days given for *one* Last Supper — and the Bible was right.

In general Christians like to dwell as long as possible on "Judas the traitor," whose name has become a byword ever since he "betrayed" his Master. There is not a scrap of evidence that such a betrayal ever took place, as John M. Robertson had no difficulty in showing; and Mr. Schonfield prefers to say as little as possible about him. No wonder. The Gospels are hopelessly at variance over poor Judas. For example, according to Matthew and John, Jesus clearly said that Judas would "betray" him. According to Luke and Mark, he said nothing of the kind. According to John, the "betrayal" was disclosed by "a sop." There is nothing about a sop in Matthew. And as, of course, it was Satan who prompted Judas to betray — it is most intriguing to find that, according to Luke, Satan "entered" Judas *before* the Last Supper, but according to John it was *after* the Last Supper. Moreover, according to Matthew and Mark, Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss; but there is nothing about a kiss in John. And so on. It really becomes tiresome to find how the Precious Word, inspired by God Almighty, contradicts itself in every possible way. It cannot even tell us which account of his death is right. Matthew says he *hanged* himself, while Peter in Acts says he merely *fell* — "falling headlong" are his words.

There is not a scrap of evidence that the Crucifixion took place; but as Mr. Schonfield is always ready to swallow everything else in the Gospels, we cannot expect him to give up this; and the story, as reproduced in the London *Evening News*, ends here. There is not a line about the Jewish saints who rose from their graves after the Resurrection, nor a word about the Resurrection itself. As he points out, "this was not all the story of Jesus: only the first chapter has ended."

As I have already indicated, to deal with the boring chapters Mr. Schonfield has given us is almost impossible because we get little else than a rewriting of the Gospel. And to take each chapter on its own for criticism would be as boring as they are. Paine shattered the Bible altogether in his *Age of Reason*; and since then, thousands of

books, many from Christians, repeated the good work in bigger detail.

That we now have to face the same out-of-date Fundamentalism is a tragedy. And all Freethinkers can do is to

challenge and challenge again wherever possible the Christian myths: The fight has never been fiercer; but, as Milton once put it — "Whoever knew Truth put to the worse in a free and open encounter?"

## Controversy on Hungary

IN HIS ARTICLE on the "Attempted Assessment of Hungary," Mr. McCall sympathises with the magnificent people of Hungary in their struggle for freedom. But we must remember that there are two sides in Hungary. One is led by the government, and the other by the Roman Catholic Feudalists. If Mr. McCall sympathises with the latter, then he sides with the Pope, who is, as the Irish say, "Agin the Government."

Freedom indeed! These Hungarians have never known what freedom is, and have only recently emerged from Roman Catholic Feudalism, to which the Church wishes to return, but fortunately the minority of Hungarians who can read, write and think, will see to it that there is no return.

Who are these refugees from Hungary who have arrived here by a free passage with plenty of food, and a promise of a good job, free houses to live in, TV sets, plenty of clothes, etc.? Ninety per cent. of them should be shipped back at once, and the TV sets, the clothes, the food, etc., should be given to our old age pensioners and the large number of our disabled ex-servicemen, many of them incapacitated for life perhaps by some of these fascist hoodlums who fought with fury against Britain with Hitler.

It is obvious to any impartial person that the riots in Hungary were engendered by Protestant Britain in conjunction with the Roman Catholic enemy of mankind.

I have seen some of these refugees in Glamorgan — a tough, well-fed lot in their teens, and as innocently ignorant as the Aborigines of central Australia, Roman Catholics to the core. The Roman Catholic factory owners of Wales regard them as a godsend for the future. Had Stalin been in power in Russia instead of the weakling Khrushchev, the riots in Hungary would have been nipped in the bud, for Stalin had a good understanding of the danger of uncontrolled mobs. He had learned the lesson in the Russian October revolution, just as Napoleon had in Paris when he quickly disbanded the mob with grape shot.

People must be in a revolution to realise what it means. In Moscow "the swinish herd," as Edmund Burke called them, led by priests of the Greek Catholic Church, plundered every shop and murdered every shopkeeper in Moscow. In less than a week, the Kremlin became like a pigsty, for the rats had come out of their holes, and were running about the city with works of art under their arms that were priceless. Under Stalin's orders, hundreds of these human vultures were rounded up and promptly shot in the Red Square. This drastic measure was essential or the revolution would have been smothered at its birth.

In Hungary a similar thing occurred. Drastic measures were not taken by the government, with the tragic result that every policeman on his beat in Budapest, and a large number of shopkeepers, including 200 Jews, were massacred on the first day of the Roman Catholic rising.

Mobs should never be encouraged, for they are a danger to the stability of any civilisation, and to call a murderous mob heroic is nothing but cant covering up a hope of a collapse in a regime which is feared. The greatest abstract thinker since the days of Aristotle, Herbert Spencer, proved

definitely that Socialism was inevitable, and a result in social evolution of development from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous.

If a thing is scientific it is true, for science cannot lie. Some may think that it is unfortunate that Socialism is inevitable, and in fairness to the British Socialist and Communist Parties, they are doing their utmost to delay its arrival. There will be much travail, but, as the great Italian patriot Garibaldi said, the road to human happiness lies through a sea of blood, sweat, and tears, and past history proves that brave men in the fight for freedom would rather die than run away from their duty. But the way of hoodlums is to plunder, murder, and then run away. We in Britain should demand that the large number of young and well-fed hoodlums now here in Britain should be sent back to Hungary, either to fight for what they call freedom, or to be placed on trial for murder.

PAUL VARNEY.

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## Reply to Mr. Varney—and Others

I DID NOT EXPECT my assessment of events in Hungary to satisfy all readers of THE FREETHINKER. I was dealing with a controversial subject and I was prepared, and even hoping, for criticism; critical interchange of opinion is the lifeblood of Freethought. But to be of real value, criticism should be reasoned. Some of the letters the Editor and I have received display this quality; some unfortunately do not.

I wish my critics would not assume that, because I happen to criticise the Soviet Union, I am the dupe of the "capitalist" press; or, because I did not on this occasion condemn British actions in Malaya or Kenya, I am a "nationalist of the worst kind." I read the British newspapers as critically as I read THE FREETHINKER. And — dare I say it? — there are dupes of the non-capitalist, as well as of the capitalist press. If Mr. Peter Fryer had not sought other means of expressing his views on Hungary, readers of the *Daily Worker* would have remained oblivious of that paper's suppression of his despatches. As it is, we know that the *Daily Worker* chose Mr. Fryer as a special correspondent and sent him to Hungary; then they suppressed his despatches.

Mr. Fryer was convinced that the Hungarian revolution started as a people's uprising. Mr. Nehru — after careful consideration of the situation — thinks likewise. What I — from experience — have found to be the more reliable British newspapers agree on this. I think it is reasonable to start from this point.

What Mr. Varney means by the riots being "engendered by Protestant Britain in conjunction with the Roman Catholic enemy of mankind," I do not know. I do not need telling that the U.S.A. and, to a lesser extent, Britain — among others — have campaigned against Communism. It was a factor that I considered in my assessment. Where I differ from Mr. Varney and his sympathisers is in believing that mankind is not limited to the choice between Catholicism and Communism. I think there

is a third way—the way of the “open society,” democratic radicalism. I find the hope for man, not in totalitarian Moscow or Rome, but in the “liberal” and free-thinking elements in all countries. The secular state of India—attached to neither of the great, opposing blocs—is destined, I think, to play an important part in the emergence of Asia and in the future of the world.

Mr. Varney sees only two factions in Hungary: the government and the Roman Catholic feudalists. But I think he is wrong; I think there is evidence of a genuine people's revolt against dictatorship—a demand for freedom. The Catholics undoubtedly tried to pervert this for their own ends. And the big question must be: would they have succeeded? It is possible that they might, but Mr. Fryer and others do not think they would. And I repeat that the courage and determination of the Workers' Councils suggests that the Catholics' task would have been anything but easy.

We shall never know the answer to that question, because the Soviet armies moved in. Possibly the Russians genuinely believed that they had prevented the resurgence of Catholic feudalism, but I cannot help thinking that Mr. Varney would have been the first to condemn a similar action by Britain or the U.S. This, it seems to me, is inverted nationalism of a foolish kind.

But, then, Mr. Varney and I have very different outlooks. His passage starting “Had Stalin been in power in Russia instead of the weakling Khrushchev,” truly horrifies me. Does human suffering mean nothing to him? I am sufficiently old-fashioned to hold individual liberty dear; to regard mental freedom as important; to oppose all dictatorships. A full stomach—though eminently desirable—is not everything. If it were, then the comparison of human beings with swine might be valid. But it isn't. And I have always considered Thomas Paine a better judge of humanity than Edmund Burke. Paine did more than his share in two great revolutions, but he never held human life cheap. Paine, however, was a freethinker; too many people who claim to be such today have merely exchanged the Christian dogma for the Communist one!

However—ending on a lighter note—I like the thought of rats running about the Moscow streets with works of art under their priceless arms!

COLIN MCCALL.

### ANSWERS TO QUIZ

1. Bradlaugh v. Grant; Huxley v. Wilberforce; Cohen v. Joad. 2. (a) Spiritualist, (b) Plymouth Brother, (c) Quaker, (d) Socinian, (e) Unitarian, (f) Sandemanian. 3. (a) atom splitting, (b) Radium, (c) Indeterminacy, (d) Electroencephalograph, (e) Java Man, (f) Relativity. 4. (a) McCabe, (b) Robertson, (c) Buck White, (d) Sanglé-Binet. G.H.T.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### HUNGARY

Thank you for the sober article on Hungary (28.12.56) by Colin McCall; in particular for his assessment of the role played by the Catholics and American Big Business. It is easy to blame the Soviet Union. They lost 7,000 men in the struggle. The putsch, using popular discontent, was fanned into flame by a crowd of anti-democratic hooligans who are opposed to freedom all over the world.

I feel that one vital point has been overlooked. The Hungarian events clearly led to war, and the Soviets still have no reason to believe that Hungary was not chosen as a point of attack. Hungary was the first fascist dictatorship in Europe, and was used by Nazi Germany in the attack on the Soviet Union. Today the U.S.A. is the avowed enemy of the U.S.S.R. Undoubtedly a war situation existed and it was dealt with pretty ruthlessly. I for one cannot condemn the Soviet Union when I realise that these same border states constituted a front on which they were attacked in 1941.

The Hungarians and the Russians paid a heavy price for the faults and mistakes which led up to open war, but I am of the

opinion that these could have been corrected but for the war policy pursued by the Catholics and the U.S.A. From this we may draw the conclusion that, contrary to propaganda, it is not the communists, but the Catholics, the U.S. tycoons and the British reactionaries that stand to gain from a state of anarchy. T. D. SMITH, B.Sc.

### GIBBON'S “DECLINE AND FALL”

I had an 1820 edition of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, which I exchanged for the latest “Everyman” edition, with an introduction by Christopher Dawson. The old edition was agreeably unexpurgated and merely prefaced by a bare account of the life of the historian. The reader was left to form his own opinion.

Not so with the “Everyman” edition. Mr. Dawson almost apologises for Gibbon's chapters critical of Christianity and challenges their fairness and accuracy. He omitted to mention that no less a man than Cardinal Newman reluctantly, but fairly, praised Gibbon as a great ecclesiastical historian. With the tide of religious reaction running strong it would not be surprising if a new edition of this famous history edited by Mr. Thomas Bowdler found public favour. ERIC A. McDONALD (S. Africa).

### COMMUNISM AND RELIGION

J. Gordon's letter “Does Communism Oust Religion?” opens up a question that should be discussed. The average Atheist, Rationalist, Humanist, or Agnostic is loth to speak or act—or publicise his unbelief. Most Secularist journals never go outside the four walls of the Rationalist's house. It would be “dangerous” to his professional, business, or social career.

Hence my answer to Mr. Gordon's query is—“Communism *has*—and *will*—and *can*—oust Christianity.” I have never met a Communist who was not a Secularist—but I have known many Secularists who support the purveyors of the Tory, Liberal and Labour political views with their M.P.s who take the oath when elected to the House of Commons.

Mr. Gordon says—“our people” (Atheists or Secularists)—do not go back to the Church. It appears that many do eventually, notably those who have a Christian funeral service or a Church wedding or have their children christened. FRANK BURGESS. [The fact that a Secularist has a Christian burial is a reflection, not on his beliefs, but on the beliefs of those responsible for his burial.—Ed.]

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