

The Freethinker

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Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

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WHEN the Churches talk about Christian unity and hope that this Utopia will one day be achieved, what exactly do they mean? Do they mean that there was once a sort of Golden Age in which all Christians were in full agreement on all points of doctrine, and that this was rudely and—more or less—unaccountably shattered by the Reformation?

That lots of Christians really believe this, particularly Roman Catholics, must be apparent when one reads the pathetic pleas to come together emanating from the heads of the Roman and the English Churches. These people talk as if they were the only Churches in existence; or, if they do not, then, if only Rome and Canterbury could come together under the Pope, all the other Churches would fall immediately into line. They would all follow like sheep into Rome.

Many Churches

It is difficult to find exactly how many Churches (you can call them sects if you like) there are which proudly proclaim full and implicit obedience to Jesus Christ and yet differ from each other. Looking the matter up in one of my books, I find that there are Abyssinian Christians, Antinomians, Armenians, Baptists, Calvinists, Christadelphians, Church of England—Anglo-Catholic, High, Low, and Protestant—Church of Rome, Copts, Dunkers, Skoptzi, Scottish Episcopalians, Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, Huguenots (French Protestants), Scottish Independents, Irvingites, Jehovah's Witnesses, Lutherans, Methodists—Wesleyan and Whitfieldite—Moravians, Mormons, Nestorian Christians, Plymouth Brethren, Quakers, Salvation Armyists, Sandemanians, Shakers, Southcottians, Swedenborgians, Christian Unitarians, and probably dozens more. In America alone there must be quite a number not listed in Christian textbooks as a rule—like Christian Science, which is, of course, neither Christian nor Science.

Moreover, it is a huge mistake to imagine that even as far as Christian history—authentic history, that is—goes back, there was any agreement whatever on Christianity. Paul, Peter, and Barnabas are shown as bitterly quarrelling, and indeed right up to the time of Constantine, there were always the hottest disputes in the Church. As Lecky says in his *History of European Morals*, "All that fierce hatred which, during the Arian and Donatist controversies convulsed the Empire, and which in later times deluged the world with blood, may be traced in the Church long before the conversion of Constantine. Already, in the second century, it was the rule that the orthodox Christian should hold no conversation, should exchange none of the ordinary courtesies of life with the excommunicated or the heretic." Heretics were *Christians* who did not always agree on some point of doctrine and so, as Dr. Gieseler showed in his *Ecclesiastical History*, "were universally hated as men wholly corrupt and lost."

The Great Constantine

Whether Constantine himself really believed in Chris-

tianity, that is, if he really ever gave up his Sun-God Mithra, is a point we need not concern ourselves with; but it is true that, as soon as he professed Christianity, he murdered or caused to be murdered about half a dozen of his relatives, including his wife and eldest son; and it was he who was, as Foote points out, "the first Christian emperor who deliberately inserted roasting heretics alive in the Roman Code. The Church subsequently took ample

advantage of the opportunity which Constantine created, and remorselessly burnt heretics at the stake for the glory and honour of God."

Whatever quarrels there are among the different Churches (or sects) these days, they pale into insigni-

ficance before the famous Arian Controversy. Christians now are not too keen to argue about what the Trinity really means—you can believe it or not as you like; and so long as you accept Jesus as your Saviour you can join almost any sect and call yourself a Christian. But it was not so in the early Utopia of primitive Christianity. Was the Son the *equal*, or was he *inferior* to the Father? That was all this bitter quarrel was about. And Arius and his followers were represented by his Bishop Alexander as "heretics, apostates, blasphemers, enemies of God, full of impudence and impiety, forerunners of Anti-Christ, imitators of Judas, and men whom it was not lawful to salute or bid God speed." The controversy became so very bitter that Constantine, in A.D. 325, called a Council of the Church at Nice, and there it was decided that the Father and Son were of the *same* substance, but not of *like* substance. The Council also instituted the death penalty against heretics.

To cut a long story short, it must be pointed out that Constantine himself became an Arian, though Arius eventually died (in A.D. 336)—probably poisoned by the followers of Athanasius whose views on the Trinity were accepted afterwards by nearly all Christians. All the same, even Athanasius was nearly killed by the son of Constantine, Constantius, who denounced him as "an impostor, a corruptor of men's souls . . . convicted of the worst crimes not to be expiated by his suffering death ten times over." Athanasius survived until A.D. 373, and Carlyle claimed that it was because the Church eventually sided with him that it survived.

Christian Tolerance

And here it should be added that even such revered and great Fathers like St. Augustine and St. Jerome were persecutors of heretics—that is, of Christians who did not agree with them—for the one thing that most Christians hate is *tolerance*. Moreover, all Christians were expected to believe their sacred books—though Mosheim points out "the base audacity of those who did not blush to palm their own spurious productions on the great men of former times, and even on Christ himself and his apostles. . . . The whole Christian Church was, in the fifth century, overwhelmed with these disgraceful fictions." Whether the

VIEWS and OPINIONS

Can Christian Unity be Achieved?

By H. CUTNER

almost universal acceptance of these and forgeries like the *Letter of Publius Lentulus to Pontius Pilate* describing the beautiful appearance of the Saviour as a Man prove the "unity" of the Church is a thing we would like some member of the Church to tell us.

What about the Popes themselves? Their record, particularly before the Reformation, forms some of the most disgraceful episodes in history. Many of them are acknowledged even by Catholics to have practised almost every form of villainy and vice known to mankind. What possible unity did they show for each other? It is a pity that space does not allow me to enlarge on some of the Popes—like John XII, Sergius III, Benedict IX, and Alexander VI. Whatever else the Reformation accomplished for good or bad, it certainly forced the Popes, as Foote once said, "to live more decently." But the astonishing thing about all this blather on Christian unity is that very rarely are we asked to consider the actual record of the various Churches in the past. This is particularly the case with Roman Catholicism, which very conveniently—and brazenly—talks as if the crimes of the Popes, the persecution of the Jews, the wholesale massacres of people like the Albigensis, the horrors of the Crusades, the frightful tortures and *autos da fé* of the Inquisition never happened. For example, there is the late Cardinal Griffin's Pastoral Letter for Lent

which he wrote in 1950: "To us in this country," he said, "reunion can only mean the resumption of that unity which was destroyed at the time of the Protestant Reformation. A call for reunion means an invitation to all non-Catholics to join the one true Church. It means, in other words, submission to the authority of the Holy See." The *Holy See!* Poor Cardinal Griffin—he was, of course, obliged to write like that, he could not have been a priest if he hadn't. But is it possible that anybody knowing the Roman Church's record could really join it because it is the *Holy See?*

Is Unity Really Possible?

People like Lord Pakenham, who are already in the Church, boast that they "accept the rulings of their Bishops fully and confidently" (as he wrote in the *Sunday Times*). So, of course, do the many distinguished converts Rome has captured. To think for oneself is almost a crime in the Catholic Churches. What a Bishop says or lays down is final. Yet in the past, the history of the Churches shows how man rebelled against this kind of unity—in and out of them. For the one distinguishing feature nearly all men have in their hearts is the love of Liberty. Nothing could extinguish that love more and quicker than "unity" in the Churches.

A Catholic View of Punishment

THE *Daily Mirror* columnist, Cassandra, recently remarked that psychologists, psychiatrists and lay welfare workers had "taken a notable scourging" from the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster. "Sad indeed would it be," Dr. Godfrey had said, "if those who administer the law, having been easily persuaded by psychologists that free-will was non-existent, were to pay increasing attention to the idea of reform by 'treatment' rather than by punishment." "That is not God's way," the Archbishop added. "The true and Catholic idea of punishment is that its purpose is also the restoration of an order of justice that has been violated." "Hence Purgatory," commented Cassandra, "... which together with the Damned in Hell is one of the corner stones of the Roman Catholic Church." "Dr. Godfrey's religion," he continued, "is the most remarkable compound of Love and Fear that the world has ever seen. It thrives in poverty and distress. It compromises with people like Franco and Mussolini. It is armed with Vengeance Condign. It flourishes in suffering and it offers the greatest prize of happiness for ever-after for the simple easy act of total spiritual surrender."

It will be seen, then, that Dr. Godfrey has to take a bit of "scourging" too. All praise to Cassandra. The more's the pity that he ended on the hackneyed—and false—note of the idea of punishment marrying "ill" with the Sermon on the Mount. It needs to be emphasised that the Sermon on the Mount does not contradict the basic teaching of salvation and damnation "ever-after" that characterises not only Catholic teaching but Christ's teaching in the gospels. "For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven. . . . That whosoever is angry with his brother without cause, shall be in danger of judgment . . . but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire" (Surely the most extreme of punishments!) That "it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell" is repeated in successive verses. And of course there is "Enter ye in at the strait

gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. . . ." Surely, Cassandra will agree that these quotations are not inconsistent with Dr. Godfrey's pronouncement. Well, they are in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew, Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

C.M.C.

From New Zealand

IT WAS very pleasing to receive an informative letter from John Bryant, secretary of the Whangarei Rationalist Association, Northland, New Zealand, who expressed surprise in my interest in "such a remote group."

The W.R.A. was formed with 4 members in 1954 and this was the first time a group had been organised north of Auckland. They now have a flourishing group, and "When we are not visited by flood or if haymaking does not interfere" have well attended monthly meetings, some of which feature visits from national officers of the N.Z. Rationalist Association. When R.C.s petitioned parliament recently in an attempt to gain State aid for private schools, the Rationalists opposed strongly and the petition was dismissed.

The group are campaigning for secular education, freedom for radio propaganda, Sunday Sport and the abolition of capital punishment.

They wish to complete the secularisation of the State, to abolish privileges granted to religious organisations, to promote free and unfettered enquiry and assert that human conduct should be based on knowledge, not superstition.

John Bryant asserts that N.Z. could do with many British immigrants — Protestants and Freethinkers. The Dutch, Poles — and now, Hungarians — are Catholics "and are going to be a menace to our trades unions."

D.S.

—NEXT WEEK—
THE CASE AGAINST "EXTRA-SENSORY PERCEPTION"

By Dr. EDWARD ROUX

The Conquistadors

By F. A. RIDLEY

THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION of the early 16th century split Europe on religious lines and deprived Rome of her medieval hegemony of northern Europe. Simultaneously, by what Protestant students would doubtless regard as a "lucky accident" but which Catholics would see as an "act of God," a New World came into the reckoning, at the very moment when Rome was losing her grip on the old. From the date of its discovery in 1492 by Columbus the New World was earmarked by Rome for her expansion of influence. In the following year, 1493, Pope Alexander VI, better known as Rodrigo Borgia, issued a Papal Bull dividing all lands to be henceforth discovered between Spain and Portugal. Pursuant upon this Papal warrant, whilst the Portuguese continued to circumnavigate Africa and subsequently established a short-lived colonial empire in the East, the Spaniards during the first half of the 16th century accomplished the epic feat of conquering the southern half of the American continent, where Spain, the militant champion of the counter-reformation, conquered a vast empire in the name of Christ and for the temporal and spiritual profit of the Catholic Church. The original empire over which "the sun never set," that of Spain, came into being as a result of a series of incredible feats of war, exploration and colonisation.

Since the American historian Prescott wrote his still classical histories of the conquests of Mexico and Peru, a considerable literature has dealt with the various dramatic and lurid episodes of the conquests. A most enthralling and erudite contribution to this literature has recently been made by M. Jean Pescola, a French historian of the Spanish Conquest. Our authority has not limited himself to any one episode in the prolonged epic, and under the title *The Conquistadors* has given a fascinating summary of the whole conquest. Immensely learned and written in a brilliant and vivid, if at times rather rhetorical, style, the book gives a masterly survey of what is, on any showing, one of the most important, besides being one of the most spectacular, events in modern, or, indeed, in world history. For the Spanish conquest of America not only inaugurated modern imperialism but also produced profound effects on the economic and the political history of modern Europe.

Christopher Columbus, whom our author shows to have been probably of Jewish origin, and to have been a bit of a heretic as well, once noted that in the world of his day gold could open all doors, including even the door of Paradise. Luther was to make the same discovery a little later! In the eyes of the Spanish conquerors of the New World gold and souls, Mammon and God, were actually closely connected. Lust for gold on the one hand, and supreme religious fanaticism on the other, were the dominant motives spurring on the Conquistadors. An example is Pizarro, the conqueror of Peru, perhaps the most sordid and ruthless of all the conquerors: when stabbed to death in his palace he made a sign of the Cross from his own blood as he writhed in his death agony, and died passionately kissing it after a life in which he had shamelessly violated every precept of morality. However, as Pescola demonstrates in masterly fashion, we must take these conquerors against the concrete background of their own times. Spain had just emerged from an eight-century struggle against Moorish invaders, the last stronghold of whom, Granada, had been finally recaptured in 1492. Religious fanaticism and crusading zeal were in the very bones of the Conquistadors, and the Catholic Church and

Spanish Empire were virtually Siamese twins. As for the gold lust which was to be so amply slaked by the lavish precious metals of the New World, Pescola shows by means of some most interesting statistics that Europe had nearly run dry of gold and silver at the time. This was the golden age of the alchemists who were trying to transmute the base metals into gold. But the Spaniards were much more successful, though the means by which they extracted gold and silver from the unfortunate "Indians" were often brutal in the extreme. The name "Indians," given to the inhabitants of the New World by Columbus, still reminds us that its original discoverer never knew he had reached a new continent, but thought he had merely re-discovered Asia by a western route. One of the first explorers to realise that the New World was actually a new continent was the Italian navigator Amerigo Vespucci, from whom America derives its name, not altogether inappropriately, observes our author, in view of Columbus's obstinate refusal to recognise what he had actually discovered!

The American continent was very unequally developed at the time of the Spaniards' arrival. It mostly consisted of prairies, jungles and forests, all thinly populated by primitive races. But in some regions Bronze Age cultures flourished in which certain aspects of civilisation were very highly developed. In Peru and Mexico stupendous buildings were erected, probably comparable with the Egyptian pyramids, whilst in the opinion of some historians of astronomy the Mayas of Yucatan developed astronomical observation to a point of accuracy never reached in Europe prior to Galileo's telescope. Prescott himself opined that the roads built—without iron or large pack animals—by the Incas of Peru were superior to any made in Europe between the Roman Empire and modern times. The conquests of the Mexican Empire of the Aztecs and of the Peruvian Empire of the Incas represented the highlights of the Spanish conquest of the Americas. Fully recounted by Pescola, neither was achieved easily; most of Cortes' original band perished in the "sorrowful night" when they were forcibly expelled from Mexico; and the Aztec capital was a heap of rubble before it finally capitulated to the white invaders. Similarly the Incas went on raising revolts down to the era of Spanish colonial rule. As our author notes, primitive tribes like the Caribs of Guiana gave the Spaniards more trouble than perhaps the more civilised Indians. The Indians, and the Aztecs in particular, were just as cruel to the Spaniards as *vice versa*. The Spanish conquest was due primarily to superior military technique, iron horses and gun powder against a primitive Bronze Age culture; secondarily to the superstitious fears of the natives and the superior diplomacy of the Spaniards, who played off the Indian tribes against each other. Without the support of anti-Aztec elements in Mexico and without civil war between the Incas in Peru, neither Cortes nor Pizarro could have attained his objective. The conquerors rarely survived to enjoy their ill-gotten loot in a peaceful old age, mostly dying violently whether in war or in assassination at the hands of the Indians. Their end resembles the end of a Shakespearian tragedy. Brave as lions and tough as teak, the Conquistadors accomplished great feats of endurance; nearly all were cruel and licentious; a few were really great men, as related by our author. This is a book for every lover of history to possess.

[*The Conquistadors*, by Jean Pescola is published by Allen and Unwin at 30s.]

This Believing World

We are sometimes honoured with extracts from the Jersey *Evening Post*, in which journal the Editor often allows some religious and anti-religious correspondence. No one expects that in such a tight little island much light can come on such questions as Evolution and Materialism; so we are not surprised to find that most of the religious writers appear to be at least a hundred years behind modern thought. A letter by a Dr. Darling, who is the Secretary of the Jersey Branch of Gideons tells us lengthily that "the FACTS as they are known today just do not square with the theory of Evolution," and adds that "the Bible was written to reveal God." Dr. Darling obviously believes that as Genesis piously records the sun was created *after* the earth and lots of other pre-scientific nonsense as revealed by God Almighty, it must be true.

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In this he is of course backed up by other dear old fossils—one of them a Mr. D. F. Oliver, who appears to have received a copy of "*Freethought*—England's leading Atheist paper." What a pity that Mr. Oliver is not quite as accurate here as when he insists that the Bible is divinely inspired, and calls upon Dr. (*sic*) Louis Pasteur, Prof. Schwarz, Dr. Blum, and "countless other men of learning" in full support. Mr. Oliver wants the "dear reader" to give "God a chance"—as if the Almighty wasn't the All Mighty.

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But is the Bible divinely inspired? Of course it is, and Mr. Oliver graciously points to the proof given in Isaiah 40, 22, where we are told that "it is he . . . that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in." Could anything be more divinely inspired than this?

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But one need not go to the Bible alone for proof of its Divinity. A Mr. H. T. Perchard brings in "archaeological excavations" and shows how Jericho was "revealed." It is true of course that an old city was discovered on the site, but it was *not* the Jericho of the Bible. For some holy reason, nothing whatever was "revealed" of that famous city much to the disappointment of the excavators. However, if this excavation business is not quite good enough, Jersey people are implored to fall back upon "the nature of God as revealed in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ." And no one can possibly upset this staggering proof. Does anything outside the Bible ever get into Jersey?

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Although in general mediums can turn up every week at some "church" or other meeting place and bring in many spirits from the mighty — or not so mighty — deep, they do sometimes fail to get "contact." That is what happened to a Mr. Ronald Strong, one of the very numerous "well known" mediums who has incidentally had trouble this way often before. In the good old days, when Materialism wasn't so powerful as it appears to be these days (in spite of it fighting in the last ditch over twenty years ago according to Mr. Shaw Desmond) most mediums could easily get away with a little help *not* from the spirit world, and trust to luck that they get away with it. Nowadays, it is not so easy, so Mr. Strong is advised to stop his meetings. But surely his is a case for "spiritual healing"? Surely when the spirits find out, hundreds of them will flock to his aid and "heal" him and reveal once again the Summerland of his tremendous faith?

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It is to the credit of Professor Toynbee that in his appreciative BBC talk the other Sunday on the late Gilbert Murray he said nothing about the "death-bed conversion."

Murray's three great interests, he declared, were Hellenism, Liberalism and Rationalism — and even more particularly was his splendid work for the League of Nations. But more than once he referred to Murray's Rationalism of which there was no doubt. Prof. Toynbee made no reference at all to the impudent intrusion of a Roman Catholic priest at the death bed, similar to when Voltaire lay dying; and even Thomas Paine had his last hours bedevilled by Christian ghouls. These death bed "conversions" make sorry stories for the Church!

Chosen Question

By G. H. TAYLOR

AT A CLUB meeting I recently addressed on the subject of Atheism the point was put to me, somewhat after this fashion:

"Disease, pain and suffering don't necessarily mean God is cruel to us. May there not be purpose in them too? No pains, no gains! Suffering can ennoble our character. It breeds fortitude and courage. And disease itself is surely a challenge to medical science. There would have been no advances in medicine if there had been no pain to cure."

There are two points here, namely, that suffering improves character, and that disease acts as a spur to medical progress.

First, there is no scientific evidence that suffering breeds courage. What it does is to test the courage already there. It does not create fortitude; it elicits its display. Pain *exposes* character; it does not develop character.

The effect suffering could have on character is not to strengthen it but to impair it.

To the other point—that disease is a good thing because it inspires a cure—I asked the questioner whether he would care to cut his throat so as to give the club members some practice in first aid. The argument that disease stimulates medical knowledge has of course been made by eminent theological doctors. It has some other curious logical consequences.

For instance, did God create the Bilharzia worm to torture human beings or to provide Christopherson with a problem which he solved in 1917? Again, are the sufferers punished for their sins or punished because they met this worm prior to 1917?

Were the agonies of the Black Death a punishment for being born in the fourteenth century? Was cholera a punishment for not knowing when to boil one's drink? Have those now laid low with polio done a great worthwhile job in stimulating the search for a vaccine?

And if disease is only a secondary imperfection in the Creator's purpose, it becomes absurd in an Almighty Being who could attain all His purposes *without* this slaughter of the innocents. Really, the only proper apology for God's behaviour, as Chapman Cohen used to say, is the Atheist explanation that he does not exist.

WITCHCRAFT TO-DAY

IN Germany, the state government of Lower Saxony is now attempting to wipe out the practice of witchcraft. A drive has been instituted against the exploitation of superstitious rural folk in the sparsely settled regions. A Hamburg newspaper reports hundreds of cases of faith-healing, exorcism of devils, and casting out of spells. State health officials have reported instances of suicide by persons who had been branded as witches. The people of the region have long been under the domination of the Catholic Church.

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All Articles and correspondence should be addressed to THE EDITOR at the above address and not to individuals.

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Details of membership of the National Secular Society may be obtained from the General Secretary, 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1. Members and visitors are always welcome at the Office.

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 propuganda.

D. STRATTON (Colorado) and T. B. G. BURCH. (Canada).—Mr. Taylor is highly appreciative of your kind remarks.

H.N.—Pamphlets for the People are excellent for distribution among the uninitiated such as you have contact with.

C.E.R.—But surely, if we all cancel our licenses because we can't get Freethought broadcasts, we are putting ourselves in a position where we cannot demand them. Your comments are always welcome.

F. C. ASHDOWN.—An interesting piece of research. Unfortunately we haven't the space to reprint lengthy matter of this kind.

F. ALSTON.—The religious "revival" in America is deceptive so far as Protestants are concerned. Very often the nearest church is the social centre of the local community, and those who use it are counted statistically as "practising" Christians.

F. WILLIS (Mrs.).—It has been calculated that for the world in general the annual birth rate is now 34 per 1,000 and the death rate 18 per 1,000. This means that this time next year there will be 43 million more mouths to feed. The world's population could therefore double in the next half century.

PETER O'DELL (17).—Read the first three chapters of Genesis and then ask yourself whether, if they had been presented to you as honest fiction, you would not have accepted them as such.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (International Centre, Suffolk Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: CHARLES H. SMITH, Charles Darwin—Pulveriser of Ideas.

OUTDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park).—Every Sunday, 7.30 p.m.: Messrs DAY, CORINA, and SHEPPARD.

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

Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street, Kingston, Surrey).—Every Sunday, 8 p.m.: Messrs. J. W. BARKER and E. MILLS.

London (Tower Hill).—Thursday, 12-2 p.m.: Messrs. D. TULLMAN and L. EBURY.

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

Sunday, 3 p.m. (Platt Fields) Messrs. WOODCOCK, MILLS, etc.

Sunday 8 p.m. (Deansgate Blitzed Site): Messrs. WOODCOCK, MILLS, SMITH or WOOD.

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: Messrs. L. EBURY and A. ARTHUR.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Sunday, 11.30 a.m.: R. POWE. Thursday, 1 p.m.: R. POWE. Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY and R. POWE.

Wales and Western Branch (The Downs, Bristol).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: D. SHIPPER.

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

Notes and News

GERMAN newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* has published a report (based on a statement by the Russian Ambassador to West Germany) that the U.S.S.R. hopes to

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £237 7s. 9d.; A. Hancock, 2s.; Anon, 2s.; Mrs. A. Vallance, £1 10s.—Total to date, August 23rd, 1957, £239 1s. 9d.

establish diplomatic relations with the Vatican within the next year. However, the Rome (Catholic) News Service, quoting Vatican sources, says there is no possibility of this happening. The first time the Russians had attempted a diplomatic contact with the Holy See was last August, when the Soviet Embassy chargé d'affaires in Rome called on Archbishop Fietta (Nuncio to Italy) with copies of U.S.S.R. proposals on disarmament and a Suez statement.

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To give thanks for his recent election as Lord Mayor of Dublin, Councillor James Carroll made a pilgrimage to the island of Lough Derg. Exercises on this pilgrimage included walking barefoot over stony ground, strict fasting and an all-night vigil.

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AMONG the multitude of begging appeals which appear in the Catholic newspapers, one which particularly caught our fancy was "£1,000 Urgently Needed!" for the "Church of St. Anthony (*Wonder Worker*)". Sad to say, "leaking gables have rotted roof timbers and damp has penetrated the walls." And apparently St. Anthony the Wonder Worker is powerless to rectify matters!

★

THE Amsterdam Catholic Actionists have pioneered a scheme by which telephone subscribers may dial a number for "recorded prayers and short exhortations." Later, it is hoped, priests will be available to deal with problems arising at any time of the day or night. Possibly an excommunication record is now available for Dutch Freethinkers who dial Den Haag 1212.

★

AN Anglican clergyman has pressed upon his flock the necessity of having their motor-cars sprinkled with holy water. Recalling that it was once the fashion to bless horses, he says, "The blessing of cars is the Church moving with civilisation." What a glorious pioneer he must be!

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WE are becoming somewhat inundated with questions for our series, "Chosen Question," and we crave patience. The next to be dealt with are from Messrs. J. W. T. Anderson, T. B. G. Burch and E. Preston, though it may be necessary to amalgamate others where questions from different sources show a basic similarity.

Religious Revival

SPEAKING to the conference of the Lord's Day Observance Society at Skewen (near Swansea), the Bishop of St. David's disclosed the startling information that Britain was largely *pagan*. The Bishop made the grave assertion that anyone who spoke on the sanctity of the Sabbath laid himself open to the charge of being narrow-minded and a kill-joy, a revelation which shocks us to the core. Another speaker, the Rev. T. H. Griffiths of Whitchurch, Cardiff, affirmed that Welsh churches and chapels were losing their battle against Sunday opening of cinemas.

To demonstrate that he, at least, was not "narrow-minded and a kill-joy," he declared that he was against Sunday trading, Sunday sport, Sunday drinking, Sunday excursions, Sunday labour and Sunday television!

We understand he has no objection to people taking a cup of tea after service.

Freethought Televised to Millions

The following dialogue took place on Mike Wallace's TV programme "Night Beat" on the American station WABD from 11 p.m. to 11.30 p.m. on May 22nd last. The estimated audience was between three and four millions.

WALLACE: Mr. Lewis, let me read to you from the Old Testament for just a moment. Chapter one, verses one, two and three: "In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth, and the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep and the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said 'Let there be light' and there was light." Do you believe that?

LEWIS: No, sir, I do not. That's a fairy tale.

WALLACE: It is a superstition?

LEWIS: It is, sir. No such creation took place. A creation predicated a time and place when and where there was nothing. Such a concept is impossible to an intelligent mind.

WALLACE: And the Bible is a fraud?

LEWIS: I say so. Yes, sir.

WALLACE: More than a fraud?

LEWIS: I think it is worse than a fraud because it has been the cause of untold misery to the human race and has arrested intellectual progress for the past two thousand years.

WALLACE: I understand that you say that the Bible is full of obscene and revolting stories.

LEWIS: It is. I need but mention a few if you'd like to hear them. The story of Lot being made drunk by his two daughters and then committing incest with them is one of the most revolting stories that I know of.

WALLACE: I don't think that it's necessary to go on. Do you consider the Ten Commandments to be a good code of morality for mankind?

LEWIS: No, sir. I do not.

WALLACE: For what reason?

LEWIS: Because they're outdated. They're outmoded. They're primitive taboos that were made into a religious system. The very first Commandment has no meaning or significance whatsoever. In fact, the three religious systems which accept the Ten Commandments do not list them the same. The Hebrew, the Protestant and the Catholic differ as to the First Commandment.

WALLACE: I understand you feel that the Ten Commandments rather than having any value, are a detriment.

LEWIS: I can give you many instances of their detrimental influence upon mankind.

WALLACE: Well, before we go any further, may I read to you what Rabbi William Berkowitz of the Congregation B'nai Jeshurum here in New York told us today regarding your attacks on the Bible and on the Ten Commandments. First of all, on the Bible. The rabbi said, "The theme and the aim of the Bible is to elevate man to his noblest purpose through its ethical teachings and moral doctrines, making man partner with God in the creation and maintenance of the Universe. It shall always withstand the test of time and the attack of cynics and of atheists." And as to the Bible containing what you have called obscene stories, Mr. Lewis, the rabbi said as follows: "Within its pages are, of course, stories of human beings which tell of both their greatness and their shortcomings." He said, "My answer to Mr. Lewis' charge would be simply to repeat 'To err is to be human, but condemning the entire Bible as a work of obscenity is foolish and unintelligent.'" Any further comment before we get into the rabbi's answer on the Ten Commandments?

LEWIS: On the contrary, he's defending his position and of course he wants to find out or say something that's going to be beneficial to him; but he is not right. He is entirely wrong about the matter. If obscenity is in the Bible, then there must be some reason for it, and the reason was not for elevation, nor to inspire goodness.

WALLACE: What in that case, in your mind, is the reason for what you call the obscenity in the Bible, Mr. Lewis?

LEWIS: It is a collection of obscene stories gathered together solely for the purpose of expressing the lasciviousness of human nature, and that is why they are put in the Bible. If it were one or two instances it would be different; but the Bible is filled with these obscene stories.

WALLACE: Isn't that what the rabbi says? He says, "It points out the shortcomings and the greatnesses of man and points out that to err is human."

LEWIS: The stories as related in the Bible and the narratives themselves do not point such a moral. The rape of Tamar by her brother Ammon does not show anything that's good or point out a moral that might come from such a narrative. It is a story of the satisfaction of a vicious, lustful desire.

WALLACE: On the Ten Commandments, Rabbi Berkowitz said, "No document has ever exercised as great an influence on the religious and moral life of man. It not only civilised an uncivilised people—the Jews—but remained as the core of a moral code for all peoples. The present-day problems and moral crises can best be met in terms of the categories described in these commandments." Any comment to that, Mr. Lewis?

LEWIS: Of course, I don't believe it. It is not true. As I told you, the First Commandment is not accepted by all the religionists in the same manner. For instance, the First Commandment states, "I am the Lord, thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." Now, the Catholics and the Protestants do not accept that part of the Commandment about out of the house of bondage and out of Egypt, because they were never in Egypt and they were not even in existence at the time this Commandment was written.

WALLACE: Would you also discard the Sermon on the Mount—the code adhered to by people of Christian denomination?

LEWIS: You can take what's good in the Sermon on the Mount, but the parts that are certainly not good and are too silly for words should be eliminated.

WALLACE: Such as?

LEWIS: Such as if your eye should offend, pluck it out; or if your hand offends you, cut it off. I think that's an utterly ridiculous code to follow.

WALLACE: We talked with Dr. Langmead Casserley, an Anglican of the General Theological Seminary, today. He told us as follows: "Living up to the Sermon in an obvious literal sense is of course impossible, but when men do great and noble deeds, the Kingdom of God will be at hand. People follow the Sermon every day, everywhere. These deeds do not get publicity. You do not turn to a newspaper and see 'Extraordinary Devotion of Accountant in Toledo.' Sanctity lacks news value," Dr. Langmead Casserley said, "but these are the moments when men live up to the Sermon on the Mount that makes life worth while." You disagree?

LEWIS: I disagree most emphatically, sir.

(To be continued)

The Life of a Lama

[A Review of *The Third Eye*, by T. Lobsang Rampa.]

By REV. J. L. BROOM, M.A.

TIBET has, until very recently, been the land of mystery *par excellence*. Since the famous Younghusband punitive expedition of 1904 opened up the country to travellers on any scale, countless books have appeared extolling Tibet, and particularly Lhasa, "the holy city," as one of the last outposts of the accumulated wisdom of the East, in sharp contrast to the materialistic money-mad West. James Hilton in *Lost Horizon* located his Shangri-La in a vaguely-defined but unmistakably Tibetan monastery, and one of the last accounts by Lowell Thomas before the Communist invasion was significantly entitled *Out of this World*.

Unfortunately, the Chinese conquest of 1950 has severely damaged, if it has not altogether destroyed the pretty legend. The Buddhist gods lamentably failed to protect the chosen land from the Communist hordes, and latest reports suggest that the modernisation of Tibet according to Western standards is proceeding apace. Great new highways linking Lhasa with the neighbouring countries have been constructed, a regular air service between Lhasa and Peking was inaugurated in 1955, and the indoctrination of the Tibetan youth with Communist propaganda is in full swing. The Dalai Lama remains the nominal head of the state, but he is clearly now a mere puppet in the hands of his Chinese overlords, and his utterances in praise of the new régime are ludicrously uncritical, being all too reminiscent of the parrotings of a Petain or a Quisling. Such pusillanimity hardly seems consistent with the Tibetan belief that the Dalai Lama is the living incarnation of Chenreze, the Tibetan Buddha himself. On the contrary, his behaviour bears all the hallmarks of very ordinary human weakness in the face of armed might.

It is necessary, I think, to bear the above facts in mind before considering the extraordinary book at present under review. *The Third Eye* is the alleged autobiography of a Tibetan lama who, as a result of his rigorous training under monkish teachers, claims to have developed remarkable powers. The publishers, of course, had no certain way of verifying the account, though they did submit the MS. to twenty authorities on Tibet, none of whom could detect any obvious factual errors. The philosophical truth of the story is however another matter, and on these grounds it calls for a remarkable suspension of disbelief which few if any freethinkers will be prepared to undertake.

The author relates that at the age of seven he entered a lamasery, where he was subjected to the most severe physical and intellectual disciplines. These involved prolonged periods of meditation, and a considerable amount of physical chastisement by the tutoring staff. When he was eight he underwent the amazing surgical operation on his forehead which is designed to uncover the "third eye," atrophied, according to Tibetan dogma, countless ages ago when man fell from grace. This "eye," according to the author, is the pineal body and when the operation (described in loving detail) was complete the patient found that by means of his extra sensory organ he was able to see the physical manifestations of his neighbours' thoughts and feelings. This is how he describes his immediate awakening after the ordeal:

"For the moment I was mainly interested in food. For the past eighteen days I had been kept on a very small allowance; now I intended to make up for it. Out of the door I hurried, intent only on that thought. Approaching me was a figure smothered in blue smoke, shot through with flecks of angry red. I uttered a squeal of alarm and dashed back into the room. 'There's a man on fire in the corridor,' I said. The Lama

Mingyar Dondup hurried out and came back smiling. 'Lobsang, that is a cleaner in a temper. His aura is smoky-blue as he is not evolved, and the flecks of red are the temper impulses showing. Now you can go again in search of the food you want so much.' It was fascinating meeting the boys I knew so well yet had not known at all. Now I could look at them and get the impression of their true thoughts, the genuine liking for me, the jealousy from some and the indifference from others."

As he grew up, Lobsang's "occult" training proceeded apace. He learned the innermost secrets of judo, the art of foreseeing the future through crystal gazing, and how to fly through the "astral spheres." Finally he was conducted to the caves below the Potala (the great winter palace of the Dalai Lama at Lhasa), where only the elect are ever permitted to enter, and was there shown the priceless treasures of the ages, and by mystic revelations was afforded a picture of the past and future of the Tibetan race and of mankind. He also learned that his own personal destiny was to leave Tibet and proselytise in China and the West.

What can be said about this strange book which in a calm, matter-of-fact way seems to brush aside the conclusions of Western science and common sense? There is, of course, nothing *prima facie* supernatural about the possession of a "third eye" which could discern the "aura" of thoughts and emotions. There is even nothing inconsistent with materialism, properly understood, in the ability to see the future, since the act of foresight itself if it existed, would then be part of the natural causal order and explicable by scientific means. Words like "supernatural" and "occult" and expressions such as "the triumph of mind over matter," which our author himself uses on occasions, are disgracefully pejorative and question-begging. Professor Gilbert Ryle, in his epoch-making book, *The Concept of Mind*, has shown conclusively that to talk of "mind" and "matter" as though they were separate entities in the old Cartesian manner is to exhibit hopeless confusion of thought. The curious happenings narrated in *The Third Eye* would be curious no longer if they were the common property of mankind, since they would then form part of the scientific explanation of human behaviour. By the very definition of terms the supernatural cannot exist since existence implies the known (to talk of an unknowable existing is to talk nonsense) and that which is known must be included within the sphere of science.

All this, of course, is far from being an admission that Mr. Lobsang Rampa has proved that third eyes, astrology and the other occult apparatus he produces have solid scientific foundations. We have, after all, only his word for them, and, with due respect, this is hardly enough to convince even credulous persons of their reality, let alone the hardened sceptics who read this periodical. Apart from those of the author, a most unsatisfactory "aura" of mystery surrounds the whole situation. Where, for instance, is Mr. Rampa now? Is his third eye visible? Would he be prepared to demonstrate his powers before the National Secular Society or the British Association? Why does he not make some particular predictions that could be tested by events? Until such questions as these are satisfactorily answered, the verdict must be a resounding "not-proven."

Nevertheless, I do heartily commend *The Third Eye* to all FREETHINKER readers. In the words of one reviewer, "Though it will be a matter of extraordinary difficulty to say whether it is a work of truth, it comes near to being a work of art."

A Poser for Parsons

MY LANDLORD has just given me notice. . . I meet the three parsons, who seem to be supervising my departure. I go straight up to them and bow.

"Gentlemen," I say, "you seem to have a deep knowledge of the scriptures. I myself have more than a little scholarship. Well, I should like to submit to you a case which profoundly troubles my Catholic conscience.

"You consider incest an abominable crime, do you not? But, dear me! The Bible gives us an instance of it, which is very disturbing. Lot, fleeing from Sodom, was seduced, as you know, by his two daughters, and yielded to their desires, being deprived of his wife who had been turned into a pillar of salt.

"Of this appalling and doubly incestuous connection were born Ammon and Moab, from whom sprang two great peoples, the Ammonites and Moabites, Well, Ruth, the reaper who disturbed the sleep of Boaz in order to make him a father, was a Moabite. Do you not know Victor Hugo's lines?

. . . *Ruth, une Moabite,*

*S'était couch couchée aux pieds de Boaz, le sein nu,
Espérant on ne sait quel rayon inconnu.*

Quand viendrait du réveil la lumière subite.

"The *rayon inconnu* produced Obed, who was David's ancestor. Now then! Was not Our Lord Jesus Christ descended from David?"

The three parsons looked at one another in consternation and did not answer.

"You will say," I went on, "that I speak of the genealogy of Joseph, the lawful but superfluous husband of Mary, mother of Christ. Joseph, as we all know, had nothing to do with his son's birth. So it was Joseph who was descended from a case of incest, and not the Divine Man.

"Granted, but I will add two further observations. The first is that Joseph and Mary, being cousins, must have had the same ancestry; the second, that it is a disgrace that we should have to read pages of genealogical tree for nothing. We ruin our eyes learning that A begat B, who begat C, who begat D, who begat E, and when we are almost driven off our heads by this interminable rigmarole we come to the last one, Joseph, who begat nothing! That, gentlemen, may well be called excess of mystification."

The three parsons, as one man, abruptly turned their backs on me and fled.

[From *Our Friends the English*, a short story
by Guy de Maupassant.]

An Illusionist on Spiritualism

In this year of grace 1891, to write upon the deceptions which have been practised under the name of Modern Spiritualism is surely akin to thrashing a dead horse; but since this *pernicious* doctrine has ever been productive of so much evil, and has done so much to fill our lunatic asylums, the author of the present work considers it would be incomplete without a chapter on the subject. . . . In the limits of a single chapter it is impossible to treat this *gigantic imposture* in an exhaustive manner. . . . there does not exist, and there never has existed a professed "medium" of note who has not been convicted of trickery or fraud. . . . it is the old story retold—the story of Duplicity feeding upon Folly. . . . [Spiritualism] is a doctrine, cradled in credulity and fostered by fraud, which teaches, and professes to prove that the spirits of those departed can be brought again into material contact with those still upon

earth. . . it is a remnant of the superstition which produced the folk-lore of ghosts and spectres in former times, a superstition that weakened the intellect, and destroyed the mental faculties of thousands, rendering them an easy prey to the avarice of impostors, who have found it easier to live by their wits than to work honestly for a living.

—[J. N. Maskeleyne, *The Supernatural*]

CORRESPONDENCE

A QUESTION

Would Mr. Du Cann kindly tell us exactly where he stands? Is he a Freethinker or some kind of Christian. If the latter, what kind?
E. MACD. (Mrs.)

INDISPUTABLE?

THE FREETHINKER is a forum of lively, intelligent opinion, and I am not one who automatically objects to the expression of variant views from my own. But Mr. Arthur B. Hewson's remarks (16/8/57) cannot go unchallenged.

Had he said he *believed* there was "Something" behind the universe I should have let it pass. Instead, he said: "Without a doubt this mighty Cosmos has a Something behind it. . ." and he emphasised "This is indisputable. . ." It is, I wish to stress, very disputable indeed. I shall not go further, except to add that a Rationalist ought to be a little more careful in his language, particularly when writing about Rationalism. A Unitarian on Unitarianism—now that is different!
ROBERT DENT.

WHY BE MILITANT?

Mr. G. I. Bennett's letter shows the need for straight-hitting propaganda. He says, "If God exists, he constitutes the principle and essence of the universe." Seeing that Mr. Bennett is unable to define *God*, he is in no position to make any statement about it. His statement is in fact nonsense.
E. H. GROUT.

ROMAN SCANDAL

When I was in Rome last month, I visited St. Peter's, with the aid of a guide. Just before we entered the building he asked us to form a circle and then told us we were about to see the second most important building in Italy; Thomas Cook's office being the first, as they paid him his salary.
JOHN D. HOCKIN.

OBITUARY

THE death has occurred at the age of 75 of Rose Amelia Hartill, a keen Freethinker and reader of this paper, at her home in High-bury, London. We send our deepest sympathy to her husband and relatives. A secular service was conducted at Finchley Cemetery on Tuesday, August 20th, by the General Secretary of the National Secular Society.

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