

The Freethinker

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Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

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THE grotesque failure of the American "Pufnik" in face of their national motto, "In God we trust," must be the cause of considerable embarrassment to the fervent Christian, no less of amusement to the sceptic.

Christian attempts to escape such theological difficulties are highly diverting. The argument, as applied to the present case was somewhat on these lines:

Sceptic: Does the failure of your satellite mean your "Trust in God" was misplaced?

Christian: Not at all. It simply means that God decided it was not good for us that the experiment should succeed.

Sceptic: Presumably, then. He deemed it right that the Russian satellites should be successful, and this without any official national motto about trusting in God. Is it possible that God got his correspondence mixed? Did He get an order from Washington and send it to Moscow by mistake? If so, what good is the motto, "In God we trust"? Who would trust a sales manager who was so careless?

Christian: It may be that God has some purpose in favouring the Russian efforts.

Sceptic: Then why try to change that purpose by prayers and a godly motto? To divert your God from his Purpose is surely diabolical! Either your God knows what He wants or He doesn't. If He doesn't, then He is not All-Wise. If He does, then your prayers will make no difference.

Christian: But we don't pray for alterations in the Divine Purpose. Nor do we always pray for adjustments to our personal advantage. Besides praying to *ask* we pray to *thank*. We thank God, in prayer, for favours received.

Sceptic: Have you thanked God for destroying your satellite? If so, why the long faces? Why the attitude of a little boy whose fireworks have got damp?

No doubt the Christian could continue indefinitely, like Dr. Pangloss, getting sillier and sillier. All that is required is a fertile imagination playing on false premises. Christians have both. The initial falsity simply becomes overlaid with interpretation after interpretation through the stage of a well-polished lie, finally to a whole structure of glossy fabrication. By thanking God both ways he ends up in the ridiculous Panglossism so brilliantly satirised by Voltaire.

Very probably the Americans will get their satellites up sooner or later and then we shall hear about the trust in the power of God (aided by super-ejectors).

The Season of Christian Goodwill

And so another Christmas comes round in the true Christian spirit of national competition for superiority in prestige and war potential. A few recollections of the Christmas Days of a few years ago remind us of the unifying influence of the Christian Message. On Christmas Day, 1940, Catholic Italians were bombing indiscriminately over the island of Corfu, while their compatriots at Bardia were being pounded from sea and air by the British. In 1943 the

season of Christian goodwill was celebrated in Yugoslavia by savage reprisals against the partisan forces of Tito, while in Italy the soldiers of Christian nations were fighting from house to house at Ortona. A year later saw Christmas Day with fighting in Athens, in the West the rival armies were locked in combat in the Ardennes offensive, while a dozen German towns underwent heavy air attacks with a joint loss of nearly 150 aircraft.

How to Test Christianity

It is sometimes said by the Christian apologist that "war is a human failing, and is not the fault of Christianity, even when the fighting is directly concerned with Christian institutions."

To this claim there are two replies, one logical and one empirical. First, the Christian religion loudly lays claim to the very best virtues and morality. Other religions are false; Christ is the true Saviour. In face of such a claim we must logically expect that Christendom shall display the best possible example of human decency. Now let us see how Christendom measures up to this test.

The Christian Record

Consider that portion of the world which for 1,600 years has been under Christian domination; namely, the continent of Europe. Here some two dozen or more nations and principalities have been under Christian rule and influence. Minor exceptions are that some parts were Christianised later than others, and that Spain was for a time under Saracen occupation; there were also breaks in the cases of France and Russia, and, of course, the Balkans under Turkey. By and large, however, Europe is the testing ground for the long term effect of Christianity. For a large part of the time, in fact, and over a large area, the Church controlled governments, monarchs and their armies, and education. Social customs and culture, literature, art and trade would also be set rigorously within the bounds of what the Church permitted. Here, then, is an excellent chance to see "Peace upon Earth" put into practice. What do we find?

We find that this corner of the world easily exceeds the rest in the number and magnitude of its war. Practically every nation of Europe has during its Christian existence, fought or skirmished with the majority of the others, in some cases many times repeatedly. Put your finger on any one year and the odds are over ten to one that there was a war on somewhere in Christendom, most of them the result of the activities of the Christian Churches and their minions. In many cases the Church will be found actively carrying on war with its own powerful military forces. Within a thousand years of European history Ira Cardiff has counted nearly 800 wars, many of them extended conflicts of considerable duration, as savage and sanguinary as current weapons could make them, particularly over religious issues touching Papal revenue and power. To all this must be added many pogroms and religious persecutions not involving warfare by nations.

REVIEWS and OPINIONS

No Sputniks for Christmas

By G. H. TAYLOR

Peace upon Earth

Where in all this shall we look for the restraining hand of the Christian Churches with the message of "goodwill to all men"? After a thousand years of fighting and brawling, intolerance and persecution, murder and torture, shall the Christians set themselves up as the divinely appointed tutors of mankind? It is no use for the clergy to wait that "Christianity has not failed because it has not been tried." Even before we begin to argue that point, we can say with Lecky that a religion that has been in existence nearly 2,000 years and has not been tried, *has failed.*

Christian Wars for Export

In latter years the rest of the world has been drawn into Christendom's maelstrom of mass murder, which today keeps the world in a constant state of turmoil and threats. World wars and war fever are Christendom's export to

mankind. But if mankind is to slip smoothly into a single-power world, then religion, as the greatest dividing and disruptive power, must be outgrown.

When that happens, science can fully function as the saviour, not the scourge, of mankind. Nuclear power, a short-term danger, could be the long-term salvation. The transition from coal and oil must proceed peacefully and on a world scale if man is to survive. It has been said by Hoyle that *without* nuclear power mankind is doomed anyway. He puts the alternative thus: "Would you sooner live in a society faced by certain decay, or in a time of great danger and even greater opportunity?" (*Man and Materialism.*)

Let us accept the latter and make the at present idle wish for "Peace upon Earth" become a reality in a future powered by Science and guided by Freethought.

Season of Goodwill

By A. R. WILLIAMS

"ONLY a week till Christmas," said the landlord of the Village Inn after glancing at the Brewer's Calendar hanging on the wall.

"Season of Goodwill," murmured an old white-bearded man seated to one side of the blazing fire.

For nearly a minute no one spoke. Instead all eyes turned to a man seated back by the window. He took a sip at his hot whisky, laughed and said, "Tom and Christians like him have to be reminded of the need for goodwill to men."

"Don't you?" asked someone.

"No."

"Because you haven't any."

The shoemaker's eyes shone with a flash of anger, gone instantly as he retorted, "I know you too well, Sid, to take that seriously. You all know me well enough to know I feel goodwill to everybody all the year round."

There were nods of agreement, followed by laughter as Ray Kemson added "I don't need a parson to tell me that, or believe it comes from God."

"As it does, all the same," declared old Tom Bartley.

Ray Kemson chuckled, saying "I won't go over it again, because I've made it clear to everybody with intelligence that God exists only in the imaginations of his believers."

"No," contradicted the old man. "It's the other way about. God's in me because I'm in him. He created me, so as his creature I believe in him."

"Then he might've done more for you than he has done."

Tom Bartley shook his head, saying "It's true enough I've never had much of this world's goods. Whereas you, an atheist and a mocker've flourished like . . ."

"The heathen," laughed Ray Kemson.

He continued: "I know. Why make a secret of what everybody knows? That I've a prosperous business. I've laid in machinery and can hardly keep pace with trade. And I'm healthy and enjoy life. Whereas you . . ."

Out of courtesy to the old man Ray Kemson stopped, resuming: "Instead of arguing, let's put it to a test. It's Christmas in a week's time. Pray to your God to show he remembers his believer at that season of goodwill."

"Aye. I will," assented Tom Bartley. "And now."

He dropped on his knees, put his hand together and said aloud: "O Lord. Look upon me, a simple as well as a sinful man. Show thy favour and grace to me in front of the scoffer. But thy will and not mine be done, O God. Amen."

Rising, the old man walked out. Said Ray Kemson: "A better prayer than most bishops make, and just as likely to

be answered as theirs."

Most unusually the shoemaker made no further comment upon Tom Bartley's faith, as he so often did at length. Instead he went thoughtful.

After twelve o'clock on Christmas morning the Village Inn had been open only a few minutes when Tom Bartley hurried in. Excited, he exclaimed: "A miracle! My prayer's answered. I found these in one toe of my slippers."

Extending his hand, he disclosed five crumpled pound notes.

When the outburst of exclamations and questions died down Ray Kemson said: "Yes, Tom. I put 'em there last night while you were in here."

"Aye," responded the old man. "You're as much an instrument of God as if you believed in him."

The astonished silence which ensued was broken by the landlord's little daughter dancing in with a magnificent doll "From Father Christmas?" inquired a man.

"No. Santa was too busy to come, so Daddy was his postman."

"There's your answer," said the shoemaker to the old gardener. "Father Christmas is as real as your God."

And closing the old man's fingers over the notes, he turned to the bar and ordered hot whisky.

Beneath that Dome

(The British Museum Reading Room)

Dome that is not a dome that Faith did raise;
Yet raised in faith that Culture be supreme;
That she, with Knowledge, govern all Man's ways,
Inspire his Art, and beautify his dream.
Under that dome a thousand thousand books,
Collected record of our British race;
Our London's pride, on which the stranger looks
As though he viewed Minerva's dwelling-place.
Beneath that dome what mighty men have sat
And read their way to government, or fame;
Our great poets; Shaw and Wells; others that
Like Marx and Lenin, had more violent aim.
'Neath that high dome how many happy days
When young I sat acquiring Wisdom's ways.

BAYARD SIMMONS.

—NEXT WEEK—

"THE FREETHINKER" ANTHOLOGY
FOR 1957

Review

Religious Liberty

By F. A. RIDLEY

IN A RECENTLY PUBLISHED BOOK, *Religious Liberty*, an Italian Protestant scholar, Professor Giovanni Miegge, seeks to state the current attitude of the Protestant Churches to the problem of religious freedom. Whilst the author's point of view is Protestant, Freethinkers would find themselves in agreement with much that he says, in particular regarding the "Double think" practised by the Roman Catholic Church on religious toleration. Prof. Miegge is a member of the ancient Italian Reformed Church of the Waldenses, whose cruel persecution by Rome in the mid-seventeenth century drew from John Milton one of the finest sonnets in the English language.

As Prof. Miegge frankly admits, the idea of religious toleration was almost unknown during the Middle Ages. From the end of the fourth century, when Christianity got control of the Roman Empire, to the Reformation—and in Spain until the nineteenth century—heresy, religious dissent, ranked as the supreme crime, to be exterminated, not argued with. I did not realise until I read this scholarly work how great was the influence of St. Augustine on the growth of religious intolerance. It was his famous interpretation of the gospel text, "*Compel them to come in*" (my italics), that provided the theoretical justification for the Inquisition and the stake, which held the Reason of Europe in chains for some twelve centuries.

My only criticism of Prof. Miegge is his apparent failure to see that the Biblical idea of a jealous God was present in Christianity from the start and necessarily contained within it the seeds of religious intolerance. True, he quotes early Christian writers who declared that force had no part to play in religious conversion, but then they were pleading for toleration for their own creed. They very soon forgot all about this when it came to tolerating the opinions of others.

The present attitude of Rome is ambiguous. The Church no longer demands outright that heretics should be liquidated, but the logic of its arguments points in that direction. Prof. Miegge quotes a revealing passage from a lecture by Cardinal Ottaviani in Rome in 1953. The Cardinal, one of the most influential backroom boys in the Vatican, said:

Sometimes the following criticism is directed against us: "You maintain two principles, two different standards of action, according to your own convenience. For a Catholic country you maintain the ideal of the Confessional State, on which is laid the duty of protecting the Catholic Church and it alone. Where you are in the minority you claim the right to toleration, or even to the equality of all religions before the law. That means two weights and two measures; a real inconsistency, which is embarrassing, and from which Catholics, who take into account the present development of civilisation, would rather be free." Why, yes! Exactly so! Two weights and two measures—one for truth, and the other for error. (pp. 22-23.)

This was actually put on record by a Cardinal of the Church of Rome, and not by the late Joseph McCabe! As Prof. Miegge says, Rome is essentially a totalitarian organisation. Any concessions made to the principle of religious toleration will be only temporary and provisional. Freethinkers have common ground with Protestants in resisting Roman attempts to suppress civil and religious liberty.

The Reformation—as Prof. Miegge indicates—started as a protest against the medieval autocracy of Rome, and originally included an explicit demand for the cessation of religious persecution. But the reformers did not live up to this initial declaration. Luther advocated force against the Anabaptists and Calvin burnt the Unitarian Servetus, while his later disciples in America and Scotland were almost as

totalitarian as the Inquisition, particularly when it came to witch-hunting. Prof. Miegge admits all this, and shows that it was the more radical sects like the English "Independents" and Quakers who eventually brought the Reformed Churches back to Luther's original demand for religious liberty. The author's defence of toleration on rational grounds is admirable, but his appeals to the New Testament are not convincing. St. Augustine, who drew his advocacy of religious intolerance from the Gospels, was probably more in line with early Christianity than are modern liberal Protestants.

Protestantism seems to have abandoned persecution in theory and practice, but complete religious equality is not yet conceded. In Britain and in Scandinavian countries the monarch has to be Anglican or Lutheran. According to Prof. Miegge, this still applies to Swedish Cabinet Ministers also, though I understood that this was no longer so. It is a fact that, until a few years ago, a Swedish citizen could not change his religion without police permission! Our author does not appear to recognise the enormity of compelling anyone—even a reigning monarch—to belong to a particular confession, and I doubt the accuracy of his statement that the U.S.A. legally recognises Christianity as the official religion.

Prof. Miegge makes many of the same points as I did in my pamphlet, *Problems of Church and State*. He distinguishes between non-dogmatic religions like Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism, and dogmatic and intolerant Islam. Religious liberty does not exist in theory in Islam, though in practice Mecca has not persecuted as much or as consistently as Rome. But the problem of religious freedom remains unsolved in Muslim lands. Buddhism is a tolerant creed, and a predominantly Hindu India remains an officially secular state under the rationalist, Nehru.

Prof. Miegge's account of the relationship between Church and State in Communist lands does not tally with my own information. In China it is probably true that the old Communist hostility to religion remains stronger than elsewhere: Christianity has to thank its missionaries for that! In theory, though, most Communist governments accept religious toleration, subject to political acceptance of the regime by the Churches.

Despite some inevitable criticisms when a Freethinker reviews a Christian book, our Protestant author can, on the whole, be congratulated upon a scholarly and very valuable book on a subject of primary importance for Rationalists.

[*Religious Liberty*, by Professor Giovanni Miegge. World Christian Books, No. 16. 2s. 6d. Lutterworth Press, London.]

RELIGIOUS REVIVAL

DISTURBED by the news that churches are closing, fewer ministers being trained, and congregations still dwindling, the Baptist Union of Wales and Monmouthshire appointed a Commission to investigate the problem. The Commission reported that: "Some chapels in our land have been closed, in many congregations are small, and the faithful remnant which remains is filled with despondency and sorrow as it contemplates the continuing spiritual ebb-tide."

But surely instead of giving way to this kind of infidel pessimism, the manly thing would be to engage an all-believing revivalist who, like Evan Roberts fifty years ago, brought most of Wales to such a pitch of religious hysteria and fervour that his place in Heaven is eternally assured. Why not try one?

This Believing World

Poor Cecil B. de Mille! His world-beating screen epic, "The Ten Commandments," over which he spent immense sums of money and years of research, was dismissed by *The Observer's* film critic, Miss C. A. Lejeune, as "a long, dull, vulgar, meretricious, mediocre picture." This is not damning even with faint praise—it is damning altogether. Mr. de Mille spent £106,000 on research alone so anxious was he to get the details right—yet he seems supremely unaware that the whole story of Moses and Aaron and the Exodus is pure, unadulterated mythology. No evidence has ever been produced anywhere that the two brothers ever existed, and none whatever has been produced that the "Israelites" were ever in Egypt at all.

★

As far as we can ascertain, the only reason why the Hebrew word is translated "Egypt" is that it was so translated in the Greek—in the Septuagint. The word is "Mitzraim," which (at least in Arabic) means "frontier or border lands" according to the great lexicographer Gesenius. But in any case the whole story of the Exodus is fantastic, as Bishop Colenso saw long ago, and was nearly expelled from the Church of England as a consequence. Few people read his great analysis of the Pentateuch these days, and he is better remembered perhaps as having written a school book on algebra. Did Mr. de Mille read Colenso when he was making his "researches"?

★

The Abbot of Downside had another shot at trying to explain to schoolchildren who was the "Creator," but without any more success than on the previous occasion. But one thing he did make clear, and that was that "God Almighty" was *not* Jesus Christ. This is most intriguing, for here, of course, he throws over the solemn declaration of his Saviour—"I and my Father are one." Naturally, the worthy Abbot can quote against us that other illuminating saying of Jesus—"My Father is greater than I," but these little contradictions never take away anything from the Glory of God the Creator. It is all so very clear to the ecclesiastical mind and can be so easily explained to schoolchildren!

★

The "News Chronicle" told the story the other day that after a doctor had saved the life of a small boy, working through several nights, the Sister of the ward told the parents that they could now thank the doctor. "The parents didn't," we are told. "They said, 'It was our prayers that saved him, not the doctor.'" It seems incredible, but there it is—a magnificent example of and tribute to Christianity in practice.

★

The writer of the above story, Michael Gilderdale (in the *News Chronicle*), gives us another story. It is that of Matthew, a road mender, who was also an Atheist. And naturally enough, he met Matthew not among a blatant and noisy crowd of unbelieving infidels, but near Limehouse Parish Church. We half expected to learn that the worthy road mender had just come out from the church after prayers. In any case, it appears that Matthew had studied for the ministry, but what with poverty and strikes and all that, he found religion didn't help, so he became an Atheist. But as far as one can judge, Matthew's Atheism simply means the absence of religion, quite a good thing, of course, but surely not something to boast about.

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On the other hand, Mr. Gilderdale found a housewife who believed in religion, as we should expect most of them do—without knowing anything about it, just as Matthew

apparently knew nothing about Atheism. And, of course, there is always the inevitable doctor who, while admitting that he has seen "people near death without a sign of fear," still believes in "some kind of revelation." He asked, "What is the mind?" and answered his question, "Not just a brain . . . it is something that exists apart from the body. It is that which exists in a life after death. It is indestructible." The doctor did not, of course, produce any evidence whatever for his belief—but do believers ever bother about evidence? All this doctor could say about it was that it was a "hunch"!

Review

Atomic Energy and Alternative Sources of Power, by Dr. Gertrude Woker; in English from the English Section of the W.I.L.P.F., 27 Great James Street, W.C.1.

MOST progressive people recognise in atomic war the greatest current danger to humanity. War, along with plague, pestilence and famine, has been since time immemorial one of the greatest scourges of humanity. But it is only since 1945, when the atomic age was so fearfully inaugurated by that appalling crime against international law, the atomic bombing of Japanese cities, that mankind has acquired the potential ability to commit suicide *en masse*. How menacing is the power of self destruction is shown in an important pamphlet issued at Geneva by an eminent chemist and physicist of Berne University, Dr. Gertrude Woker, who has long been known for her progressive opinions in social questions and who had the honour of having her books publicly burnt in a Nazi *auto-da-fe* on account of her hostility to the Hitler regime. Since the war she has been a resolute critic of re-militarisation and in particular of nuclear war preparations. The anti-militarist organisation, The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom publishes her present pamphlet. She briefly outlines some of the now incalculable potentialities opened up to human progress by the peaceful uses of atomic power and mentions, for example, the increasing use made of solar energy, which, *inter alia*, has been used for the distilling of fresh water from sea water. But even in connection with peaceful uses she issues a warning:

It must never be forgotten that every reactor permits a certain quantity of fusion products, some of which are gases, to escape into the atmosphere. These are specially dangerous, as we have no organ by which we can sense radio activity and so become aware of the danger.

Moreover, the peaceful uses of atomic energy "will have to pay tribute to its military uses." She quotes a recent authority who says:

It was stated at Geneva that the British industrial piles of the Calder type were not designed solely for power but also for plutonium production, required for *military* (my italics—F.A.R.) purposes. To satisfy the latter requirements it was admitted that 30% of the power output which they could have had was deliberately sacrificed.

Our author gives us in a long appendix a series of quotations from all sorts of people dealing with the possible, or certain, results of nuclear war. They are calculated to strike fear into the stoutest heart. Incredibly we are told that even little Switzerland now seeks to possess the Bomb.

Her quotation from Bertrand Russell, which admirably summarises things, is:

People have a right to know in general terms what they will have to face if they go to war . . . The probability is that it would create a planet destitute of life, except for a few mosses and fungi . . . We cannot now wait for a "Thirty Years War" to teach the lesson there will be no survivors to learn . . . The experience will in all likelihood be that of universal death. You have been warned expertly in this timely pamphlet.

F.A.R.

THE FREETHINKER

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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

W. CONWAY.—Norway ended her 142-year-old ban against the Jesuits in 1946.

P. JORDAN.—Although over 90% of Danes claim a church affiliation, it is estimated that only 3% are regular churchgoers. As there are only 26,000 R.C.s (and 34 diocesan priests) spread throughout the whole of Denmark (including Greenland and the Faroe Islands) they can hardly be considered a menace.

T. FORTEUX.—Latest figures show that R.C.s claim 25,000,000, or 39% of Germany's population. When the hierarchy told Catholics not to vote for the Socialists in the recent election you can imagine what a great help to Adenauer this was. Swiss Catholics now number 46% of their population and may soon command an absolute majority.

H. ALANDALE.—We cannot agree that science arose from religion in any way. The late Prof. V. Gordon Childe wrote: "It is quite obvious that science did not, and could not, spring directly from either magic or religion. . . . Insofar as a craft like that of healing or astronomy was annexed to religion, it was sterilised of scientific value." (*Man Makes Himself*.)

Lecture Notices, Etc.

INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (International Centre, 83 Suffolk Street).—Sunday, December 22nd, 7 p.m.: T. D. SMITH: "Is History Useless?"

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics Institute).—Sunday, December 22nd, 6.45 p.m.: J. THORNTON, B.Sc.: A Lecture.

Central London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, W.1).—Sunday, December 22nd, 7.15 p.m.: J. M. ALEXANDER, "New Light on the Origin of Life."

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, December 22nd, 6.30 p.m.: R. P. LITTLEWOOD, B.A., "Sub-Tropical Argentina."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Hall, Upper Parliament Street).—Sunday, December 22nd, 2.30 p.m.: E. TAYLOR, "The Diffusion of Culture."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, December 22nd, 11 a.m.: W. E. SWINTON, PH.D., "History and Myth at Christmas."

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.

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. POVE.

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

WE are sure that our good friend, Mr. A. R. Williams—whose story we are pleased to print this week—will raise no objections to our rather gay front page. We agree with him that Church and BBC Christmases are to be avoided

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £276 11s. 6d.; A. L. Jones (S. Rhodesia), £1 10s.; M.W.B., £1 1s.; A. W. Coleman, £2; A. George, 7s.; J. Molyneux, 5s.; J.T., 5s.; A. J. Orchard, £1 5s.; Anon, 10s.; A. Hancock, 1s.—Total to date, December 13th, 1957, £283 15s. 6d.

like the plague, but we cannot refrain from wishing our readers a very merry Christmas. And we know Mr. Williams will join with us in doing so.

★

AT a time when the destructive possibilities of scientific development are inevitably before us—and when religious people are only too ready to emphasise them and urge us to turn back to God—we do well to remember the power of science for good, and the quiet but steady progress it is making towards a genuine internationalism. The fourth UNESCO Travelling Scientific Exhibition, "Man Measures the World," has ignored any Iron Curtain and is now installed in the Technical Museum in Prague. It explains, by means of diagrams, photographs and actual instruments, nine different measuring systems, including those used in biology, atomic physics, astronomy and geography. Mr. W. H. Diamond, Director of the Exhibition, told Prague newspapermen that more than 100 scientific instruments had been loaned by factories and institutes in nine Western countries. "These have now been supplemented," according to *Prague News Letter*, "with Czechoslovak instruments, and the exhibition has been brought up to date with a pictorial explanation of the Soviet artificial satellites as a means of measuring more precisely the pull of the earth's gravity."

★

THE November issue of *The Sign*, which declares that it is "not ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified," contains an article on the pamphlet, *Religion and Old Age*, published for the London Churches Group. "Religion is hard to sustain in isolation, and it is important that old people be incorporated in the religious life of their Church," is the passage it quotes with approval and proceeds to develop. It is tragic to face loneliness and insecurity in old age, without the feeling that you "matter." Under such circumstances an elderly person will no doubt welcome a visit from cleric or layman and enjoy any opportunity to mix socially with others. There is no justification whatever for quoting that "man without God is less than man"; and the final impression of the article is not so much that the Church can help old people, but that old people can help the Church.

★

By all accounts, the University of Nottingham debate, "This House will beware of the Papal Bull," was a stimulating affair. Proposer and seconder of the motion, Messrs. T. M. Mosley and E. Taylor, acquitted themselves well, but the opposition whipped up the young Roman Catholic girl students for the evening session and the motion was defeated 72—54, with 22 abstentions. Still, votes count for little on such an occasion: it is the propaganda value that counts.

★

THE REV. D. P. DAVIES, of Holy Trinity Church, West End, Woking, has switched his Sunday evening services from 6.30 p.m. to 6 p.m. The reason? A popular television show starts at 8 p.m. and, to quote the Vicar: "It is no use hiding the fact that Sunday Night at the Palladium is more popular than going to church. . . . The new church time will give the congregation ample time to settle down at home before the curtain rises."

Dr. Soal and E. S. P.

By COLIN McCALL

THE *Evening Standard* series "Is there a life after death?" does not, as a whole deserve serious treatment. The standard — if the pun may be forgiven — was deplorably low. Yet one contribution (November 27th) calls for a reply, not on intrinsic merit, but because of authorship. When a former Senior Lecturer in Mathematics at Queen Mary College, London, takes part in such an "inquiry," he gives it a superficial air of authority. How superficial will, I hope, become clear. But the ordinary reader may well accept Extra-Sensory-Perception, and possibly immortality, as proved on scientific grounds by an article that is, to say the least, extremely dubious.

The mathematician is Dr. S. G. Soal, who has purported to demonstrate ESP by "foolproof" methods. Briefly and bluntly, it may be said that because a person has guessed more cards right than Dr. Soal thought he could, that is proof of some strange powers beyond the normal. I want to emphasise the guessing aspect of the affair because I consider it to be crucial. It is the term that Dr. Soal uses — but seems often to forget — and it is the correct term. Amid all the mysterious aura of ESP experiments there remains the simple fact that the "subject" *guesses* what card is turned over, what number will appear when a die is thrown, and so on.

It is an important fact because people unacquainted with such experiments might think something more is involved. Ask a claimant to extra-sensory powers to tell you what is written on a piece of paper face downwards on the table, and he will not be able to do so. A case occurred recently, when such a person visited the National Secular Society offices and asked me what I thought of his powers as revealed in stories that he told me. It so happened that a lady in the office was addressing envelopes by hand and turning them over on the desk to keep them in alphabetical order. "Have you any idea whatever of the name and address on the last envelope turned over?" I asked our visitor. Of course he hadn't. Neither would anyone else.

What happens, then, when Dr. Soal experiments? Well, he reduces the field of possible alternatives to, say, five pictures, usually images of some kind. And he has perhaps five cards of each picture, making 25 in all. These are shuffled and then turned over one by one by the agent; the subject guesses the order in which they are turned. The results are then examined. There may be a high, average or low score compared to what Dr. Soal "mathematically" expects. It is the high or "significant" ones of course, that interest him. Can they be repeated? Sometimes they are, for a period; but it seems they eventually fall off. Then it is usual to cease experimenting — a quite unscientific procedure — for the paranormal powers have waned!

Dr. Soal starts his article dramatically: "The scene is a grassy terrace in the mountain village of Capel Curig. The day is August 9, 1956." He then quotes some remarkable card guessing results between two Welsh cousins, Glyn and Ieuan Jones, aged 14. Glyn apparently got all 25 cards right on two occasions and "altogether he has made 26 scores of 20 or over." In the article Dr. Soal is remiss in not telling us how many attempts there were in all; but he goes on to say that the boys were later investigated by "an expert conjuror and sceptic," Mr. Jack Salvin, who was "completely satisfied that no code or trickery had been used," and was "utterly mystified by the marvellous feats of guessing."

Then we hear again about the Shackleton experiments,

with their alleged implication that the subject had paranormal powers of naming, not the card that was turned, but the card that had yet to be turned. Basil Shackleton become known—says Dr. Soal—as "the man who was $2\frac{1}{2}$ seconds ahead of time." Add another case—not under experimental conditions—which I haven't time to detail, and Dr. Soal is speculating on some part of the personality that is "not fettered to the present moment," "a transcendental self that exists in an eternal present"—whatever that may mean. "Far from being cowed by the cold immensities of cosmic space and time"—he continues, possibly writing in pre-sputnik days — "we may one day discover how very much we transcend them both."

Emotional and unscientific though much of this obviously is, however, I fully agree with Dr. Soal when he insists that it is impossible to explain telepathy on the analogy of wireless waves, as some have tried to do. But there our agreement ends. He resorts to the old fashioned concept of the soul; I reject telepathy altogether. I reject ESP and parapsychology generally. I don't believe anybody can know the image on a card before or after it is turned, if he cannot see it or is not told. I don't believe anybody can forecast the throw of a die (as Dr. J. B. Rhine has claimed). All anybody can do is guess. How then can the high scores be explained?

There may not be any single explanation. In some cases, I am convinced, trickery enters; but let us rule that out. Next we should realise that "high" scores are all those above theoretical mathematical probability; that they usually comprise fewer hits than misses; that the two 100 per cents of the Joneses are most exceptional and, perhaps, not above suspicion (it should be noted that, as I read Dr. Soal's report, these two complete successes did not occur in the presence of Mr. Salvin). It so happens that a great deal of real investigation into the problem of mathematical probability has been done by Mr. G. Spencer Brown, Research Lecturer of Christ Church, Oxford. And his conclusions are given in his recent, rather technical book, *Probability and Scientific Inference* (Longmans). Mr. Spencer Brown demonstrates in several ways how invalid are the parapsychological claims of Dr. Soal and others. Such alleged scientific standing as they have are based upon what are termed the laws of chance. In the card experiment outlined here, for example, chance expectation is 5 right out of 25 guesses. But 25 right is not impossible *by chance*. As Mr. Spencer Brown says: "The laws of chance are not really about chance; they are about the non-chance implications of chance events. J. M. Robertson in his brilliant letter on chance, though he allows his indignation to run away with him and misstates his case over the question of long runs, was, if I am not mistaken, the only philosopher in the last hundred years to see clearly that there were no laws of chance."

A most important point that emerges from *Probability and Scientific Inference* is that randomizers or chance machines do, in fact, show a bias. In Mr. Spencer Brown's words, "whenever one tries to randomize, significant biases are bound to occur and can build up to a large significance before they are noticed." In order to produce a genuinely "random" set of numbers, it is necessary to watch the machine and prevent patterns from emerging or to adapt it with a feed-back. Randomness is, of course, a relative term: we can never say that a series has no pattern, merely — as Mr. Spencer Brown says — "that it has no pattern"

that anyone is likely to look for." Indeed, the concept of randomness tends to grow less satisfactory over longer series and "in a series of infinite length it becomes absolutely contradictory."

How does all this affect Dr. Soal's article? Well, not only does the latter completely ignore Mr. Spencer Brown's general thesis, which he is definitely aware of; he ignores a mock experiment in which highly significant results were obtained without any possible paranormality. He ignores too, a specific challenge concerning his own experiments with Mrs. Stewart, where Mr. Spencer Brown has demonstrated (despite Dr. Soal's lack of co-operation) a significant bias in the randomized data used. Mr. Spencer Brown says:

Joseph Lewis on American T.V.

(Concluded from page 400)

GORDON: Sir, in the *New Yorker Magazine* which appeared on November 4th, 1932, they did a profile story on you by the late Alva Johnson, and I quote him. He said, "Lewis is the atheist Pope. Lewis makes atheism pay. 'His Unholiness,' as his admirers call him, has a thriving mail-order business of anti-religious and sex instruction books. Since he sold his chain of one-dollar shirt stores, he has distributed more than a million books on atheism and the facts of life. His sex catalogue consists of fifty-nine volumes containing more than 18,000 pages of scientific erotica or enough to equip the average reader to hold his own in any general conversation." Mr. Lewis, how good a business is atheism?

LEWIS: Well, now, I knew Alva Johnson when he was a reporter on *The New York Times*. When he did this profile of me he had to be facetious because that was the principle by which the *New Yorker* printed these articles, but he's wrong about making atheism pay. I was successful in the publishing business. I published books by Margaret Sanger and Dr. William J. Robinson; they were books dealing with the scientific and medical phases of marital affairs. I contributed, I believe, in a great measure, to the success of Margaret Sanger and her birth control movement.

As to making atheism pay, that is another matter. I wish it were true. It would prove that the people are more intelligent and are willing to spend more money on education and enlightenment than upon superstition. It so happens that I am in a financial position to devote my time to the cause of atheism. I published Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason* and a few other freethought books as a contribution to the cause. Is there anything wrong in that? Some men give much of their wealth to the Church, in the belief and hope that they will be rewarded in heaven for their contributions. They vision a seat on the right hand of God. Why can't I support a cause that I believe will help advance mankind intellectually and morally and bring peace and understanding to the peoples of the earth? I believe in the *here and now*. My reward is in the satisfaction that I am helping to disseminate knowledge. Now, let me say a word about religion and profit. Religion is all profit. It has no goods to buy, no commissions to pay and no refunds to be made for unsatisfactory results. What a racket it is! It is the greatest fraud ever perpetrated upon the human race.

GORDON: Well, the same article quotes you as having said, "Experience has shown that persons profoundly versed in sex are usually safe against religion."

LEWIS: That's not true.

GORDON: You didn't say that?

"The guessing scores, *because of their high significance*, are said to be very good evidence for telepathy; but results of *equal or greater significance* in the randomized data are *glossed over*. Is this because *they* are not interpretable in terms of telepathy?" (All italics are in the original).

The answer, I am convinced, is yes! I do not accuse Dr. Soal of faking his experiments, but he is guilty on other scores. His use of highly emotive language; reference to the soul "immaterial and outside space and time"; above all his refusal to answer Mr. Spencer Brown's request for information about the Stewart case or to mention the latter's findings. These are evidence, surely, of a desire to believe; and that is fatal in this field.

LEWIS: No, sir, I did not.

GORDON: Okay, because we took it right out of the files.

LEWIS: Well, you may have, but that was the *New Yorker* article and everyone knows at the time that the principle underlying these articles in the *New Yorker* was to see to what extent you could be "piqued." The article had to be facetious. However, if you had a profile in the *New Yorker* it was considered that you had "arrived"—that is, that you had achieved some measure of success. It was considered a recognition of some sort. Thomas Paine in his day was pictured as "Mad Tom," and Ingersoll was caricatured as the Devil. I will have to be content with a few false accusations and some vicious slanders. When in public life you must expect these things. As an instance of how unreliable Alva Johnson's statements are, I want to say that no one has ever called me 'His Unholiness.' The best word that I know of to describe the articles which appeared in the *New Yorker Magazine* at that time is "smartalecky."

GORDON: We have just one minute and I want to ask you your opinion of Billy Graham, before we go off the air.

LEWIS: All right. I say that Billy Graham (I'm glad you did that because I wanted to talk about him), I say Billy Graham is a fraud of the first degree. He is making money out of something that's the most despicable thing I've ever heard of in my life, and, of course, it belongs in the realm of religion. Billy Graham deals in sin. There's no such thing as sin. It's a fraud and it's a *cruel* fraud. He tells people there are sinful beings and they have to come and make a "decision for Christ" in order to be saved. He also believes in Hell, and Hell is the most monstrous idea that was ever born in the perverted brain of man. It was created by priests to torment and rob the living. I don't believe I have words strong enough by which to condemn Billy Graham and his crusade. He is preaching a fraud, a false gospel.

GORDON: I'm going to have to interrupt you, Mr. Lewis. Thank you very much for coming here.

LEWIS: Thank you, Mr. Gordon.

ANNOUNCER: The views and opinions expressed on this programme do not necessarily reflect those of this station.

COMMENTS

LOUIS J. GORDON: I sure did receive comments on the interview. My mail was practically all favourable, with nobody really bitter about anything. However, the station (WXYZ-Detroit) received a petition seven pages long from people who expressed great resentment of having you on and indicating that they were going to boycott all the products advertised by the station. The wheels didn't seem to

be concerned but they did ask me to lay off religious subjects hereafter. It was a pleasure meeting you and Mrs. Lewis and I certainly enjoyed having you on the programme.

A. F. RAND: Despite the limited time which you had, you did an excellent job on the Lou Gordon TV programme. The freethinkers of Detroit are proud to have had a champion like you speak up so well for our cause before the TV public in this area. I clasp your hand in warm congratulations!

J. J. CORBETT: You raised more trouble than any other person interviewed on the Lou Gordon programme. It was in the nature of signed petitions protesting your appearance with threats of boycotting the products advertised on WXYZ. The President of WXYZ requested Mr. Gordon to drop religion for a while until it cools off. He cannot order Gordon. Some of the petitions carried as many as a hundred names. There was a flood of phone calls and individual letters and there were many from atheists commending the station and complimenting you. Gordon's programme has a good audience and pulls well. You did all right.

CHARLES M. HANSEN: The Lewis-Gordon interview here in Detroit was doubtless an intellectual treat for all those who were fortunate enough to hear it. What impressed me most was the dignified manner in which Mr. Lewis conducted himself. He appears to be a man who never gets irritated or frustrated under fire. He sits calmly, analyses the question, then at a precise moment retaliates quickly with a series of well-timed, well-placed blows that stagger the opposition.

CORRESPONDENCE

CHRISTMAS TREES

Christmas trees are with us again, and the origin of these arboreal toys is not so well known as it should be. They are symbolical of the celestial family tree which poses the insoluble puzzle of who was the mother of which*, who the Father of What, Who the Son of Whom, and what significance (if any) attached to the Holy Ghost branch. The Big Four in Heaven gave it up themselves long ago, but it left them allergic to trees. There are no trees in Heaven, not even a Christmas one. Mortal Christians, however, are adept at rationalisation, grab at any excuse for light relief, and admire pretty things. It can't be denied a Christmas tree, sparkling with fairy lights, is a pretty thing, even if it throws no light on the mystery. The original tree was the Arancaria (Monkey Puzzle Tree), but this has gradually been superseded by less prickly forestry.

It's a mystery to me why Joseph has not been acknowledged the true founder of Christianity. Most men in his shoes are inclined to be fussy. Some cleave their wives in twain with a hatchet, others throw them out into the snow, drop them into deep wells, or strangle them with their own pyjama cords. Had Joe done any of these things the religion would have been stillborn. But to the everlasting profit of the priestly fraternity, he did none of these things. He said nothing and went on quietly making coffins by day and attended evening classes in matrimony, just as if nothing had happened.

G. S. BROWN.

*Our Father which art in Heaven.

SPACE TRAVEL

I have always found the articles contributed by Mr. G. I. Bennett to be most interesting and stimulating. His latest, "A Humanitarian View of Space Travel," poses some very difficult questions and has caused me much "heart-searching." I am against all forms of "blood sports," but I condone the sending of a dog up in a satellite. Therefore, according to Mr. Bennett, I can no longer look upon myself as a Humanitarian. Just how far should one's feeling of compassion for life be allowed to decide whether a person is a Humanitarian or no? Must I think it evil to kill a mouse, a rat or even a house-fly?

It is certainly our duty to diminish the amount of pain in the world, but in doing so we must try to keep our desire to help in a proper perspective. Professor J. B. S. Haldane, in his essay, "Some Enemies of Science," states: "I have seen numerous experiments on animals, but I have never seen an animal undergoing pain

which I would not have been willing to undergo myself for the same object." Would Mr. Bennett sanction painful experiments on, say, 50 dogs, if he was guaranteed a cure for cancer?

JOHN THOMSON, junr.

WHAT THE GENERAL SAID

In reply to E. C. Trask, let General Crozier speak for himself. He actually wrote, "The Christian Churches are the finest blood-just creators we have and of them we made free use." (My italics.) Coming from him that was more than praise—it was a recommendation for the D.S.M.! Pagan Constantine judged well when he took Christianity "under his wing," and used the strong backs and weak heads of its followers to further his bloody aims.

And today, after spending six years fighting bestial Nazism, we have spent twelve years building them up for a further—more atrocious—assault on humanity! Hailed by all hierarchies, financed by armament kings, as champion of this "Great Cause" comes "Doctor" Billy Graham, High Priest

"Of Ahriman, dread prince of evil mood—

Father of lies, uncleanness, envious spite,

Thefts, murders, sensual sins, that shun the light,

Unreason, ugliness, and fancies lewd—"

A publisher of horror comics excused himself with, "After all, there are more morons in the world than men—and there is money in it." With £7,500 p.a., plus all exes, Billy is certainly in the money—Judas only got 30s., and it was the death of him!

THOMAS DAVIDSON.

COMMENTS

I would comment thus on two points in your December 6th issue:

(1) I think the answer to Mr. Crosswell's strictures as to your articles on fox-hunting is that humanitarianism is eternally at war with evil bringing, or threatening to bring, suffering upon any creature, human or non-human.

(2) I think Mr. Joseph Lewis rather spoils an otherwise excellent case by denying that faith may move mountains or work wonders. There are times (rare though they may be) when it not only can but does, as I believe psychologists are generally agreed. Faith, complete and undoubting, may induce an extraordinary state of mind that makes triumph over certain physical maladies or material circumstances possible. Such faith may be ill-founded but that does not affect its efficacy so long as it remains invincibly sure of itself.

G. I. BENNETT.

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