

The Freethinker

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Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

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PARSONS are continually being brought face to face with the unpleasant truth about their beloved "religious revival." Their reaction is either to step smartly out of the way and dodge the issue, or to smother it with the time-honoured blanket of verbiage. The Rev. Donald Soper is an exception. His method is to sit and brood sadly on such matters. His article in *News of the World* for August 18th finds him openly admitting that, so far from being in the throes of a revival, "most churches are more than half empty" and "organised religion is in a slump."

The vast majority of people today have no use for the parson but are too tolerant to kick him off the social scene, and too lazy mentally to find out whether he still has any useful function. They think of him, if at all, as invisible six days of the week and incomprehensible on the other—and don't even know the name of the church they stay away from.

Such are the unpleasant facts which sadden Dr. Soper and cause him to ask "what is wrong with our parsons." And here he does his colleagues a little injustice: he should be asking what is wrong with their creed. For if Christianity is false not even the best clergy can put it right. If the "facts" on which Christianity rests are not historical, if they never happened, then the quality of those who preach them as true must suffer in proportion. It is not the parson's fault that Christianity makes nonsense, though it may be his misfortune not to recognise it as such. But then, it is difficult to get a man to see the truth when his living depends on his *not* seeing it.

A Fairy Tale Philosophy

The notion that what is wrong with religion is simply its preachers will not stand examination. Christianity, as the name implies, rests on the unique character of Christ as a mediator and Saviour-God to atone for the Fall of Adam. God made Adam as an engineer makes an inferior bridge. If the engineer makes the bridge to stand a certain weight and then allows more weight on it than it will stand, he is at fault when the bridge collapses. As the Maker of Adam, God foresees that his creation will not withstand the temptation offered. Not only Adam, but Adam's descendants, are then blamed for what happens, and redemption is permitted only as a reward for believing that Christ dies for Adam's "sin." If this solution strikes you as absurd, you are damned. Now if all this is equal to a fairy tale, then it remains so whether or not its propagator writes "Doctor of Divinity" after his name or not. (A Doctor of Divinity is what is left of a theological student after the sense has been extracted.)

If the Christian scheme of things *were* historical it would be illogical. If it were historical *and* logical it would still be unethical. To all this the quality or otherwise of our parsons makes not the slightest difference, and Dr. Soper cannot attribute the trouble to that source. No theologian can make Theology a valid science any more than an astrologer or palmist can convert what is spurious into

what is scientific. Dr. Soper must look elsewhere for the basic reasons for the slump: he must look to the foundations of Christianity itself, which have been undermined by developing knowledge.

A Revival of What?

That is why there is something inherently dishonest about any claim for a religious revival. Consider. When people return to religion they should be going back because of some new evidence showing Christianity to be true. On the contrary, such contemporary matters to which the attention of the public has been drawn—for instance, Mithra, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the evidence of living things evolving from non-living—have not favoured Christianity at all!

Not even the most fanatical upholder of religion can claim a revival due to some new favourable truth having been established. Not a single discovery has made Christianity more likely or less ridiculous. Why, then, a "revival"? Was it not merely a matter of advertisement like any commercial product? The better it is advertised the more people will tend to buy it, irrespective of its quality. And the less it satisfies the fewer will tend to buy it. That is in fact exactly what happened. The great Jehovah Jamborees of Billy Graham brought a slight increase in churchgoing—for a very short time. A new circus in town would have been an equal attraction.

Sixty per cent. of his "converts" were aged five to nineteen. They contained a vast number of teenage "fans" bringing their tremendous emotional input which has since been transferred to Rock 'n' Roll, with Billy Graham displaced by Bill Haley, and the contortions of the revivalists supplanted by the capers of Elvis Presley and Tommy Steele. Of the two crazes the latter is far less unhealthy.

But the general idea of a religious revival was too good to lose. And so the sickly baby was taken under the care of the BBC parsons.

The BBC to the Rescue

Half ashamed of the Billy Graham methods, the BBC parsons have had to employ different tactics. Different goods have had to be put in the window. It became the fashion to show off the Christian religion as the intimate friend of the workers and their children, with treats for the kiddies, dances for the adolescents and tea parties for the aged. A recent ITV programme showed a group of children at a Butlin's Camp with the Punch and Judy show paving the way for the appearance of the padre!

The religion whose appeal was once based for eternity on Holy Writ, and enforced by rack and torture chamber, is now reaching the stage where the attraction will be ping-pong and pics, with cups of tea given away free with the Creed. And instead of the ascetic holy man of old, we are getting the Pipe-and-Pint Parson.

Healthy (?) Competition

Of course, the new difficulty which confronts this form of Christian revival; or *survival*, more accurately; is the element of cut-throat competition which it introduces.

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

OBITUARY

The Religious Revival

(BORN 1955: DIED 1956)

—By G. H. TAYLOR—

People won over by free buns and free rides can be lost just as easily by the same means to a rival firm. This happened recently at Arundel. "The Baptists," lamented the Vicar, "are enticing children away from my Sunday school. I don't pinch their children. Why should they take mine? I hear that the Baptists have a van going around the Council Estate on Sunday which takes children to their Sunday school. Some children have said they prefer the Chapel because the Baptists have treats and give prizes."

In a recent book, *Christian Missions*, the Rev. E. Blake says children attend Sunday school because "father likes to have the house quiet on a Sunday afternoon so that he can have a sleep. Others like their children to qualify for the Summer outing, the Christmas party and annual prizes."

Some "Revival" Records

Hardly a week passes without our reading something which shows exactly how the "religious revival" is faring. At the 1957 Methodist Conference the President openly lamented that "the masses do not want Religion." The gulf between the Churches and the people, he said, was very great. This is hardly surprising. The people have mostly outgrown Christianity, and to make it fit modern life and modern problems is like fitting a size three shoe to a size twelve foot.

Figures for the attendance at Methodist Sunday Schools show 30,000 children lost in 1955, and the figures for 1956 are expected to reveal a similar loss. An official Baptist source recently admitted that since the First World War they had lost two millions from their Sunday schools in England and Wales.

A recent report to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland told of such serious losses, both financially and in the matter of recruits to the ministry, that with present resources it had become hopeless to try to keep pace with the dispersal of population.

Opening an appeal for funds for church repairs earlier this year, Mr. Bulmer Thomas deplored that even when the money was found for the churches, "what is lacking is the will to use them."

Perhaps a sign even more encouraging to Freethinkers is evidence that the public are becoming increasingly aware of the gap between the Churches and themselves. This attitude marks a great advance on merely being indifferent to the Churches. Twenty years ago the good folk of such places as Abertillery and Bedwelty would have been aghast at the idea of opening their cinemas on the Sabbath Day. They have recently, against organised clerical opposition, given their support for Sunday opening with the resounding majorities of 11 to 1 and 5 to 1 respectively. The Christian-controlled Sabbath is gradually becoming a thing of the past, and it is being recognised as such. In a recent debate in the Bristol City Council on the Sunday opening of playing fields one councillor declared it was "time to throw off the stranglehold of the Church."

The Christian Creed on Crutches

The strength of such "stranglehold" was in fact admitted by a clergyman of the same city a short time ago when the Rev. E. Hopkins, Vicar of St. James, declared himself to be "disturbed by the fact that although the Christian Church has all modern techniques at its disposal, the impression made on the masses is comparatively little. . . . Think of the assistance given by the daily press, broadcasting and TV, each bringing the Gospel right into the homes of the people. Think of the vast amount of Christian literature that pours out from the Christian press."

What is this but an admission that even when carried in the best twentieth century vehicles, a first century creed has lost its appeal?

The Rev. D. Soper, in the article above referred to, admits that "the intellectual basis and supremacy of Christianity is being threatened as perhaps never before. Christianity as history and as philosophy is in for a tough time. . . ." As a shield from Hell Fire the Christian Churches are no longer wanted. As the mainspring of social reform they were never in the running. And latterly, as the Headquarters of Public Moral Hygiene, they are now almost universally treated as a top-ranking bore.

So much, then, for the late lamented Revival that misfired. There will be another one, of course. Revivals come and go. And each one is a direct admission that the previous one failed.

G. W. Foote on Christian Changes

HELL has long been cooling off. It is said that nearly all the scientific men went there and they improved the place beyond recognition. The oldest inhabitant was puzzled to know where he was. A few of that venerable species were so discontented with the change, so disturbed in their habits of life, so wild at being robbed of their last consolation, that they made themselves a perfect nuisance. The place, indeed, is so much altered that it has had to change its name. It is no longer called Hell; it is now called Hades, as may be seen by the Revised Version of the Bible. The new name is quite attractive. But it lacks force as a "swear word." It is hardly strong enough to move a cat from a garden wall.

Most Churchmen accept the renovated establishment. Their clerical predecessors preached the old Hell of brimstone and fire, and eternal darkness in spite of the flames, and everlasting torture of the hopelessly damned; and they burnt people alive in this world for doubting the orthodox view of the next. The fire and the flames are now given up. Yet the old Hell was proved from the Bible, and the new Hell is proved from the same book. And the same book has been used, and will continue to be used, to justify whatever changes of doctrine the Christian Churches deem necessary.

How does a change *become* necessary? The explanation may be given with reference to the biological law of natural selection operating through the struggle for existence. A changing environment means that a species must adjust itself to new conditions of existence or perish. An unchanging environment means that a species may continue to exist indefinitely without further adjustment. The change rarely originates in the organism; it usually originates in the environment. When it does originate in the environment the law for the organism is "Change or die."

This is how the Christian Churches change. They never change of themselves. The motion of development never comes from within. It comes from outside. A change takes place in the environment; that is to say, in the intellectual, moral, and æsthetic condition of mankind. Science shows, for instance, that the universe was not made in six days—if it was made at all. When that fact was established beyond dispute, it was found that the word "day" meant period. Further advances of science compelled the clergy to find, as the most sagacious of them soon did, that the whole Creation Story was a legendary narrative—embodying, of course, the sublimest truths. That is how the matter stands today. Further changes in the environment will compel further changes in the Churches' doctrine. We say *compel*, for that is usually the process. Organisms will not change unless the environment does. Churches will not change unless the world does. And the world *does* move.

[THE FREETHINKER, September 28th, 1913.]

Freethought Televised to Millions

(Continued from p.278)

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: All right. Mr. Lewis, let me ask you this. There are undoubtedly thousands of atheists in the United States today, but very few of them launch attacks as you do on the Bible, the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, on all organised religion. They seem, most of them, to be perfectly happy to live by their own beliefs and let others live by their own. What I would like to get at is, why this bitterness, this destructiveness on your part? Why are you so passionately opposed to religion and desirous of tearing down the house of religion?

LEWIS: Well, because I think it has done a great deal of harm. You might say the same thing about Abraham Lincoln. He looked upon slavery as an institution that he thought was harmful, he thought it was detrimental, he thought it was reprehensible. And so he devoted his life to the abolition of slavery, which, by the way, has Biblical sanction.

WALLACE: What crimes—what harms have been done in the name of religion, sir?

LEWIS: Oh, religion has committed so many crimes it would take an encyclopædia to record them.

WALLACE: All right, then, let me ask you this question. Let me put it to you this way. Is not the good that organised religion—or for that matter, disorganised religion—is not the good that religion has done over the years—has it not outweighed the bad that has been done in the name of religion by possibly a thousand to one?

LEWIS: No. I think the contrary is the truth. I would say the harm that it has done outweighs the good by ten thousand to one. Religion invented Hell, it invented blasphemy, it invented witchcraft. Why, those three things alone, if you recorded the crimes committed in those names, would be sufficient to condemn it before the world.

WALLACE: Mr. Lewis, let me find out, if I may, about your own code of morality—the precepts that you live by. Mr. Lewis, would you kill?

LEWIS: I would be very reluctant to kill.

WALLACE: That's not answering the question.

LEWIS: Probably in extreme self-defence I would, but otherwise no.

WALLACE: You would not kill, except in self-defence?

LEWIS: I believe so. I hesitate to kill an insect.

WALLACE: Would you commit adultery?

LEWIS: No, sir. I would not.

WALLACE: Would you steal?

LEWIS: No, sir. I would not.

WALLACE: Would you bear false witness against someone—would you testify in court falsely—commit perjury?

LEWIS: No, sir. I would not.

WALLACE: Well, Mr. Lewis, you say that you will not do any of these things. Would you tell me, then, what is the difference between your code of morality and that of the Ten Commandments whose content essentially I have just read and whose content you say that you condemn?

LEWIS: Because you haven't given the full meaning of the Ten Commandments. When you ask me whether I would bear false witness—if the Commandment read, "Thou shalt not bear false witness," if that were all to the Commandment, it would be a very good commandment, but the Commandment reads, "Thou shalt not bear false witness; against thy neighbour." That reduces it to a pro-

vincial code of conduct. That means only for your neighbour—you must not bear false witness against *him*. It's a primitive concept—it was a primitive taboo. But to the stranger beyond the gates or to other peoples, it was perfectly all right to bear false witness, and the Biblical testimony is in support of that premise by the conduct of the primitive Hebrews themselves.

WALLACE: Well, I think that in the standards by which we interpret the Ten Commandments today, the bearing of false witness is not only against the neighbour who may be next door or sitting next to you, but against your neighbour in the broader sense. You would not kill, would not commit adultery, would not bear false witness, would not steal; these are the same things. Is not your morality exactly the same as that set forth in the Ten Commandments?

LEWIS: No, it is not, because these things that you mention are basic and were in existence long before the Ten Commandments were ever written or even printed. The basic rule of life is that you protect yourself in society.

WALLACE: Well, then, the Ten Commandments are reflective of what is right in life and you condemn them.

LEWIS: No, they're merely repeating some of the old codes that are as ancient as man himself.

WALLACE: Well, it's not bad to repeat old codes if old codes are valid.

LEWIS: No, but you separate those which have very little value, very little significance, very little influence. Take those about creating a Sabbath Day. Do you realise what that has done to man? People have been beaten to death—people have been killed. Take the Third Commandment, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord, thy God in vain." That has brought about blasphemy. People's tongues have been ripped out. People have been burned at the stake. You must take them all. You can't take just a few. And when you say, "Thou shalt not kill," what do you mean? Moses himself, the so-called law-giver, killed a man without the slightest provocation. Does anyone suppose that a God of the Universe would give a murderer a Commandment to tell other people, "Thou shalt not kill."

WALLACE: Mr. Lewis, an author by the name of F. Scott Fitzgerald once wrote as follows. He said, "The easiest way to get a reputation is to go outside the fold, shout around for a few years as a violent atheist or dangerous radical and then crawl back to the shelter." Would this, in any way, describe the motivation or the possible future of Joseph Lewis?

LEWIS: No, sir. I would much rather quote Coleridge—Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who said, "Not one man in a thousand; yes, I repeat it, not one man in a thousand has strength of mind or goodness of heart to be an atheist." He was then associating with the English atheists, who were the finest men of England, and he made that statement because it takes a great deal of courage to express your thoughts in this particular philosophy.

WALLACE: I'm certain that that is true.

(To be continued)

—NEXT WEEK—
**REPORT FROM INDIA TO THE
 WORLD FREETHOUGHT CONGRESS**
 F. A. RIDLEY REPORTS FROM
 EAST GERMANY

This Believing World

Whether religion, that is, a deep faith in the power of religion to keep people on the straight and narrow path, is increasing in America, there are no authoritative means of knowing. What we do learn from time to time of the terrible crimes which regularly take place there is that often religion is used as a cloak to hide the crime. One recent example is the case of an 18-year-old boy, Ronald Marone, who raped and murdered a poor 15-year-old girl, and when told of the murder by his friend "Ronald prayed with him for the girl." "She is," he piously said, "in God's hands, wherever she is." Ronald was a regular church-goer and he actually took a Bible with him when he went to the District Attorney's office to be questioned.

★

Our contemporary "Weekend" has just exploded another Spiritualist myth. "Shame on you, Gwen Hayes," it said the other week, "for the shabbiest bit of spiritual humbug we've heard of for a long time. Gwen is making a nice fat profit flogging pictures of family ghosts." In other words, Miss Hayes goes into a trance, and at "five bob" a time (or more) she paints pictures of dead people from their "spirits"—and as she rarely or ever gets a likeness, she explains "they never look like they did on earth because they change after death." But will this or any other exposure stop some people from getting into touch with their dead relatives, somehow or anyhow? Never!

★

The way brilliant ideas for Jesus's sake surge up in the minds of some parsons compels our admiration. One such idea from the Rev. H. S. Godwin of Ipswich is for each street in a town to have its daily prayer so that every street in a parish in a month or so will have been mentioned—very valuable work, he considers, and no doubt most pleasing to God Almighty. Mr. Godwin is prepared to name some person "desperately ill" or in some need "specifically," which should help matters. All the same, we have an idea there will not be too much enthusiasm about the suggestion. Apathy is almost as dread a word in our Christian community as Unity.

★

That something should be done to jigger up the flagging spirits of Christians all over the country is the opinion of the Rev. Donald Soper, who has recently discovered that "apart from the Roman Catholic Church and the Sectarian Protestant underworld, organised religion is in a slump." He feels impelled to tell a troubled world "what is wrong with parsons" who may well be responsible, as they appear to him to be "not so honest in their pulpits" as "scientists or teachers." Dr. Soper is very pessimistic, for he even feels that some people who have told him they had been converted, he "liked better before it happened."

★

Where Dr. Soper and those who think like him fail to face the issue is in the fact that they will never if they can avoid it, discuss the question of Christian origins. They much prefer to leave the problem where the Roman Catholic Church leaves it—no discussion, please, all you need is Faith. Dr. Soper's conception of Jesus is exactly that of the Roman Church—follow Jesus Christ in everything, even in the interpretation of what "our Lord" said or thought as laid down in that Church's various manuals. He has no other justification for his Christianity.

★

Sometimes even the most addle-headed Fundamentalists are forced to show a trace of sanity, for here we have *The National Message*, the organ of our British Israelites, pub-

lishing an article disowning Noah's Universal Flood, and admitting it was only a "local" one in Mesopotamia. Noah, in less primitive pages than those in *The National Message*, has always been a figure of fun, and children have always enjoyed a Noah's Ark quite as much as other and more spectacular presents. Of course, our British Israelites—who loathe being called Jews, by the way—do not discard Holy Writ in a sentence or two. The true Noah and his Ark really existed, but not all the world was destroyed. In fact, there is no discrepancy whatever "between Biblical history and archæological discovery." Instead of being a Big Flood, it is now a little flood—that is all the difference.

PRAYER TO THE CRUCIFIED JESUS

Hear, O my beloved and good Jesus, before whose Holy presence I kneel; I fervently beseech Thee to fill my heart with all the sentiments of faith, of hope, of charity, of grief for my sins, and desire never more to offend Thee; while I, with all love and compassion, contemplating Thy five wounds as prophesied by St. David: "They pierced my hands and my feet: they have counted all my bones."

[This is a reference to Psalm 22.—ED.]

Paternoster, Ave, Gloria.

All who recite the above prayer before an image of the crucified Jesus will be granted an indulgence of 10 years; and absolutely if they regularly Confess and take Holy Communion, according to the decree of the Supreme Pontiff." (Translated from the Italian.)

The above 10 year and plenary indulgence is printed under special licence in Milan, and issued under the Veronese imprimatur: "IMPRIMATUR VERONAE, 22.XI.1955 Can. J. Lenotti V.G."

Evolution of an Idea

When the old chief died, the father of all the clan,
The fierce one, the wise one, the feared and revered old man,
They bore out his withered body, and sweating and groaning with [toil,

(Lest he should come back and plague them) covered it over with [soil,

With a great mound of earth—for the strength of the mighty dead
Is greater than that of the living, or the weaker when they are sped.

And lest the old man should hunger beneath the earthen mound,
They gathered the food-seeds of grasses and scattered them all [around,

Laying the earth above them, lest birds should steal the grain.
And Lo! when they came in the autumn, to bring him food again
The mound was covered over with grass of the self-same kind,
Golden, and richer in seeds than the sort that the women find
Searching for food in the valleys.

And the new chief turned to the Clan,
Saying, "Give thanks to our Father, the Man who is more than a [man

That hath not forgotten his people, and, lying beneath the mould,
Returneth the gift that they gave him, returneth it manifold!"

And the people gathered the harvest, food enough for their need
Through the long cold season of hunger, but leaving a store of the [seed

Buried to feed the Father, and with it they laid beside,
The best of the meat they had hunted, and one of the clan that had [died.

And the next year the harvest was greater. And year after year they [came

To take of the Old Man's bounty, to feed him and praise his name,
And bury their dead about him. And he thanked them with greater [yields.

And his barrow grew wider and wider — and that was the first of the [fields.

In this, or in some such fashion, did men first turn the sod.
And still they pray: "Give us this day . . ." And they call

[the old man . . . God.
RUSHWORTH FOGG

THE FREETHINKER

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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 propaganda.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

INDOOR

Orpington Humanist Group (Sherry's Restaurant).—Sunday, September 8th, 7 p.m.: W. GETHIN, O.B.E., B.S.C., "Esperanto."

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

THE posting of the Ten Commandments in the classrooms of a Long Island school district has been banned by the New York State Education Commissioner. "The education of children is not served by acts which create divisiveness, ill-feeling and unwholesome controversy," said the Commissioner. We hope his example will be followed.

THE U.S. Congressional Record (equivalent of our Hansard) contains an interesting item dated Wednesday, July 3rd 1957 (Vol. 103 No. 116). Under the Appendix to the Proceedings of the Senate, are given details of some recently discovered letters written to the Citizens of Rhode Island by Thomas Paine. They were introduced by the Hon. Jacob K. Javits of New York, who — referring to the 181st anniversary of the Declaration of Independence (the day following) — said it was fitting at this time to bring the letters to the attention of his colleagues. He asked "unanimous consent that the article by Joseph Lewis, founder of the Thomas Paine Foundation be printed in the Appendix of the Record". And this was duly done. The letters, written at the request of Washington, induced the people

of Rhode Island to accept the 5 per cent impost tax for national defence after they had previously refused it. They virtually saved the Union, and John Adams remarked "Washington's sword would have been wielded in vain had it not been supported by the pen of Paine."

★

IN THE BBC booklet *Religion on the Air*, published a year or so ago, the Rev. Roy McKay (Head of BBC Religious Broadcasting) forecast that "Further religious television programmes are likely to develop in the near future." Whether Mr. McKay was speaking for ITV as well as the BBC we don't know, but we learn with regret that Associated Television and A.B.C. Television are to put on a series of television services in London, the Midlands and the North from mid-September to Christmas. It is to be an "experiment" we are told. We should like to know how its success will be judged. We should also like to know who suggested the new religious programmes. The *Manchester Guardian* (21/8/57) says: "The Independent Television Authority announced yesterday that the Central Religious Advisory Committee had agreed to a suggestion . . ." etc. It would seem from this that the suggestion came from the Authority. Be that as it may, readers should certainly protest to the Authority.

★

DESPITE TERRIFIC Channel gales, the two outdoor meetings on Worthing beach on Sunday, August 25th were most successful. In the afternoon the Church Army (complete with harmonium and loudspeaker) proved no match for the National Secular Society in the persons of J. W. Barker, Jack Gordon, Colin McCall and P. G. Young. In the evening the Salvation Army was similarly routed. Apart from the many interested locals and holidaymakers, it was pleasing to see among those who had come specially for the occasion, Mr. H. Cutner (on holiday at Brighton), Mr. W. Morris (Rustington) and Mr. W. A. Morrison (Shoreham), whilst Messrs. R. DeSalle and J. and P. Potheary had—like Mr. Young—travelled from Portsmouth. The Portsmouth members hope to make the trip again on September 15th. Worthing Branch N.S.S. has an enthusiastic Secretary in Mr. W. Perkins, of Valley Holme, Grinstead Lane, Lancing, Sussex. He now has promise of enthusiastic support from neighbouring Hampshire.

★

THE play, *The Making of Moo*, reviewed recently in these columns, caused much fluttering in the clerical dovecotes. It is bad enough to refer to unbelief on the stage—unless the unbeliever is the scoundrel of the play—but to subject "sacred" beliefs to sustained ridicule is just too much! We are moved to ask why the pious Lord Chamberlain passed the play (assuming he understood it).

★

MR. G. H. TAYLOR has accepted an invitation from the South Place Ethical Society to give a talk on *The Making of Moo* at the Conway Hall Discussion Circle in November, and is trying to arrange for the use of some of the script.

★

WHEN Sir Thomas Meyrick, the Master of Foxhounds, and eighty members of Pembrokeshire Hunt were summoned for permitting sheep worrying the case failed due to legal technicalities and the Pembrokeshire Police were ordered to pay £125 costs. Master of Foxhounds Sir Thomas is a man of astonishing versatility, and besides his post with the Hunt he is a magistrate and also *President of the Pembrokeshire branch of the R.S.P.C.A.* In these characterless days it is refreshing to find a man who can not only sit on the fence but also stand on both sides of it at the same time. We are seeking the R.S.P.C.A. view on this.

The Case against Parapsychology

By DR. EDWARD ROUX

A PACK of 25 Zener cards contains five each of the following: circle, square, cross, star and wavy lines. Suppose I take two packs, shuffle each well and deal the top card from each pack, then the second, and so on, as in a game of "snap." The most probable number of "snaps" I shall get in working through the two packs together is calculated mathematically to be 5, since for every one card of a particular suit in one pack there are one out of five of the same suit in the other pack. This is what the mathematician tells me I am most likely to get, but in practice I may score anything from 0 to 25. Mathematically my chance of scoring 0 is one in about 250, and of scoring 25 four in something like a million million million.

These are the odds calculated mathematically. They do not tell us what is going to happen when we deal the cards, only what is most likely to happen. I may score 25 the first time I deal the cards or I may not score 25 if I deal them a billion billion times.

Instead of dealing one pack against another I could have played the game in a different way, by using only one pack and guessing the nature of each card before I turned it up. In theory there is little difference between the two sorts of game and they should in practice give the same sort of results.

Suppose I shuffle a pack of Zener cards and, dealing them one by one so that you cannot see them while I can, ask you to guess what they are. If you score 25 right my reaction will be: "That's not guessing: you *know* what they are." If you do the same with a second pack and a third, and I am able to rule out any kind of trickery on your part, I shall have to conclude that when I look at a card what exists in my mind is somehow transferred through space to your mind, in other words that we are telepathic.

Certain investigators have carried out guessing games of this sort and have brought forward evidence which they claim proves telepathy or something even stranger than that. Among vast numbers of subjects (people investigated) a very small number apparently had supernormal powers. Some of these "paranormals" are said to have scored averages of 6, 7 or 8 correct guesses over a large number of runs. It was expected in terms of the mathematical theory of probability that averages over a large number of runs should approximate to 5, and therefore these persons were said to have paranormal ability. Note that they were still guessing; they were more often wrong than right, and they were not conscious as far as any one guess was concerned as to whether it was right or wrong.

When such "paranormal" persons, discovered by one investigator, were subsequently tested by other investigators they almost always failed to produce anything unusual.

Nevertheless when results showing apparent telepathy were first published and when, in terms of the "laws of chance" as generally understood, they appeared to show "something," many otherwise sceptical scientists were impressed. Some tentatively accepted the idea that some sort of paranormal activity had been revealed, though there was an unwillingness to accept any particular theory explaining it. Others suggested that the results were due to fraud, if not by the investigators then by their subjects or assistants. A third group of scientists thought that the results were really revealing that our knowledge of statistics was not quite as comprehensive as had previously been assumed.

This view is steadily gaining ground and has inspired a recent book by G. Spencer Brown, *Probability and Scientific Inference*.

We shall try to show, in a popular way, the general lines which modern criticism (including Mr. Brown's) is taking. It has been considered by many of us for some time that the parapsychologists have been "proving" far too much. The results of the first guessing games reported by J. B. Rhine in the U.S.A. seemed to indicate telepathy. This seemed highly unlikely but not completely impossible. One thought vaguely of electro-magnetic waves and the like. After all, we have radio and television.

Next, S. G. Soal, of London, came forward with his Shackleton case. This subject had not guessed the target card more often than chance (as the statisticians saw it) would allow; but when his guess in each case was compared with the *next* card, *i.e.* the one that had not yet been turned up, a significant degree of correlation was found. In other words, Shackleton possessed the power of pre-cognition! People began to speculate about the nature of time. It was becoming a bit *too* wonderful.

To make things even more amazing, Rhine produced evidence of "telekinesis." Dice were thrown and paranormal subjects willed them to fall in certain ways. They fell more often in the desired ways than the statisticians were willing to attribute to mere chance.

It should have been clear at this stage that all the phenomena concerned were aspects of statistics. They had nothing to do with clairvoyance, telepathy, precognition or "telekinesis." They were not *psi*-phenomena but *stat*-phenomena.

As a *reductio ad absurdum* we may mention the latest of all *psi*-phenomena, namely cloud breaking. Some friends are out picnicking on a summer's day. Lying on the grass they watch the beautiful white clouds sailing across the sky. Someone says: "Let's play cloud breaking. See that big cloud there. Now all concentrate on it. We are going to break it." All concentrate. Very soon the cloud begins to break up. "We've broken that one. Let's try another." The game becomes fascinating. Clouds are being broken all over the sky. (They were breaking up before the game started, but no one was taking any notice then.)

The essence of parapsychology appears to be this. Take a set of random numbers. That means a set of numbers with no obvious pattern. Place against it another set of random numbers (guesses). Similar numbers will not come together except by "chance." In general, coincidences will be few. But every now and then the pattern of one set of numbers will coincide more or less with the pattern of the other set. This rare event seems equally to be due to chance. If it is it will not normally be repeated for some time. The test for acceptance by scientists is continued and unfailling repetition.

No parapsychologist can take his human guinea-pigs round the laboratories of the world, or even of his own country, and demonstrate their paranormal faculties to the sceptics. Shackleton is now said to have lost his "powers." We may well ask: "Did he ever have them? Wasn't he just a lucky guesser whose luck has now evaporated?"

With the new-fangled E.S.P. go all the other and older marvels of the seance room and the rapping table. The so-called *psi*-phenomena are anecdotal, not scientific. Mrs. X, the great medium, can no longer perform except in a "sympathetic atmosphere." It is not hard to guess why.

Lourdes: The Great Illusion

By COLIN McCALL

RECENT PROMINENT ARTICLES in the *Sunday Dispatch* (June 30th) and the *Sunday Pictorial* (July 21st) have suggested miracle cures at Lourdes: the first from cancer, the second from a twisted spine. And there is little doubt that many people will accept them at face value—especially the first, which is quite plausibly written by Mr. J. P. Gallagher. The need for extreme scepticism will be obvious to all FREETHINKER readers. In argument with Catholics, however, they ought to be armed with the latest reliable information about Lourdes. They should read *Eleven Lourdes Miracles* by D. J. West, M.B., CH.B., D.P.M. (Duckworth, 1957).

Dr. West critically examines the eleven modern cases that have been proclaimed miraculous by Canonical Commissions. Dating between 1937 and 1952, each case has passed the three necessary stages for adoption as a miracle. It has been investigated and reviewed by the Lourdes Medical Bureau, by the International Medical Commission in Paris (which considers whether it is medically inexplicable), and finally by the Ecclesiastical Commission. Any one of these three bodies may reject a case, and it is interesting to see how many are rejected. In the years 1946, 1947 and 1948, the Lourdes Medical Bureau found 194 cases worthy of further examination, but eventually only passed on 19 of these to the International Medical Commission. Investigation of cases takes varying periods of time, so there is no direct correlation year by year, but the Medical Commission accepted only one of the six cases passed to it in 1947; in 1949 they accepted three and rejected three; and in 1950 they accepted two and rejected nine. Of the six cases accepted by them, only three have been declared miraculous by the Ecclesiastical Commission.

It will be seen, then, that the Church does not rashly pronounce a miracle cure. With the wisdom of the ages, it moves very carefully indeed, though the popular press, lower ecclesiastics, and Catholic doctors are not always so chary. Up to 1946, however, even Catholic doctors have to admit "many serious shortcomings in the collection of evidence on Lourdes cures," says Dr. West; and he considers it a waste of time to argue about the old cases now. Instead, he takes the eleven cures pronounced miraculous by the Canonical Commission since 1946. But he first makes clear the restricted nature of the "miracles." They are not, he says, "of a type that an outsider would consider self-evidently miraculous. There are no cases of lost eyes or amputated legs sprouting anew. . . . There are very few cases of recovery from essentially incurable disease, and very many cases of dramatically swift recovery from serious but potentially curable conditions like tuberculosis." He adds: "In most cases no claims can fairly be made about the speed of the cure unless the patient is subjected to rigorous comparative examination immediately before and immediately after the alleged cure. Unfortunately, this never happens."

One of the eleven special cases is considered in detail. It is that of Mlle. Gabrielle Clauzel, whose "rheumatic spondylitis with compression of the nerve roots" was allegedly cured during Mass on August 15th, 1943. The patient's own doctor (Maurin) provides the chief medical document dated May 21st, 1944, and this is given in full. Dr. West finds that: "As a medical document, Dr. Maurin's report, like so many of the accounts to be found in the Lourdes files and publications, is curiously imprecise and unsatisfying. Mlle. Clauzel had an obscure disorder of many years'

duration, yet at no stage does she appear to have had a complete investigation such as would be carried out on a difficult case in any modern hospital." Important information (that a consultant referred to was a psychiatrist) is withheld; "Dr. Maurin's explanation of the whole case in terms of extensive root compression is scarcely plausible"; "Mlle. Clauzel's symptoms seem to be more severe and extraordinary than can be accounted for by the spinal arthritis and postural defect which is all that is indicated in the X-ray report" (dated August 20th, 1945; earlier X-ray reports mentioned by Dr. Maurin are not available). Dr. West suspects hysteria, and "If the Clauzel case is just another example of hysteria cured dramatically by suggestion, it hardly seems worthwhile to discuss it further." The Lourdes Medical Bureau's report throws no further light on the nature of the illness, but it reveals "an attitude of mind in the doctors responsible, who seem determined at all costs to avoid the obvious natural explanation."

The report of the Canonical Commission of Inquiry is also given, but it merely reiterates their own particular interpretation of the evidence "with no consideration of alternative possibilities," and it glosses over "the absence of any clear evidence as to the organic basis of her [Mlle. Clauzel's] illness." Dr. West concludes that "in this and in many other instances the Lourdes Bureau has lent its support to cures without sufficiently investigating the case and without giving fair consideration to interpretations that do not fit in with the idea of a miracle."

The other cases are no more rewarding—for the miracle-seeker. Mme. Gestas (1947) has "such obvious possibilities for ordinary explanations." Even if Francis Pascal had been miraculously cured of blindness in 1938, "the medical documentation is so poor we could never be sure about it." Colonel Pellegrin's case of liver abscess and fistula (1950) is not remarkable for the healing, but for the "coincidence between the closure of the fistula and the visit to Lourdes," and the alleged rapidity of the healing. There is, alas, "impreciseness regarding crucial dates," and "as a result of treatment the Colonel's fever was cured, his general health improved and his weight increased long before he visited Lourdes. The closure of the fistula was merely the last stage of a lengthy process of recovery." Sister Marie Marguerite did not go to Lourdes, but recovered after prayer and the taking of Lourdes water. "Without careful medical substantiation of such a case, the sceptically minded are unlikely to be interested"—says Dr. West—and "the original dossier has disappeared from the Lourdes files." In the report in the *Lourdes Bulletin* No. 69, July 1946, "we are told practically nothing" and the nun's medical adviser, Dr. Philouze, reveals "a surprising lack of appreciation of the sort of information required [so] that one cannot place much confidence in his medical judgment."

Mlle. Canin was said to be suffering from tubercular peritonitis when cured in 1947, but Dr. West protests against the view that T.B. peritonitis was "firmly established on clinical grounds." All that one can say is that "the patient suffered from a long-standing but fluctuating abdominal disturbance of undetermined origin." "It could have been in part functional," he continues, for she "had recovered several times before, and she recovered again very rapidly after her visit to Lourdes." "Such an event," he says, "deserves no special comment." Jeanne Fretel's case (1948) "seems potentially most remarkable; it is a tragedy that information is so lacking. On the unsatis-

factory, jumbled and occasionally inconsistent information available, no definite scientific statement can be made about Jeanne Fretel's condition." The absence of "crucial evidence" is "regrettable" about Fräulein Traute Fulda (1950). Regarding Mme. Couteault (1952): "Since the underlying cause is so obscure, the diagnosis is more of a label than an exact scientific concept, and it may well cover a while variety of pathological processes. . . ." And "in the one Lourdes miracle in which objective hospital tests are available both immediately before and immediately after the cure"—that of Mlle. Louise Jamain (1937)—it is "sad and tantalising" that "there should be conflict between the bacteriological and radiological findings and consequent doubt as to the interpretation of the case."

Mme. Rose Martin (1947) has been left to the last because it is claimed that she was cured of cancer. She had a swelling in the bowel which was diagnosed as cancer, but Dr. West finds it "surprising" that her surgeon (Dr. Fay) "did not consider it worth while to make sure the swelling was cancerous by ordering a biopsy or at least by carrying out a rectoscopy." Dr. Strobino at Lourdes "argues that the diagnosis of cancer was virtually certain and a biopsy unnecessary since the patient was bed-ridden and wasting away"; but his argument carries little conviction, says Dr. West, because "other complications besides cancer could have produced both the swelling and the wasting illness." Several examples are given, but the most likely is that Mme. Martin was simply suffering from severe constipation and that the lump was "a mass of impacted faeces." It is known that she was taking large doses of morphine—a drug which causes severe constipation—and it is significant that the Lourdes doctors stressed that there had been "no abnormal evacuation of the bowels prior to the dramatic recovery." If there had been, says Dr. West, "it could have been an important point in favour of the impacted faeces or inflammatory mass interpretations, hence the importance of denying it." "Unfortunately for the protagonists of the miracle cure," he continues, "the Lourdes dossier contains an account by Mme. Martin herself" of just such an evacuation during the journey. A nurse, Mlle. Clory, remembers that Mme. Martin used the bed-pan, and that she was constantly demanding morphine. On the advice of the pilgrimage doctor, Mlle. Clory gave an injection of Lourdes water and camphor instead of the morphine—a fact that "may well explain the sudden relief of the patient's constipation, the passing away of the offending material, and the consequent recovery." Dr. West doubts Mme. Martin's cancerous condition and "therefore fails to see why her recovery was considered 'miraculous' or even particularly remarkable."

So much for the only cancer cure proclaimed miraculous at Lourdes since 1946; so much for the other ten cases deemed miracle cures. Eleven miracle cures since 1937 is not impressive for a healing establishment under the personal supervision of the B.V.M., and after Dr. West has finished with them, not one of these remains. Each is found wanting. Insufficient evidence, unsatisfactory diagnosis, carelessness, sometimes a lack of honesty: these and other factors help to create what the Drs. Valot have called the "illusion" of Lourdes. The weakness of the Lourdes doctors, says Dr. West, "is that, being impelled to arrive at a predetermined goal, they cannot let themselves be carried along by the facts, but must strive to carry the facts with them." They too are part of the great illusion and Dr. West is to be congratulated on his part in helping to dispel it. He is unlikely to convince a fervent Catholic, but he cannot fail to impress the critical reader. Whether he will reach the *Sunday Dispatch* clientele is another matter.

CORRESPONDENCE

SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS

A letter of complaint in a Catholic paper comes from a gentleman obviously perturbed at the disorder in his chosen church. Apparently the sinners kneel without the customary military precision, and leave gaps that are too wide or gaps that are too narrow, into which, invariably, someone tries to squeeze.

A simple solution seems at hand. What is obviously needed is the religious equivalent of a cinema usherette, who would sort late-coming Catholics into two queues, fat communicants being directed into the *wide* gaps and thin communicants into the *narrow* gaps.

He further complains that communicants, having received Holy Communion, often remain kneeling at the altar rails, thus impeding those awaiting their turn and—even worse—sometimes confusing the priest, who does not know which of the assembled flock have partaken of the holy repast and which have not. Some of them might even take it twice, though the second time, no doubt, God would know and would withhold His Divine Sanction from the greedy. These kneelers clearly present a more difficult problem. Would a "No Loitering" sign help?

DAVE SHIPPIE

GOD'S HABITAT

The mind of a thinking Christian must be greatly exercised by the problems of God's relationship to Time and Space. Believing in the omnipotence of a God who created everything (which must include Time and Space) he must ask himself how God managed to be timeless and everywhere before He created Time and Space.

T. PRESTAGE

N.S.S. EXECUTIVE MEETING

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 21ST.—Present: Messrs. Ebury (Chairman), Alexander, Barker, Cleaver, Corstorphine, Gordon, Hornbrook, Johnson, Pustan, Shepherd, Taylor, Warner, Mrs. Venton, the Treasurer (Mr. Griffiths) and the Secretary. Apologies from Messrs. Ridley and Arthur. New members were admitted to the Bradford, Edinburgh, Kingston, North London and Portsmouth Branches. With new individual members these numbered 12. The Admiralty was investigating case of Royal Marine who had been refused right to change his religious registration. Contribution to the Central Board for Conscientious Objectors was approved. Details of West Ham's meeting on October 6th (Mrs. Knight) and Holborn Hall meeting on November 10th (Mr. Drewitt) were given, with Worthing Branch outdoor meeting on August 25th. Suggestions for the Annual Dinner were considered. The next meeting was fixed for Wednesday, September 18th, 1957.

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