

The Freethinker

Vol. LXXVII—No. 45

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Fivepence

THE NATION-WIDE CONTROVERSY which attended the famous broadcasts of January 1955, coupled with the public activities of Mrs. Margaret Knight since that time, made it obvious that sooner or later the BBC would have to yield. There were, of course, the pessimists among us who held that never again would she be allowed on the air. They counted without due consideration of the weight of a growing body of informed opinion, and insofar as freethinkers in all parts of the country—whether organised in N.S.S. branches or acting individually—have played their part in helping to form that body of opinion, they may credit themselves with a share of the honours when the freethought case was given recognition on TV on Tuesday evening, October 22nd.

Some belated sense of fair play appeared to have stirred the BBC in the spring of 1956, when our Secretary, Mr. McCall, was recorded for a two-minute statement of the atheist's position. This incident should not be forgotten by our propagandists, who can here show their hearers a clear case of suppression by the authorities, for, although it was only a tiny share of the programme, our Secretary's recording was cut out in the televised version, and the latter turned out to be sheer Christian propaganda under the guise of an impartial inquiry—a typical piece of Christian "religion without morals."

However, the fact that the N.S.S. nearly got on TV showed the general trend of things, and an *actual* broadcast or telecast may not be so distant as some of our less sanguine friends imagine.

In the event it was Mrs. Margaret Knight who was invited to the studio and her own title, "Morals without Religion," was given to the programme. Not only has Mrs. Knight a thorough grasp of the freethought (or Scientific Humanist) case, but she is also an expert in the psychology of propaganda, which is exactly what one would expect from her status as a university lecturer in Psychology. Her method of putting over militant matter in a non-militant manner has won her many, many friends among liberal-thinking Christians, and this, I believe, is precisely why the BBC find it difficult to by-pass her. This factor, plus incessant pressure from freethinkers both in the press and directly to the BBC, makes freethought televising possible in 1957.

Thus Spake the "Radio Times"

It required no great ability in prognosis to see that any freethought programme would have Christians in attendance, and this is exactly what happened on October 22nd. The announcement in the *Radio Times* said:

Margaret Knight defends her views as a humanist and answers questions put to her by . . .

and then followed the names of the three Christian gentlemen.

This charming fiction by the *Radio Times* is quite touching. What they meant, of course, was something rather different.

What they really meant was:

The Rev. Ian Pitt-Watson, Sir Edward Villiers and the Rev. H. C. Whitley, Ph.D., D.D., will advance their Christian views despite occasional remarks by Margaret Knight.

Fighting against this handicap and also losing some time to the previous programme, Mrs. Knight, though interrupted time and time again, made some trenchant remarks in the limited time she had, took all the points that were going, and answered (or began to answer till interrupted) all that was said on the other side.

The Stronger Side Handicapped

In the space of twenty minutes very little can be

covered, and Mrs. Knight's share, after her first statement, was so meagre that it is surprising how much she *did* manage to bring up. There were five main items, namely: Is scientific certainty the only sort of certainty?; the problem of evil; does Christianity work?; the Gallup Poll on God; and the reliability of the Bible.

Before considering these, however, one thing has to be voiced, for it literally shouts its presence right at the outset, and we should never let the Christians forget it. It is that whereas Christians are given the complete freedom of the air to propagate their creed every day of the week, a freethought speaker is an event of such proportion that three Christians have to be in attendance lest the public get the wrong idea.

Not that we mind opposition! We welcome it—especially when there is a chairman to see fair play (and there appeared to be no chairman at all on October 22nd—with the result that the Christians pretty well hogged the programme whenever they wanted to butt in). But we are entitled to point out that three atheists attending a Christian address with full right to speak, is a thing which would strike panic into the hearts of the "Do-unto-others" hypocrites. If the average Christian broadcaster were let loose on the air in the company of, let us say, Messrs. Day, Mosley and Ebury, he would emerge from the ordeal a nervous wreck.

We are driven to conclude that in the opinion of the BBC authorities the Christians are the weaker side and need the special protection of two thousand broadcasts to one Humanist, and with three Christians to oppose the Humanist on that occasion. And this is the religion of Charity, the Golden Rule and "Blessed are the Meek."

Falling Back on Faith

Let us now take a look at some of the points raised. At the outset the Christians were united in their efforts to make some capital out of the proposition that some things are believed without being scientifically proven, and that it is necessary to take some things on trust. "Yes," replied Mrs. Knight, "but not when they flatly contradict what is known."

By using this argument the Christian hopes to establish his case that although his beliefs cannot be demonstrated,

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

Margaret Knight on Television

—By G. H. TAYLOR—

they can nevertheless be accepted if we are prepared to take a chance and judge the results.

Now to invite the atheist or humanist to take a blind mental leap against his judgment is to establish a dishonest criterion for conversion. The Christians, of course, assume that the blind leap must be in *their* direction. What would they say if we approached Christians with an invitation to become members of the National Secular Society even though they did not accept our position? But then our standards of honesty are not Christian standards.

Then there is the contention that Christianity has been found to "work." Sir E. Villiers was put in the programme apparently for the purpose of saying he was once of Mrs. Knight's persuasion but had found that Christianity "worked." Silly arguments of this sort can easily be discounted. Mrs. Knight once accepted Christianity and is now not a Christian, so her experience cancels Sir Edward's and we are "no forrarder."

Moreover, the old, old story of "I was once an atheist like you, but I found Jesus, etc." is really a laughing stock among our propagandists. When asked, "What made you an atheist?" these people usually falter most comically, and when asked, "What are the anthropological origins of the god-idea?" their replies invariably prove that they never were, never will be and never could be, atheists.

Christian "Argument"

And what can be meant by the statement made by Mrs. Knight's opponents, that "Christianity works." In the absence of definitions and of controlled experiments, the proposition is utterly meaningless. One can understand the

meaning of "Christianity works" when the statement is made by a tradesman whose church attendance has brought increased custom. But as to the man who tells me he has proved Christian teachings by his own experience, I must require, among other things, that he has died, has been to Heaven and has returned to tell us about it!

When Mrs. Knight reminded her opponents that according to a Gallup Poll people were giving up the belief in a personal God, it was suggested that this did not represent "informed opinion." Mrs. Knight could not get in her reply, but are we to assume that in the Middle Ages, when the belief in supernatural agency was held by 99%, not 40%, it represented "informed" opinion! Must we suppose that the believers in witchcraft were well informed, while the 40% who reject God in this age of education and science, are lacking in knowledge as compared with the witchcraft believers?

At the mere introduction of the problem of evil the Christians changed the subject with alacrity, and when asked point blank whether he believed the Bible story about the saints rising from their graves, the Rev. H. C. Whitley continued to beam benignly, washing his hands in water as invisible as the god he was defending, and talked of other things.

A pitiful display of Christian argument—or lack of argument! The debate must go on, said the Rev. Ian Pitt-Watson in conclusion, and our guess is that it will. The Christians cannot afford to let matters rest as at present. They are coming out of the fray very badly and must think of something to "keep face" with millions of listeners.

Opening School in Heaven

By A. R. WILLIAMS

EXCEPT for a slow faint distant chant of "Holy, Holy, Holy," which continued from eternity to eternity almost unnoticed, the courts of heaven were immersed in Sabbatical calm. God Almighty had drunk his early morning cup of tea and the archangel Israfel had fetched away the empty cup and saucer. Then the Almighty dozed again.

According to the terrestrial calendar the date was the first Monday in September and the time by earthly clocks quarter to nine. In heaven a group of archangels conversed together in murmurs, looking with increasing intentness at their somnolent Lord.

Agreed the seraphic conclave: "Yes. You go, Gabriel. Children have always been your speciality."

Therefore Gabriel glided to the side of the Heavenly King. There he stooped to speak into the godly ear. Getting no response, Gabriel spoke louder, and a third time without making any apparent impression.

The watching archangels smiled slightly to each other, Azrael saying "We ought to have sent Michael. He could have given him a prick with his sword and roused him."

"Aye," assented Michael. "But I find myself getting lethargic with no prospect of fighting, so I sympathise with old Jah, doomed to watch the spiralling planetary systems for ever."

Suggested a young cherub pertly, "We need Lucifer back. He'd liven things up, as I hear he always did."

At this truth there was an uncomfortable silence. All archangelic eyes fixed their gaze on the occupant of the golden throne, who was slowly raising his head to listen to his favourite messenger.

Said the latter, "Your Almightyness; you must listen to the earth now, this morning."

"Ugh! Why?"

"Because in England the schools reopen this morning."
"What's that to do with me, and what is there to listen to?"

"Have you forgotten the 1944 Education Act?"

"Eh? What of it?"

"The outstanding clause of the Act prescribes that every school shall open with an act of public worship."

"Do they do it?"

God's tone of utterance was both so dubious and testy that Gabriel, patient as he normally was, could not resist the jibe, "Don't forget that English Acts of Parliament are obeyed and enforced, not ignored like your obsolete Ten Commandments."

The Almighty tried to bring upon his countenance a touch of the old sternness and into his eyes a gleam of the old fire which had once quelled multitudes of discontented angels. Now it merely amused the Seraphim, who drew near anticipating some fun, as schoolboys will round an angry master.

"All right," muttered God ungraciously. "I can only quote their poet Milton, who knew more about me than I know about myself: 'Grate on their scranne pipes of wretched straw.' I'll listen."

Whispered Rafael, "I hope he won't remember that other quotation from Milton:

There arose a noise
Of owls and cuckoos, asses, apes and dogs.
It'd be too insulting to the dear little children."

Meanwhile Uriel swung round a huge amplifier, a great trumpet-shaped instrument resembling an enormous ship's ventilator, and God Almighty leaned toward it.

—NEXT WEEK—

BERTRAND RUSSELL'S LATEST BOOK

Reviewed by COLIN McCALL

The Existence of God

By F. A. RIDLEY

ONE OF THE MOST fundamental difficulties met by modern theologians is to provide any convincing proofs of the existence of a First Cause, God. I understand this weakness was conspicuous in a recent discussion in which Mrs. Margaret Knight took part with an academic representative of Christianity, at which, unfortunately, I was not able to be present. When asked by a member of the audience to "define" God, the Christian apologist stated that he could only do so "negatively," which does not seem to take us very far. Incidentally, time was when such an admission would have led to the immediate denunciation of the hesitant apologist as a most dangerous heretic. Outside "The One True Church of Rome, which continues to repeat the medieval arguments provided by "Natural Theology" with unshaken certitude, theology is all at sixes and sevens even where its most fundamental tenets, God and immortality, are concerned. In this respect extremes meet. Both Rome and Rationalism derive considerable satisfaction from this current theological impasse! To Rationalism the inability of the theologians to agree upon any proof of their most fundamental proposition appears as a convincing proof of the current disintegration of theological belief, whilst to Rome the intellectual chaos into which modern Protestant and modernist theology has fallen provides yet another proof of the theological monopoly possessed by "The One True Church."

The problem of proving by logical argument the objective existence of the supernatural beings with whom primitive man peopled his universe, arose with the development of organised religious cults with definite beliefs about the gods. As such, Natural Theology—the department of theology primarily devoted to proving the credibility of the current theology—is far older than Christianity. It may have originated in Egypt but its earliest extant protagonists, Plato, Aristotle and Cicero, belonged to the Græco-Roman civilisation with its pre-Christian paganism, in which connection we may note that exactly similar arguments were put forward by the apologists of paganism to "prove" the existence of both God and the gods, monotheism and polytheism. Actually in chronological order the gods were prior to God. Cicero, for example, in *On the Nature of the Gods* (first century B.C.) produces arguments—*inter alia* the famous "Argument from Design"—to prove not monotheism but polytheism! Historically "God" is a monopoly, who has taken over an earlier system of divine competition, and his existence is now "proved" by the same irresistible arguments as were formally used to "prove" the existence of his predecessors. Natural Theology originally held the existence of many gods to be as self-evident as it now holds that *one* is self-evident.

Just as the Copernican universe made untenable the old Christian scheme of human immortality in an "up and down" physical Heaven and Hell, similarly did evolution cut its traditional foundations from under the old theological "proofs" of God. Since all Protestant Churches and practically all Protestant theologians above the Billy Graham-Salvation Army level, now accept evolution, the old "proofs" of a static creator of a static universe go by the board. In modernist theology God becomes something impersonal, pantheistic, merely the idealised version of a very un-ideal universe. Such widely accepted definitions as the "Unknowable," "Something not ourselves making for righteousness," or the *summum bonum*, add to one's vocabulary rather than to one's knowledge. To define God

only negatively surely marks the final term of the current process of theological disintegration.

Rome, however, is the one exception, still standing by her medieval Aristotelian-Thomist system of Natural Theology, and resolutely refusing to give up either the ghost or the battle! She still lays it down that the existence of God can be proved by Reason without recourse to supernatural Revelation. This is, indeed, since the Vatican Council of 1870 officially defined it, a dogma of the Church, which then officially condemned Fideism—the assertion that the existence of God can only be known by faith and cannot *ipso facto* be proved by rational logic. Natural Theology is still taught in Roman seminaries as a special branch of theology and the existence, attributes and omnipotence of "God" are "proved" by a complex pattern of argument culminating in the famous Five Proofs of St. Thomas in the 13th century, which are still considered as the last word on the subject. I understand that the famous Muslim theologian Al Ghazzali, "The Proof of Islam," produced equally elaborate "proofs" based on the same Aristotelian logic. Following St. Thomas Rome still accepts the definition pronounced by Aristotle that God is Act—Pure Act, to whom limitation is unknown and in whom no potentialities can possibly be found, since, according to this definition, everything that has been, is or will be or could conceivably be, known, felt or done, is already in existence in God—a strange assertion in the Age of Relativity. One of the criticisms brought by their Catholic critics against the Jesuits was that their motto, *ad majorem Dei Gloriam* (to the greater glory of God) contradicts the above definition, there being no degrees of "greater" or "less" in omnipotence.

The "One True Church" has, at least, the merit of being the only Christian Church in the modern world to retain a consistently logical theological system in the sense that conclusions follow if and when one grants the premises. If Mrs. Knight in her role of a modern Hypatia, were to debate with a Roman specialist in Natural Theology she would not be fobbed off with "negative" definitions of the Being and Attributes of God. Whatever else Pure Act may be, it is *not* something "negative"! None the less, the intellectual crisis which has already produced indescribable chaos within the non-Roman Churches is at present surreptitiously but steadily eating its way into the fabric of Thomist Theology and perhaps in particular into Natural Theology, which deals exclusively with the credibility of belief. For both Evolution and now Relativity are basically incompatible with the intellectual system propounded by Aristotle and revised by St. Thomas. The latter's thirteen million odd words assume a static, not an evolving, universe, and a static God! Evolution implies potentiality and the Thomist God is by definition "Pure Act," a Being devoid of all potentiality. Consequently in an evolutionary world of Relativity the Catholic God is a being with feet of clay who must sooner or later totter and fall from his evolving pedestal. In the world of Darwin and Einstein "necessary being," as predicated by Aquinas of God, becomes totally unnecessary! Hume long ago pointed to the commonsense refutation of Aquinas' favourite argument: no being can be necessary unless it is *impossible* to think of him as unnecessary, but from the fact that people not mentally certifiable see no reason to acknowledge the existence of God, it is self-evident that God is not. He is not a "necessary being." Catholic theology will sooner or

This Believing World

With a burst of tremendous courage, the BBC managed the other Sunday to get two Fundamentalist parsons and an "unbeliever" who had found Christ, to oppose Mrs. Margaret Knight on the question of "Morality without Religion." It was a TV production, and the antics of one of the parsons were unconditionally funny. Her opponents did their utmost to confuse her with irrelevancies, but she had little difficulty in putting the case for Scientific Humanism without the parsons or the convert clearly putting a single real argument against her.

★

On one point, however, we would like to say a word. Mrs. Knight referred to Mark as the *earliest* Gospel, and she dated it about 60 A.D. This is about 120 years out. None of the Canonical Gospels were known by name or referred to before about the year 180 A.D., and there is no evidence whatever that Mark is the earliest Gospel. There were—as far as one can speculate—numbers of Gospels and "words of Jesus" floating around for more than a century, but we know little or nothing at all about them.

★

On ITV, the usual religious Sunday show was a talk by Canon J. Fison on the Exodus. He believed every word of the story as we get it in Exodus, but he hoped we would look upon its *spiritual* beauties rather than on its undoubted facts. Though it was literally true, we did not know when or how it happened, and when he was asked a question about this by one of the audience, he turned away with a plea of its wonderful spiritual values. The truth is, of course, that there is not the slightest proof that there ever was an Exodus, and no archæologist has ever produced any evidence whatever that the Israelites ever were in Egypt.

★

How are we supposed to know they were? Well, it is in the Old Testament, that is, it's in a book written by the only people who tell us about it. We are also told in the same book that the Israelites are God's Chosen people. Who wrote that? They themselves wrote it—and the world still believes it. Can anything be more silly?

★

Although the Archbishop of Canterbury can always shelter himself behind Jesus or Convocation, 39 of Birmingham's parsons have not been afraid to tackle him on his completely out-of-date views on divorce—in particular, on marrying divorcees in church. But we Freethinkers must never forget that this question of marrying in a church still makes people believe that God Almighty is behind the "sacrament," whereas the marriage is legal only if the church is registered for marriage. In England and most countries, marriages can be celebrated anywhere and any ritual, religious or pagan, can accompany it; but it is *legal* only before a properly appointed Registrar by the State. Strange that divorcees, both innocent and culpable, so often appear to be very religious!

★

One of the bright young ladies on the *Sunday Pictorial* recently asked "Did the Bible slip up?" after reading the "Aramaic" version of Matthew—in English, of course—on divorce. Like nearly all Christians, she thought that Jesus (presuming he lived at all to say anything) utterly condemned the second marriage of divorced people because he was entirely against divorce. We have in these columns pointed out over and over again that Jesus *did* allow divorce. "Whoever divorces his wife," he said (Matthew, 5,

32), "saving for the cause of fornication . . ."—whatever is meant by this.

★

And it is interesting to note that the latest English version of the Gospels—from an Aramaic "original" by George Lamsa says exactly the same thing—"except for fornication." So it is not the Bible which has "slipped up" but the Roman Church, backed up as far as possible by the English Church. The truth is that both Churches want power at all costs over the people. They want to be in at the birth, at the death, at the marriage of everybody—in fact, right through life. Once people begin to see through the holy fraud of it all, that is, that a parson is no more a "man of God" than a dustman, and that he has no power whatever over life and death any more than an Australian aborigine, whatever the Churches as Churches say about marriage will be laughed at. As indeed they are even now.

Welsh Notes

WRITING in the parish magazine of St. Peter's, Carmarthen, the Vicar, Canon W. M. Jacob, condemns football pools and calls them a *drug*. If this is true, many Christians are certainly severe addicts. And which is the bigger gamble—a shilling flutter on the Treble Chance, or staking a lifetime of pious misery to win a sexless eternity in nowhere?

★

PONTYPRIDD (Rhondda) voted for Sunday opening of cinemas on 17/10/57. The result was: For, 6,406; against, 3,142. This was a 2 to 1 majority in a 36% poll. When the result was announced from the balcony of the municipal buildings, a large crowd cheered the result.

★

SPEAKING in Cardiff, Bishop Petit of Menevia decried modern philanthropy, saying: "Its radical defect is that it does not love men and women as God loves them. God loves their souls; philanthropy loves only their bodies." An act of human kindness is thus of little importance in the eyes of a Catholic bishop. Far better to *pray* for a man dying from malnutrition than give him a bowl of soup.

D.S.

THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

(Concluded from page 355)

later be reduced to the same impasse as that in non-Catholic theology.

The fact is that the massive systems of medieval theology constructed by Aquinas, Calvin and their Muslim and Hindu counterparts, were the products of a now outworn culture, as obsolete as the polytheist theology which it superseded. The actual motivation of the Universe is still a matter of astronomic speculation, but it is hardly open to speculation that "God" is on the way out!

WAS THERE SOMETHING?

Some writers contend, in your paper,

They've knowledge we Freethinkers lack;

And say, giving various reasons,

That "Something must lie *at the back*."

While much, they assert, is contentious,

No light, in *our* darkness, bestows,

Of "God" naught they tell us, just saying:

" 'Tis 'Something.' " What? "*God only knows.*"

C.E.R.

THE FREETHINKER

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

THE FREETHINKER can be obtained through any newsagent or will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, £1 10s. (in U.S.A., \$4.25); half-year, 15s.; three months, 7s. 6d.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

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.

H. DEAN.—There is a tie-up between blood sports and the Church. We came across a case only this week. The Wiveliscombe Deaning magazine for September, edited by a vicar, has a suggestion that the hounds of the Devon and Somerset Stag Hunt should be blessed on church premises before the hunt starts.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

INDOOR

- Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (International Centre, 83 Suffolk Street).—Sunday, November 10th, 7 p.m.: W. MILLER, "Free-thought and You."
- Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics Institute).—Sunday, November 10th, 6.45 p.m.: G. SWIFT, "Trends in Education."
- Central London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, W.1).—Sunday, November 10th, 7.15 p.m.: W. CARLTON, "In Retrospect: 40 Years of Soviet Communism."
- Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, November 12th, 7.15 p.m.: Debate—Should Britain Disarm Now? Yes—S. MORRIS, M.A. No—J. HUTTON HYND.
- Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, November 10th, 6.30 p.m.: Prof. H. LEVY, "Scientific Humanism."
- National Secular Society (Holborn Hall, W.C.1).—Sunday, November 10th, 7.30 p.m.: O. C. DREWITT, "My Years as a Monk."
- Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Trades Hall, Thurland Street).—Friday, November 15th, 7.30 p.m.: B. HAYLETT, "The Byzantine Empire."
- Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Hall, Upper Parliament Street).—Sunday, November 10th, 2.30 p.m.: W. OWEN, M.P., "The Issue of the 20th Century: Democracy or Communism?"
- South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, November 10th, 11 a.m.: Dr. J. LEWIS, "Self Sacrifice in a Godless Universe."

OUTDOOR

- Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (The Mound).—Every Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. CRONAN, MURRAY and SLEMEN.
- London (Tower Hill).—Thursday, 12-2 p.m.: L. EBURY.
- Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every weekday, 1 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, FINKEL, SMITH or CORSAIR.
- Sunday, 8 p.m.: Messrs. MILLS, WOODCOCK, 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).—Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY and R. POWE.
- Wales and Western Branch N.S.S. (The Downs, Bristol).—Sunday, 3 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 address *against* Spiritualism given by Mr. H. Cutner before a packed audience, most of whom were members of the Marylebone Spiritualist Association, at their headquarters in Belgrave Square on October 25th last, was listened to with patience, tolerance and good humour. Though the lecturer hit the movement as hard as he knew how, it was a pleasure to be heard without very angry interruptions and replies. Many questions were asked, and it was hoped that the lecturer would come again. Health permitting, Mr. Cutner would certainly like to deal with some aspects of Spiritualism he was unable to deal with on this most interesting evening.

★

THE Aberdeen debate between Mrs. Margaret Knight and the Rev. Ian Pitt-Wilson had as chairman our contributor, the Rev. John L. Broom, M.A., who has sent us a report. This encounter between a lecturer and the chaplain of the same university attracted a large audience. We have just received Mr. Broom's report, which will appear in our next issue.

★

WE are pleased to note that Mr. T. M. Mosley, Vice-President of the National Secular Society, has been made an Honorary Life Member of the Leicester Secular Society. This is a well-deserved honour, for no one has done more for Secularism in the Midlands than Tom Mosley. And this is a suitable occasion to remind readers that they are always welcome at the Leicester Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate. The Society is the oldest Secular Society in the world, having been established in 1851.

★

IT is announced, with understandable enthusiasm, that the *biggest* particle of the True Cross has been discovered in a St. Louis, U.S.A., church. From the number of True Cross particles to be found in various continental churches, one might assume that it was about as high as the Empire State Building.

★

POPE PIUS XII, in an Encyclical Letter to the world's 1,500 R.C. bishops, has instructed them to "protect Christian morals" by the immediate setting up of national offices for the supervision of films, radio and television (where these do not already exist). The bishops are "not only to exercise a watchful care, but also to use positive action and authority." Although the Pope pointed out that these organs of entertainment can illuminate men's minds, they could also "disfigure them by dimming their lustre, dishonour them by a process of corruption, and make them subject to uncontrolled passions." We understand the "Children's Hour" is not, as yet, on the Index.

★

IT is estimated that over 100,000 Catholics gathered at Erfurt in East Germany to celebrate the 750th anniversary of the birth of St. Elizabeth of Thuringia. More evidence of the success of Communist education!

"MY YEARS AS A MONK"

By O. C. DREWITT
(formerly Fr. Norbert Drewitt, O.P., S.T.Lic.)

at the HOLBORN TOWN HALL, W.C.1
SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 10th 7.30 p.m.

Admission Free Questions and Discussion

(Arranged by the National Secular Society)

More Light on Ghosts

By H. CUTNER

GHOST STORIES, whether put forward as fiction or as Gospel truth, have always fascinated me. I began reading them very early, for I was lucky enough to come across Mrs. Crowe's *Night Side of Nature* and Florence Marryat's *There is No Death* when I was still at school, and they gave me the urge to read more. Lord Lytton's classic, *The Haunted and the Haunters* and his *Strange Story* and *Zanoni* to say nothing of William Godwin's *St. Leon*, all helped to make me interested in the Occult—and they also helped to make me as complete a sceptic as possible.

Thus, when I first came across *An Adventure* (about 1912), I was quite prepared to read it with the same interest as I did *Zanoni*. That this story by two maiden ladies was put forward as Gospel truth did not impress me. That it was written by two authors whose integrity was vouched for by the publishers only seemed to me a variation of the way Daniel Defoe got people to believe in his *Journal of the Plague Year* as literally authentic. No one indeed could ever better Defoe in giving an air of such veracity to his incomparable romances that they always read as if they were a transcript from life. Unfortunately, I have never read his *History of Apparitions*, but I am sure it reads even more "authentic" than *An Adventure*.

The two ladies who wrote this book were Miss Moberly and Miss Jourdain, the Principal and Vice-Principal of St. Hugh's College, Oxford, and surely, with such endowments, like George Washington himself, they could never tell a lie? In 1901, they paid a visit to Versailles and there saw enacted a scene with Marie Antoinette and other people in it as it must have been enacted before the French Revolution. The two ladies conversed with some of the people, they heard contemporary music, saw the Temple of Love as well as bridges and cottages and other scenery dominant in 1789, but naturally no longer there in 1901—in fact, what they saw was not a "reconstruction" but exactly the kind of scene that must have taken place when Marie Antoinette herself was alive.

The dominant point to remember is that the two ladies *both* saw it, and while we are always ready to admit a hallucination in the case of *one* person, it is difficult to admit it for two people both seeing exactly the same things at the same time. Moreover, in the case of Miss Moberly and Miss Jourdain, what earthly reason could they have in lying about something they had never experienced? If human testimony went for anything at all these two greatly respected ladies *must* have told the truth. To make sure they were absolutely right in what they saw, they began extensive researches into the period and were able to confirm everything they had seen from the purely historical point of view. That their book proved incontestably that apparitions and whole scenes in which apparitions took part did exist, was something which now could never be disputed and, during their lifetime, the two ladies and their book were accepted as "veridical"—though, unfortunately, not everywhere.

There was, for instance, a tiresome review by Mrs. Henry Sidgwick in the *Proceedings* of the Society for Psychical Research which had the temerity to challenge the whole story; and there was also a scathing attack by J. R. Sturge Whiting, both of whom were more or less ignored; and no doubt there were many other criticisms. To those specialised readers who believed in spooks, *An Adventure* appealed so strongly that five editions have been called for—and no doubt others will follow.

In the meantime, one of St. Hugh's College's former students, Mrs. Lucille Iremonger, who knew the Principal and the Vice-Principal, broadcast her impressions of the two ladies, in which she—more or less—ridiculed the claims made in *An Adventure*. I heard this broadcast and was not in the least surprised; though naturally it appears to have upset some of the infallible "critics" sponsored by the BBC every week. One of them, Mr. Eric Keown, angrily said, "No ghost story in the world has ever had so much substantiation," and another, Mr. Paul Dehn, added, "Yes, I quite agree, it's shattering." As for Mrs. Elspeth Huxley, she had studied *An Adventure*, and so she recited some of the "evidence" in the book, and of course that also was so "shattering" in its complete proof of the "adventure," that nothing more should have been said.

These "critics" were a little too optimistic, for Mrs. Iremonger set to work to write a book, and her *Ghosts of Versailles* (recently published) is one of the most crushing exposures of deliberate fraud I have ever read. Every reader of this journal should buy or borrow a copy, for I can promise them something as thrilling as the best detective story.

She first deals with the two ladies, Miss Moberly (1846-1937), who was a daughter of a Bishop of Salisbury, and Miss Jourdain (1863-1934), whose father was the Vicar of Ashbourne, Derbyshire. This is gone into with great detail impossible to epitomise here, but it can be said that both were reputed to be, and certainly considered themselves, "psychic." Further, in dealing with their trip to Versailles (in 1901) Mrs. Iremonger has no difficulty in showing that instead of writing their "adventure" down in detail then and *not* together at the time, we get nothing but the vaguest hints about what they really did when, years later, they were challenged. If they are to be believed at all, they appear to have written a few things down in 1901 and much more up to 1906, though Miss Johnson, who was the research officer for the S.P.R., and who was shown some of the manuscripts, claimed that two of them supposed to be written in 1901, were in fact written in 1906.

Mrs. Iremonger examines in detail all the evidence for four MSS.—two of them written by Miss Moberly and two by Miss Jourdain. Anyone who reads these chapters and still believes in the absolute integrity of these impeccable ladies should forthwith join our all-believing Spiritualists. It is interesting to note that the earliest accounts of the "adventure" appeared only as an appendix to the second edition in 1913, and this particular edition is very difficult to obtain. And it must never be forgotten, as Mrs. Iremonger notes, that

The cold fact... which cannot be too often stated, is that the two so-called independent accounts written by Miss Moberly and Miss Jourdain, which went before the public as such, were not independent at all... the documents were independent only in so far as it was true that the two women did not sit down in the same room to write them—not even in the same place... They were written after discussion, and after reading of previous accounts written to each other...

It is interesting also to note of the fifth edition—the editor is Dr. Joan Evans—that "actual editing was hardly attempted, the wretched confusion which had prevailed from the beginning still being allowed to continue." And there are many errors of facts "verifiable without much difficulty."

Mrs. Iremonger goes very fully into the psychological problem—"Was it a Vision or a Waking Dream?" with

similar cases compared. They all go to show how easy it is to lie—as David Hume noted in his famous *Essay on Miracles*—and how very difficult it is for a law of nature to be suspended in favour of spooks. To put it another way, there is no evidence whatever, and there never has been any genuine evidence for the kind of apparition described in *An Adventure*.

Why did Miss Moberly and Miss Jourdain write the book? The best answer I can give is the following quotation from Camille Flammarion's—who incidentally was a believer in Spiritualism—*Les Forces Naturelles Inconnues*, page 213:

I have seen unpaid mediums, men and women of the world,

cheat without the least scruple, out of sheer vanity, or from a still less creditable motive—the love of deceiving. . . . You must distrust both classes (paid and unpaid).

But, of course, *An Adventure* will still have its supporters and defenders. Except for Miss Margaret Lane, when the "critics" for the BBC had to deal with the book, there was almost a chorus of disapproval at the way Mrs. Iremonger smashed the myth of the impeccability of Miss Moberly and Miss Jourdain into atoms. It shouldn't have been done. It wasn't cricket.

Let me repeat—get the book and you will all the better understand how myths and miracles come in time to be accepted as history.

Freethought in Holland and Belgium

By C. BRADLAUGH BONNER

[Based on reports submitted to the 32nd International Congress of the World Union of Freethinkers held at Paris, September 7th-10th, 1957.]

BELGIUM AND THE NETHERLANDS are contiguous countries; the first has two languages and one religion; the second has one language and two religions. They were once under one crown. Yet the problems which confront the Freethinker in these two lands are very different. When the present kingdom of the Belgians broke away from the Dutch realm, its politics were dominated by a powerful liberal current of anti-clerical spirit. Ever since, the one and only Church has endeavoured with all the power and cunning at its disposal to regain its monopoly of the mind. Right up to the last war the Liberal and Socialist Parties were strongly anti-clerical and numbered many active Freethinkers among their leaders. The war was a "godsend" to the Church, of which it made the greatest use; in particular to capture the children. The State schools were by law secular; the Church therefore established schools wherever possible, especially in rural areas, as far as possible at the expense of the State. During and since the war it has received ample subsidies from clerical governments. The present Government, to judge by its past, should have withdrawn all these financial aids to the Church, but it has approached the problem somewhat half-heartedly. The Church does not limit its activity to the schools; it has gained a firm grip on the hospitals and on public institutions such as homes for the aged, and also youth movements such as Boy Scouts. Furthermore, such is the power of the Catholic missions in the Belgian Congo, that the notable efforts of such a leading Freethinker as Senator Buisseret, even as Minister, are barely enough to prevent this region being a Roman Colony. The Belgian Freethought Federation is most powerful in the Liege region; then in Brussels and Antwerp; the last has organised in the last few years a very successful Youth Fête, whereas Brussels every October 13th, commemorates the martyrdom of Francisco Ferrer. There are in Belgium three Freethought orphanages, of which two are directly controlled by the Freethought Federation. Of these our friends are rightly proud. Besides untiring efforts to maintain the State schools free from clerical interference and to reduce the subsidies to the Church schools, the Belgian Freethinkers strive to abolish the compulsory religious attendance in the Army; to facilitate cremation; to abolish the compulsory oath in the law courts and elsewhere.

In Holland the outstanding event of the past three years for Freethinkers has been the celebration of the centenary of De Dageraad (The Dawn), first an Amsterdam society,

and later, in 1881, a national Freethought organisation. The proceedings were well reported in the press and on the radio. It may be noted that before the recent war there was a regular official Freethought broadcast, for the renewal of which our friends are still fighting. The last census showed, not only that the Catholics had increased to 28% of the population, but that the non-religious had made a great stride forward to 17%. The numbers of militants, however, had not increased. A large proportion of young people were quite uninterested in either religion or anti-religion. The Dageraad therefore appointed a committee to study the situation and to recommend new paths of action to meet altered conditions. This autumn a special meeting will debate certain possibly far-reaching changes: it is proposed to change the name of the society from The Dawn and the weekly from the *Freethinker (Vrijdenker)* to the *Vrije Gedachte (The Free Idea)*. The Dutch have in recent years developed a spirit of separation, producing what are currently called "pillars," of which there are three particularly noteworthy: the Roman Catholic, the Protestant (Lutheran), and the non-religious. Each "pillar" tends to attend its own preferred schools, to establish its own clubs, etc.; there are Catholic schools, Protestant schools and Secular schools; there are Catholic bands and Protestant bands; there are Catholic athletic clubs and Protestant ones. There is even a Catholic pig breeders club! The religious "pillars" have nothing whatever to do with one another in any possible activity.

How can these divisions be broken down in any degree? How can the "third column" be interested in thinking, particularly scientific thinking? Is the so-called Humanist movement recently established an answer? It is no more Humanist than the Freethinkers, but thinks that to participate in "good works" and to refrain from attacking religion is better propaganda. Lately, it is true that it has been rather more successful in drawing adherents than the older Dutch organisation. We shall see.

CREDIT WHERE DUE

The New Yorker recently quoted from the *Manchester (New Hampshire) Union-Leader*:

Concord.—The state's revenue from the Inheritance tax will be \$1,000,000 more than estimated for 1957, it was reported yesterday by Kenneth L. Cowan, director of the Division of Inheritance Taxes, State Tax Commission. . . .

Said Director Cowan: "While the director and the division are proud of the record, the writer humbly acknowledges that it could not have been accomplished without the action of Him who called to rest many New Hampshire citizens possessed of substantial wealth and who had no tax-exempt survivors to whom to leave such wealth."

CORRESPONDENCE

GOD?

W. Mills may find law and order operating by virtue of blind chance unthinkable, but only because of the complexity of the thought necessarily involved.

Let us simplify the problem by an illustration in two dimensions. If W. Mills scribbles aimlessly upon a sheet of paper the result will resolve itself into superimposed, pear-shaped enclosures joined by lines. These are the two constituents of all possibility if the pencil does not leave the paper. Such scribbling makes an approach to an average of possibility, nearest when done by a very small child. (Modern art producing apes appear to lack the necessary inscribing continuity, splashing their paint about in crossing lines.)

Superimpose these possibility constituents mechanically, a piston attached to a pencil drawing on a revolving wheel, and a pattern will appear, æsthetic qualities and mathematical laws governing its form. By slightly complicating the mechanism, *simplifying* the linear and circular *relationship* by going through all the speed ratios of the relative movements, the superimpositions of the pattern formation will be multiplied and variegated. Growth is involved. Law and order have automatically occurred.

This illustrative mechanism pivots at a static point, but if this point moved in a line, or more slowly in a larger circle, the revolutions of the circumference of the wheel would assume the same kind of pear-shaped forms as the constituent parts automatically designed within it. Remove these from the arbitrary direction imposed by the paper and they would spin, possibly in the manner of the ultimate particles of matter, creating a circle in time. Thus certainly move and possibly form the spiral nebulae which constitute a large proportion of the galaxies.

All that is needed for the evolution of physical law and order is an infinity of chaos. From this emerges the chemical, the biological, the psychological with which we are struggling, and finally perhaps the social, as yet very close to the point where our cycle began.

R. V. STURGESS.

A PANTHEIST SPEAKS

Upon reading the dialogue of your "Freethought Televised to Millions," I am left with the feeling that Freethought could have taken a more constructive course. Nothing can be accomplished when the "tone" of the discussion causes listeners to turn to another station. It is the Christian listener we want to contact. [The tone of the TV interview with Lewis caused some 3 to 4 million listeners *not* to turn to another station.—Ed.]

Words carry the meanings we give them. No Freethinker can uphold fundamentalism, the Christian God, nor an inspired Bible, but there are those of us who can envisage a supersensual, metaphysical principle, believing that eventually man will reach the helm of his evolutionary progress as the worlds roll on. We have all rights to call this principle we envisage 'God' and thereby disclaim the contemptuous name "Atheist." A Pantheist is not an Atheist.

ALVIN McELVAIN.

THE BOOK OF JOY!

"Truth is Joy; Read the Bible" proclaimed the Wayside Pulpit. The moron responsible for this imbecility is evidently a liar or has not read the Bible. How the seeker of Truth is filled with Joy after reading its horrific stories beggars the comprehension!

T. PRESTAGE.

THE ALTRINCHAM AFFAIR

With regard to the very clear and able article by Mr. F. A. Ridley on the Monarchy v. Altrincham dispute (October 11th), I would like to point out that the so-called "Red Dean" is not, and never has been, a member of the Communist Party, which is entirely republican in principle and has no use for monarchs or hereditary systems of any kind. If the Rev. Dean has taken a stand in defence of the monarchy, as Mr. Ridley "believes," he expresses his own opinion, and the phrase "even there" is quite out of place.

(Mrs.) G. MATSON.

BIBLE MORALITY

Reading in this week's FREETHINKER the article, Joseph Lewis v. Billy Graham, I thought how well it brings home to the thinking man the curse of this supernatural religion, which has turned Graham, who might otherwise have been a decent moral human being, into what he is, not because he was born that way, but by lapping up this stupid belief in a three-in-one God. A Christian will stoop to anything so long as he feels he is putting one over for his God. It leads to worse things, of which we seldom hear, such as the Catholic peasant, during the war, who, when caught in the act of raping a five-year-old girl, calmly said he could see no wrong in it as she was non-Catholic, and he was implanting her with the seed of Catholicism, or words to that effect. What a creed! And who knows what other foul things it leads to.

GEORGE LESTER.

THERE'S NOTHING NEW...

We think we are mighty smart with artificial insemination; but 'tis well to remember it is nothing new. The Lord managed without even a test tube. And if it is a wise child that knows its own father, Jesus went better—he was his own father!

G.S.B.

ORDER AND GOD

If order proves God, what does disorder prove? Given simple gravity and all the order we see will follow in endless time.

Shake up a container of assorted stones and what happens? The big ones go to the bottom, small to the top. Blind chance? No! It's the ultimate principle of nature. Given enough time, a lot can happen with only that.

Canada.

J.F.K.

OBITUARY

WE regret to report the death on September 16th of a most respected African member of the National Secular Society, Dotse A. K. L. E. Wemega, of Afife, Ghana. Mr. Wemega was a keen Secularist, and his letters to the office were always of interest. It is encouraging to know that his nephew, Mr. Jonas Wemega, has joined the Society in his stead.

C. McC.

THE Dagenham Branch, National Secular Society, records with regret the death of Dorothy Florence Thompson, a member of the Branch since its formation. Mrs. Thompson, who was 63, had been a widow for a number of years. Her death followed an illness of eighteen months, which she bore with great courage. We offer our sympathy to her parents and relatives.

A secular service was conducted at the City of London Crematorium on Wednesday, October 30th, by the Secretary of the N.S.S.

G.W.W.

N.S.S. EXECUTIVE MEETING

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 23RD.—Present: Messrs. Ebury (Chairman), Alexander, Arthur, Barker, Cleaver, Hornibrook, Johnson, Pustan, Shepherd, Taylor, Mrs. Venton, the Treasurer (Mr. Griffiths) and the Secretary. Apologies from Messrs. Ridley, Corstorphine, Gordon and Warner. New members were admitted to North London, Portsmouth, San Juan and West London Branches; with new individual members these totalled 15. The Humanist Council decision to remain in being for at least another six months was approved. A report on C. of E. endowment by Mrs. Ebury would be considered for publication by a Committee of three (Johnson, Shepherd, Taylor). Correspondence from Ingersoll Memorial Association, *Le Gai Logis*, A. R. Hopkins and Unity Theatre was discussed. Mr. Ridley would be asked to take a new series of study classes in the New Year. Glasgow, Manchester and Fyzabad Branch affairs were considered. Mrs. E. C. Trask was appointed to represent the last named Branch on the E.C. The Annual Dinner would be held in the Mecca Restaurant, E.C.2, on Saturday, February 15th, 1958. Annual Conference 1958 arrangements at Nottingham were reported. The next meeting was fixed for Wednesday, November 13th, 1957.

CAN MATERIALISM EXPLAIN MIND? By G. H. Taylor. Price 3/6; postage 6d.

FREEDOM'S FOE—THE VATICAN. By Adrian Pigott. Price 2/6; postage 6d.

THE DOLLAR AND THE VATICAN: Its Character, Methods and Aims. By Avro Manhattan. 2nd Edition—Revised and Enlarged. Price 21/-; postage 1/3.

EVOLUTION OF THE PAPACY. By F. A. Ridley. A succinct account of its rise to power. Price 1/-; postage 4d.

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