

The Freethinker

Vol. LXXVIII—No. 3

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Fivepence

ON FEBRUARY 17TH, 1600, there perished at the stake in Rome, one of the most famous heretics of the day, Giordano Bruno, pantheistic philosopher, Copernican astronomer and ex-Dominican monk. Among the numerous charges against him by the Roman Inquisition was the doctrine of the plurality of worlds. He had asserted that other worlds besides ours were the seat of intelligent life which, not having the guilt of Adam, did not need to be redeemed by Christ. It was perhaps because of such views, which were very disturbing to the theologians, rather than his advocacy of the novel astronomical hypothesis of Copernicus—which had not actually been condemned up to this time—that Bruno owed his terrible end. The relief experienced by his persecutors at getting rid of their awkward critic was brutally manifested on the very day of Bruno's martyrdom. For, writing to a foreign correspondent, an eye-witness declared that he hoped Bruno, on his way to hell, would find time to visit his inhabited worlds and tell how the Romans dealt with heretics.

Then and Now

Today, 358 years later, with the dawn of Space Travel, we find a remarkable change in the attitude of the "unchanging" Church. Only last year the Pope was photographed with delegates at an astronomical congress in Rome, the object of which was to establish contact with other heavenly bodies and to ascertain if life may be found on them. It is now, moreover, orthodox doctrine that rational beings may also exist on them, as cited below. And recently we referred to an optimistic clerical speculator, the Rev. Fr. Baldwin of Buxton, who has actually *bought land* on the moon—still a rather speculative deal, particularly as it includes fishing rights on a world devoid of atmosphere, water and, presumably, fish! If, as Bruno himself seems to have imagined, the soul of the old heretic has survived the tortures of the Inquisition, it must at present derive amusement and satisfaction from the way his tormentors have been forced to accept his teaching long after his death at their hands.

The Plurality of Worlds

In the century ushered in by Bruno's martyrdom, another Freethinking philosopher—but one who was too cautious to court martyrdom—turned his attention to closely-linked problems. A recent issue of the French Freethinking paper, *La Raison*, featured an article of unusual interest commemorating the birth and death of Bernard de Fontenelle, who was born in 1657 and died in 1757. In a book which enjoyed great contemporary celebrity, *Discussions on the Plurality of Worlds* (1686), Fontenelle—whom Reinach has described as one of the most original thinkers of his epoch—raised again the possibility of habitation of other worlds in relation to Christian theology and to the central dogma of the Fall. No inhabitants of the moon, he declared, could be descendants of Adam and could not therefore be inheritors of original sin. Not needing a

redeemer, the Church could have no jurisdiction over them. These opinions were still dangerous in the France of Louis XIV, but Fontenelle was extremely cautious and not only died in his bed, but did so at the ripe age of 100.

The Fall and Interplanetary Theology

Long after 1686 the problem of life on other worlds remained purely speculative—the subject matter merely of enterprising pioneers of science fiction like Fontenelle's contemporary, Cyrano de Bergerac, and his later countryman, Jules Verne. In the last few years, however, the problem, if not more actual—since the question of life in other worlds still remains hypothetical, with the balance of probability decidedly

against it—has at least become more topical theoretically. Both Roman Catholic and Protestant spokesmen have discussed the question—including, we understand, the Vatican broadsheet, *Roman Observer*. For Rationalists and Christian modernists who accept evolution, the problem is not a very serious one; but this is not the case with a traditional theological system, whether Catholic or Protestant, which starts from the literal acceptance of Genesis. The "inspired" writer—and the Holy Spirit who inspired him—has given no information on such matters as a Lunar Adam or whether the Martians were also troubled with talking serpents. Whilst it may seem difficult to take such questions seriously nowadays, we must bear in mind that some people take them seriously. And they cost Giordano Bruno his life.

Celestial Eden?

The fundamental problems confronting interplanetary theology may, we think, be summarised as follows: if intelligent life exists in other worlds, it must by definition be the work of the Creator; the same Creator who was responsible for Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve were created perfect but subsequently fell, dragging down their descendants, the entire human race, from which sad plight they were later redeemed by Jesus Christ. The same process may have transpired with the inhabitants of our hypothetical other worlds? They must have been created perfect, since a perfect God cannot make anything imperfect. Now comes the problem which must give severe headaches to the "backroom boys" at the Vatican. It is: did the Fall take place elsewhere than on earth—are celestial Gardens of Eden scattered throughout space? And, if the serpent tempted, say, a Venusian Eve, did she, too, succumb to his wiles with the same disastrous results and necessity for a future Messiah? The questions are of the utmost theological gravity and of an extreme complexity. No wonder the theologians preferred to burn Bruno rather than argue with him! Fortunately, that way out is no longer possible. The problem—or whole set of problems—remains (literally) suspended in the air, and formidable. Some might go further and pronounce it insoluble? Meanwhile, we conclude by suggesting a simple act of justice. As the Church which burned Bruno appears now to have

VIEWS and OPINIONS

Interplanetary Theology

By F. A. RIDLEY

belatedly adopted his opinions, the least it can decently do is to canonise *St. Bruno*, patron saint of a new "science," that of interplanetary theology, which he was the first to propound.

P.S.—The statement of the Dutch Catholic scholar, Father George van Noort, in his treatise, *God the Creator* (1920) was that "a person would not violate Faith who would believe that there are certain rational creatures on other heavenly bodies."

The Godmother

By RICHARD NORTH

PHYLLIS has just dropped in to tell me about the party. She has been assisting in an important capacity at a ceremony in which an infant was made "the child of God," and she afterwards went to the party which followed the ceremony. She hasn't told me anything about the ceremony, but she has said a lot about the "lovely party."

Phyllis is a spinster approaching the age of fifty. She was brought up under the influence of religious scepticism, for her father is an atheist. She herself, however, is by no means an atheist. It is true that she does not observe any form of religious worship, and I doubt whether she ever prays privately. Indeed, towards the principles of theology, Christian or otherwise, she shows an indifference she would be ashamed of if she were buying a hat. Yet she has more than once accepted an invitation to sponsorship at a christening, so it may be presumed that she acknowledges some responsibility for the promises she makes on those occasions, and some degree of submission to the deity in whose name she makes them.

When Phyllis left I was moved to look up the official ritual and refresh my memory upon what godparents actually undertake to do for baptised children. I found that when, in later years, the infant in question relieves Phyllis of her promises and takes over the responsibilities itself, it will be asked to state precisely what its godmother did for it. And the prescribed answer is, "They did promise and vow three things in my name. First, that I should renounce the devil and all his works, the pomps and vanity of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh. Secondly, that I should believe all the Articles of the Christian Faith. And thirdly, that I should keep God's holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of my life." To a person of any moral or intellectual integrity that seems to be a commitment of considerable gravity. It implies an ability to distinguish between the devil's works and God's will which modesty would hesitate to claim. I feel confident that Phyllis has never made any effort whatsoever to separate these two opposed sets of conceptions; I doubt, indeed, whether she even believes that there is a devil. The sponsor is, however, committed to a sincere attempt to teach that distinction to the child, who cannot be expected to pick it up unguided. The baptismal ritual closes with a specific charge to the sureties that it is their "parts and duties" to see that the infant is taught what "a solemn vow, promise, and profession he hath made by you"; that they shall call upon it to hear sermons and to learn certain set pieces; and that they shall teach it "all other things which a Christian ought to know and believe to his soul's health."

It is a pretty safe bet that Phyllis will never mention either the devil's works or the deity's will to the child whose privilege it has become to shun the one and embrace the other. And she is much more likely to take the child to the pictures or the theatre than to hear sermons, and to teach it nursery rhymes in preference to the prescribed

set pieces. She would, indeed, experience some embarrassment in guiding the child to walk according to God's "commandments" (confined, according to the Catechism, to the ten specific ones in Exodus XX), for she herself lives in open disobedience of one of them—she cohabits with a man who is married to someone else.

It is possible that Phyllis has an answer to all this. When her godchild takes over the responsibilities at present assumed by Phyllis, it will declare that at its baptism it was made "a member of Christ, the child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven." Whether or not Phyllis understands what these three things mean, she might take the ground that the mysterious change, whatever it is, has already taken place in the child. The past tense is used—the child "was made" all this at its baptism. Such a reed could easily become a buttress for a woman like Phyllis. But if she does argue thus her reflections upon her own case should be interesting. Her atheist father never took her to the font, and she has therefore never undergone the great transformation she has just witnessed in her godchild. (That fact alone, by the way, disqualifies her for sponsorship, but the church officials were either ignorant of this infraction or condoned it.) Well, Phyllis isn't fussy, and it was a "lovely party."

Legal Action over Child

IMAGINE a married couple having to take legal action to regain the custody of their own child; having to spend their hard-earned savings on trips to Ireland and on lawyers' fees. This is what Mr. and Mrs. Frank Scrimshaw, of 4 Saw Hill, Triangle, near Halifax, Yorks, had to do. And the Roman Catholic Church was the real culprit!

It was not actually the Church that held the child, of course, but it was a no doubt well-intentioned woman who had been thoroughly indoctrinated by the Church of Rome. She was Mrs. P. Galvin, of Longford, Eire, mother of Mrs. Scrimshaw, and a true defender of the faith! And the reason for her action was simply that her daughter and son-in-law had been married in Halifax Register Office, not in a church.

Mrs. Galvin discovered this terrible fact on a visit to Halifax, but apparently made no immediate complaint. Instead, she asked if she could take three-year-old Marion Scrimshaw back to Ireland with her for a holiday. The parents agreed but, when the time was up, said they were coming to fetch the child. The grandmother asked if Marion could stay another week. This, too, was agreed, but when, the following week, Mr. Scrimshaw went to bring his daughter back, he found that she had disappeared with Mrs. Galvin. He had to return alone.

He learned later from letters received by his wife, that they would not get the child back until they had been "properly married" in a Roman Catholic church and agreed to bring up the child as a Catholic.

The only course was legal action, and Mr. and Mrs. Scrimshaw took it. They won, Mr. Justice Murnaghan of the Dublin High Court ordering the grandparents to show cause within 14 days why an order should not be made for the return of the child. Mrs. Galvin finally capitulated, but not before the whole of their savings had been spent by the parents on trips to Ireland and wages lost through absence from work.

It is good to know that, from first hearing of the case, local Freethinkers have done what they could to help Mr. and Mrs. Scrimshaw during their worrying time. We are sure that all readers will sympathise with these Yorkshire parents.

C.McC.

Salvation

By G. S. BROWN

I WILL CALL HIM McNAB (not his real name but he was Scotch, so it is not inappropriate). One fateful evening he had freely partaken of a fluid similarly described as Scotch. As Burns put it, he "wisna fou but just had plenty." In that condition he tended to follow crowds, and this time the crowd led him into a Billy Graham revival. The heat and the hectic atmosphere at the meeting accentuated his inebriation and soon he was following a lesser crowd—to the platform this time. There he was converted and accepted Jesus, although not quite sure if the whole business concerned Boy Scouts or a cup-final celebration. With revivalist hymns buzzing in his head and wayward navigation in his feet, he left with the crowd, essayed to cross a busy street, was knocked down by a motor bus, and . . .

. . . found himself in Paradise, into which, as the bearer of a red-hot permit, he was admitted without question. Being full of evangelism, he wasn't surprised; but found it strange at first. He noticed that nobody in the place seemed to walk, rather they glided or floated around, like gulls in a gale. With a shock, he realised the reason. He felt himself all over and found he had no body to speak of, he was more of a nimbus or evanescence, like Peter Pan's shadow, only pure white. His discovery, he thought, called for a drink, which usually helped him to become *au fait* with circumstances. His query as to the whereabouts of a pub was met with horror. Later, when boredom pressed him really hard, he was to find he could get nothing to eat either. Not that he was thirsty or hungry, having such a nebulous body. He just wished to break the monotony. There was plenty of music, of course, but he found harps and hallelujahs pretty stale when compared to the accordeons and Scotch reels to which he had been so long accustomed. Wafting aimlessly about, he came to a huge choir lustily screaming a refrain he had often heard at street corners:

"This is my story, this is my song,
Praising my Saviour all the day long."

This reminded him that a day in Paradise seemed uncommonly long. He seemed to have been weeks in the place and it hadn't been dark yet. He longed for a sleep, but found there was no night in Heaven—and no beds. Everyone seemed pleased: it gave them so much more time to praise the Lord. To cheer himself, McNab started to bawl "I belong to Glasgow," but was frowned off at the second line. He came to the conclusion that he was not suited—that he had been "had." No body, no food or drink, no beds, no cats, dogs, horses or birds, nothing but radiance and rapture, harps, hallelujahs and holiness. Deeply despondent, he floated around aimlessly and came to a door, painted black, and bearing the words "Embassy—Hell" in scarlet letters. He knocked at the door and a hearty voice shouted "Come in!"

He entered and found the owner of the voice to be a genial man of Pickwickian contours. After exchange of greetings, McNab asked "Are you Hell's ambassador in this place?"

"Yes, I am, but only for a month; none of us can tolerate life here for longer. When our month is up, we get ten years off duty to recover."

"I see. What sort of a place is Hell?"

"Quite nice: air-conditioning, central eating, snack bars, and so on."

"Ah! but what about Hellfire? Isn't that a drawback?"

"Not now; once we got enough insurance agents inside they sold fire policies to everybody. For a time it was uncomfortable if premiums lapsed, but soon all got policies insuring against that contingency and they are quite secure—fireproof you may say—and, of course, all the houses are asbestos lined."

"Does everyone have a body in Hell?"

"Oh, yes, for past discomforts and present amenities we found them indispensable."

"And they have nights and beds to spend them in?"

"Definitely."

"And I heard you mention snack-bars. Tell me—can you fix me a transfer to Hell?"

"Assuredly; that's what I'm here for," reaching for a form. "I write the particulars here and you sign on the dotted line."

"Oh, it needs particulars?"

"Certainly; nobody can get into Hell unless they have done something to deserve it. You can't get in there with a phoney passport such as smoothed your way in here, but there is nothing to it, you only have to instance one mortal sin you have committed."

There seemed more to it than he thought, however. McNab was long lost in thought, so the ambassador prompted him.

"Have you ever murdered anybody?" "No." "Ever robbed a bank?" "No." "What about adultery?" "N-no."

The fact is Mac had been an average man, leading a somewhat humdrum average life without extremes of vice or virtue. He was exasperated, however, and annoyed that he couldn't even imagine a sin in his time of need. Scratching where his head used to be, and not meaning to be heard, he ejaculated "Christ Almighty!—"

"That'll do, none better," said the ambassador, writing "Taking the name of the Lord in vain."

In no time McNab had his pass, signed and stamped in triplicate. "Which way do I go?" he asked with a new zest.

"Follow me . . ."

Supply and Demand

THE clerical corporations will die hard. That is certain. Religion today is not so much a matter of ideas as of organisation. Think of this England during the days of John when Rome laid an interdict on it. Few can realise the blanched terror of the people when they found their churches closed. Today, if the churches of England were closed for twelve months, for repairs of the liturgy and articles, one wonders how many people would deeply feel a loss. But forty thousand clergymen have to live, and they form large and powerful corporations, which must pass through many changes before they disappear.

And then? There is an interesting type of young man, generally very neatly dressed, who seems to think that he is transfixing me with the question: "What would you put in the place of the churches?" Nothing, of course. The question is silly, because no one ever does put these things anywhere. Demand is followed by supply. And there will be no demand. That is precisely the bitter experience of the clergy today. There is so little demand for them that the far greater part of their work is the attempt to make a demand for them. No one, surely, questions that?

JOSEPH MCCABE (*The Twilight of the Gods*, 1923).

This Believing World

It was quite amusing to hear the TV "Meeting Point" Christian Forum the other Sunday trying to answer the simple question, "Is it necessary to believe in the Virgin Birth to be a Christian?" Canon Raven, who had obviously the greatest difficulty in answering it, disagreed entirely with the Abbot of Downside, who insisted that as his Church had settled the question for ever, you couldn't be a Christian if you didn't. Mr. J. Arlott and Prof. Wilson gave the evasive answers which showed that *they* did not believe in the Virgin Birth but hoped other Christians did. Altogether, it was sheer delightful Christian entertainment with nobody except the Abbot certain of anything; and he was only certain because his Church told him to be so!

★

In the popular BBC "Any Questions" programme, a question dealing with the Population Problem was answered by Mrs. Mary Stocks, a stout defender of Birth Control. And it was most instructive to hear on the air later the angry replies of many listeners—obviously all Roman Catholics. For sheer bigotry, intolerance, and, of course, hopeless ignorance, these people would be hard to beat. One lady—and she insisted she was one of over three millions of her faith—could hardly conceal her devastating anger that such ideas as those of Mrs. Stocks should be allowed on the air at all. It seems a pity that "Any Questions" is not thoroughly "vetted" by Roman priests and their devoted female followers!

★

As if the filming of the Ten Commandments and other Biblical subjects was not enough, Lady Lees of Lytchett is asking the public to subscribe £100,000 to make "gospel" films. We hope she will be heartily supported. There is nothing like putting on the screen phoney Angels and Devils, the former armed with coaching horns, the latter with red-hot tridents, to say nothing of nighties and human tails to add a touch of humour to what would otherwise be a very sad representation of the Man of Sorrows whether going about "doing good" or not. Another happy touch would be to pictorialise the famous pigs packed with the Devils Jesus sent into them, throwing themselves into the sea and thus destroying themselves. There is no end of similar popular scenes hot from the Gospels, but rarely referred to by devout Christians when on the air or on TV.

★

On the other hand, some pious Christians at least do not like Mr. Cecil B. de Mille's latest Biblical production, which one lady film reviewer called "an orgy of sex and debauchery" compared with the simplicity of "our own Scripture periods." The Ten Commandments are always quoted by Christians as being the greatest Code of Morals ever devised—except when they grow lyrical about Jesus—but the representation of drunken Egyptians chasing "half naked" women among the Israelites is really too much for lovers of God's Precious Word. Yet anybody who really knows his Bible knows also that this is mild compared with some parts. Ask the Wolfenden Committee.

★

Whatever Jesus is reported to have said about human relations, it is always a matter of regret that he never said a word about "blood" sports, or about animal torture—not a word about Vivisection, or chasing a deer until its heart bursts. By many religious members of Hunt clubs, in fact, we are told that foxes like being hunted to death—much better than shooting 'em, just as children who follow the marvellous sport like being "blooded." Needless to

add, a number of anti-Vivisectionists appeal to Jesus as the greatest anti-Vivisectionist the world has ever seen, though in actual fact he never *once* used the word *animal*. But of course he was always discoursing about Angels!

★

According to "The Recorder," the Rev. W. Gill, who is a Methodist and, of course, a thorough believer in Jesus of Nazareth, "who still towers above the ages," is ready to throw over the "miracles" of the Bible. He thinks "times have changed" and he views with dismay, "the great increase in Fundamentalism since the war." But surely Fundamentalism, foolish though it is, is at least consistent? What exactly does Mr. Gill believe? Methodism can no more oppose miracles than Roman Catholicism can oppose the Pope.

From Poland

AFTER A BREAK of some years, the Association of Atheists and Freethinkers has lately resumed its activity in Poland. A national conference attended by 500 delegates took place on November 9th, when it was reported that sixteen provincial branches were already functioning.

The aim of the Association, as explained by its President, Dr. A. Nowicki, is to unite all rationalists, regardless of differing political and philosophical views, in order to "develop, deepen and propagate atheist and rationalist world views, combating all kinds of prejudices, antagonisms of belief, and racial or social discrimination." The link is emphasised between rationalism and humanist philosophy on the one hand, and the traditions of materialism and struggle for social liberation on the other.

Mere anti-clericalism is no part of the aim of the Association, it is, in fact, realised that this is a danger to be guarded against, especially in the circumstances prevailing in Poland. What the Association hopes to do is to encourage people to make their judgments for themselves on the basis of scientifically verified facts, and to create an atmosphere in which serious discussion can be conducted.

In furtherance of its ends, the Association has decided to set up discussion and educational clubs, to initiate and co-ordinate studies on religion, to publish journals and books, to organise public lectures, and to co-operate with other similar organisations (e.g., the Society for Secular Schools) in Poland and abroad. The publishing part of the programme has already begun to come into operation, with the appearance of the first numbers of a fortnightly called *Argumenty*. The Association hopes later to sponsor publication of a library of classics of rationalism, atheism and studies in religion.

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The following message will interest readers:

The members of the Bydgoszcz Branch of the Polish Atheist and Freethinker Association send the readers of THE FREETHINKER and all English Freethinkers their best wishes for 1958.—WALDEMAR ZABOROWICZ (*Secretary*), Bydgoszcz 9, ul. Sutkowskiego 22 m 15, Poland.

CHOIR ON STRIKE

A novel strike took place in St. Hyacinthe, Quebec, when 20 R.C. altar boys demanded their pay be increased from 10 to 15 cents per week. Bravely refusing to be intimidated by organised labour, the parish priest sacked the lot and has now obtained replacements.

NEXT WEEK

BURNS'S ELDER BROTHER

By The Rev. J. L. BROOM

THE FREETHINKER

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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 welcome during normal office hours.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

W. M. MCALPIN.—We have no Hebrew Bible earlier than 900 A.D.—though fragments of parts have been found. Therefore the Massoretic texts are the only ones known. Whether the "canon" of the Old Testament was finally fixed about 90 B.C. is not known with any certainty but its text is *not* known.

ARTHUR WARE.—Asked by Manning (then a recent R.C. convert) what she deemed the attitude of workers, Florence Nightingale answered that "the most thinking and conscientious of the artisans have no religion at all." She herself was a freethinking Deist.

H. ALAN DALE.—Superstitions often stick together. Monarchism feeds on Godism.

C. F. SHORTHOUSE.—Religion cannot be regarded as "a primary stage of science," for it has not the means of correcting its own errors. Self-correction is essentially a scientific technique.

O. M'CANN.—"Good Friday was Robinson Crusoe's batman" was an actual answer given by a conscript to an Army chaplain.

ALAN WARD.—It is just one more of the many modern attempts to save God by making him nicer to know.

C. PORTER.—The overwhelming majority of the Christian Church Fathers accepted *Genesis* as literally true.

H. LA SARRE.—You say you "have exorcised several ghosts." We think this is a sheer waste of ghosts. You would have done better to have sold them to some show producer for the variety stage. Give us the first refusal of your next one, please.

Mrs. E. HARLOW.—All god-creeds are founded on decide: to proclaim the one true god is to kill off the others.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics Institute).—Sunday, January 19th, 7 p.m.: A Lecture.

Central London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, 5 minutes Edgware Road Tube).—Sunday, January 19th, 7.15 p.m.: W. A. GAPE, "The Failure of Secularism."

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, January 21st, 7.15 p.m.: R. S. W. POLLARD, J.P., "Why Abolish the Blasphemy Laws?"

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, January 19th, 6.30 p.m.: R. JOHNSON, "The Age of Faith."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Hall, Upper Parliament Street).—Sunday, January 19th, 2.30 p.m.: D. BOADELLA, "The Success and Failure of Psycho-Analysis."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, January 19th, 11 a.m.: A. FLANDERS, M.A., "Work—the Neglected Social Problem."

West Ham and District Branch N.S.S. (Wanstead Community Centre, The Green, E.4).—Thursday, January 23rd, 7.45 p.m.: J. SHEPHERD, "Religion and the Cult of Power."

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.

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Sunday, 8 p.m.: Messrs. MILLS, WOODCOCK, SMITH or WOOD.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

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 usually reliable *Manchester Guardian* couldn't resist painting the lily in reporting the case of a 14-year-old girl who recovered after lying in a coma for five months. It is true the case was an amazing one. The girl had been knocked down in September 1954 and "when it was becoming clear to us that she would probably survive"—said Mr. Joseph Schorstein, consultant neuro-surgeon at a number of Glasgow hospitals—"we were beginning to ask ourselves what kind of handicapped creature might emerge from this state of unconsciousness." Seven months after the accident, the girl had a mental age of six; when she left the hospital six months later, "her test score was appropriate to her age." She still had some paralysis but it was hoped that her good progress would continue. With some justification, Mr. Schorstein described her recovery as "remarkable and even marvellous" but the *Guardian* (19/12/57) heading turned this into "Miraculous recovery"—in quotes.

★

A CORRESPONDENT who holds an educational post in a British Federated territory reports an unexpected event. A few days ago—he says in his latest letter—Form III asked me to talk to them about time and space (they had been reading Wells's *Time Machine*). They got thoroughly interested and, a day or two later, I talked to the Principal about getting people to come and lecture on various aspects of the Geophysical Year. By Form III, I said, the students' minds are blossoming and they are beginning to ask questions about the Universe. The Principal replied that my mention of students' minds "blossoming" reminded him that he wanted to ask me whether I would be prepared, for one period a month in 1958, to talk to the Sixth Form on Rationalism. When I had regained my power of speech—adds our correspondent—I indicated that I would be delighted.

★

THE ITEM '*Freedom in Israel*' (THE FREETHINKER, January 3rd, 1958)—taken in full from the New York *Truth Seeker*—was submitted to the Israel Embassy for comment. The Embassy does not know anything about Judge Panken nor the Jewish Newsletter. It states: "It is true that marriages in Israel can only be consecrated in accordance with the religious laws of the various denominations. However, all the rest is absolute rubbish."

★

WE send our best wishes for a swift recovery to Mr. Robert McK. Campbell of Edinburgh, who has had a leg amputated. Glasgow secretary, Mr. J. Barrowman tells us of Mr. Campbell's great misfortune; he tells us too that this staunch Scottish Freethinker remains as cheerful as ever.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY 52nd ANNUAL DINNER

followed by a Dance
SATURDAY, 15th FEBRUARY, 1958

ALL WELCOME at the MECCA RESTAURANT
11 - 12 BLIMFIELD STREET, E.C.2
(Near Liverpool St. and Broad St. Stations)
RECEPTION 6.30 P.M. DINNER 7.0 P.M.

Vegetarians Catered for Evening Dress Optional
Guest of Honour: STEPHEN SWINGLER, M.P.
TICKETS 17/6 each from the Sec., 41 Gray's Inn Rd., W.C.1

My "Curious Capers"

By H. CUTNER

WHEN I SUGGESTED in a recent article that Mr. Maurice Barbanel, the Editor of the Spiritualist weekly, *Two Worlds*, was in the habit of "bellowing bankrupt blather," I had, of course, no idea that he would provide me with plenty of material to prove that I was right. In five successive numbers of his journal, he has—he thinks—bellowed out of existence "Cutner's Curious Capers."

The opportunity for his bombast was an address I gave before the Marylebone Spiritualist Association at the kind invitation of its genial Secretary. I told him I would pull no punches, and he smilingly agreed. What was expected of me was to show, if possible, that the claims made by Spiritualists or mediums that the dead survived and could be reached were fraudulent.

Obviously, I had carefully to select my evidence, and I took four cases from Spiritualist history which, in my opinion, were utter frauds, yet were being constantly boosted up as providing irrefutable proofs of "survival." Of course, I had to deal with a few other things and, let me confess, my memory of some things which happened twenty or thirty years ago let me down. This was pounced upon with all the bellowing and bombast Mr. Barbanel is so famous for. I was in his opinion proved "wrong, wrong, WRONG!" It was a genuine godsend to him. And what were these terrific errors?

I said that a notorious "spirit" photographer, a Mrs. Deane (now dead), had taken a photograph of a War Memorial Service in the Albert Hall when actually it was taken at the Cenotaph! Could anything prove more convincingly what a hopeless ignoramus I was? Incidentally, this silly photograph had a lot of "spirits" hovering about at the top, and one newspaper pointed out that these "spirits," supposed to be portraits of dead soldiers, were in actual fact taken from members of football teams. Of course, as Mr. Barbanel rightly says, huge protests were made by Spiritualists, and even Sir A. Conan Doyle was dragged in, as well as Sir A. Keith. As neither of these gentlemen practised photography, I refuse to take any verdict from them about "spirit" photography as worth anything whatever.

The other prodigious error I made was that I said Mr. Barbanel in *Psychic News* got into a row with the *Sunday Dispatch* over the late William Hope, when it was actually over the still living John Myers. Hope was a contemptible fraud, and only Spiritualists—who are ready to believe anything—could ever have been taken in with his "spirit" photographs. Whenever Mr. Barbanel mentions these people, Mrs. Deane or Hope or Myers or somebody called Dr. Glen Hamilton, who "practised" in the same way about 30 years ago, and whose "spirit" photographs he prints week by week in *Two Worlds*, he always tells us that every photo was taken under "strictly test conditions." In the same way, whenever he introduces a "witness," he or she is one "whose testimony is unimpeachable." If Miss Estelle Stead or a Mrs. Durrant see "spirit" photographs taken "under strictly test conditions" they should be believed. I think that the only people who can be more easily bamboozled by "spirit" photographers than "scientists" are estimable ladies whose ignorance of what a "spirit" photographer can do is as vast as that of an Australian aborigine.

Let me quote a *Catalogue* of rare books on all sorts of magic and occult subjects published in 1934 by the late Harry Price. It contains particulars of books on spirit

photography which "describe," says Harry Price, "200 ways of producing" them. 200 ways! It would prove exceptionally interesting if Miss Stead or Mrs. Durrant knows of *ten* ways, let alone two hundred. Could even Mr. Barbanel give us *twenty* ways—offhand? The vast majority of "spirit" photographs have always been done in the brilliant and successful way the late William Hope did them—he *switched* the plates in the darkroom. Under "strictly test conditions," there is not a spirit photographer in the world who could produce even one "spirit." "Spirit" photography is the most arrant of all frauds and humbug.

It is most amusing to find that when I am "absolutely wrong," that proves my hopeless ignorance. When Mr. Barbanel is completely wrong, as he was about me, he merely says "I am at fault . . ." The truth is anyone can make a slip, and the only ones that matter are the serious ones. Even poor old Conan Doyle had to admit in his famous debate with Joseph McCabe—"I may have sometimes been inaccurate. I am not infallible."

In the course of my lecture, I mentioned Conan Doyle and Houdini—and here Spiritualists have always the advantage over me. Not one in a thousand would read Houdini, and therefore when Mr. Barbanel bellows in big type, "Houdini convinced by Lady Doyle seance," he knows he can say anything he likes, for it is not easy to get hold of Houdini's book, *A Magician Among the Spirits*. It is much easier to say Conan Doyle kept "records" from which his son Adrian could quote to show that I was wrong and Mr. Barbanel right. I haven't seen these "records," but I have read Houdini's book, and in it he expresses the greatest contempt for the "Lady Doyle seance." No one who reads Houdini can but see that while he admired Doyle as a fine novelist and story teller—as indeed I very much do—he ridiculed the impudent fraud of making his mother speak perfect English, a language which, as an Austrian Jewess, she did not know when alive. Far from being convinced, Houdini solemnly denounced the humbug of Spiritualism in the strongest terms he could use. For example,

So far, I have never on any occasion, in all the seances I have attended, seen anything which would lead me to credit a mediumistic performance with supernatural aid, nor have I seen anything which has convinced me that it is possible to communicate with those who have passed out of this life.

This proves how "Houdini was convinced by Lady Doyle's seance." But few Spiritualists will see this extract—they much prefer to have Mr. Barbanel bellowing even if he cannot produce a scintilla of evidence. As I pointed out in my previous article, I dealt with the "levitation" of D. D. Home, which is always being quoted, sometimes in rapturous idolatry, and nearly always with a portrait of the "immaculate" medium himself. In my lecture, I gave "chapter and verse" from Lord Dunraven, one of the aristocratic "witnesses" of the miraculous "levitation." This seems to have upset Mr. Barbanel no end. He querulously says I did not give the issue of the *Sunday Dispatch* from which I ostensibly quoted, and, "there was no newspaper by the name of *Sunday Dispatch* in existence during Dunraven's lifetime." I sometimes wonder at the superlative impudence of bellowings of this kind.

As any one of the audience could have told him, I was most careful to give the name of the newspaper, the *Weekly Dispatch*, the date, March 21st, 1920, and I said anybody after the lecture could come and examine the cutting. In his long letter to the Editor, Lord Dunraven

makes the special point that *no one saw* the alleged "levitation." I quoted the exact words at the lecture and in a previous article in these columns. The truth is that Home was a humbug who never was actually caught out because he had such fools trying to "test" him. He was far too astute to allow anybody but people in the "best" society to "sit" with him. He asked for no fees, but was always content to accept "presents." And anybody who has any doubt about Home should read the *full* report of the Lyons case, in which Home "accepted" £30,000 from a credulous fool of a widow who hoped to get in touch, through him, with her dead husband, and found out how she was fooled. Home had to disgorge the money in a court of law. In any case, Mr. Barbanel did not deal with Lord Dunraven's letter to the *Weekly Dispatch* but with other "phenomenal" happenings which I did not touch. It was his business to deal with what I said, and the fact that he did not, shows how marvellously I have been "exposed."

(To be concluded)

Sir Ernest Laurence Kennaway

WE HAVE LOST a steadfast friend in Sir Ernest Kennaway, who died on January 1st. Born in New Zealand of Devon stock, he came to England to study at University College, London (the "infidel" college), at New College, Oxford, and at Middlesex Hospital. Distinguished as a research worker and teacher, he became Professor of Pathology at London University and Director of the Chester Beatty Cancer Research Institute, gaining many distinctions on the way, such as the Royal Medal of the Royal Society, the Garton Medal and Prize, etc.

Brought up in strict religious surroundings, he nevertheless did not keep his mind closed in this respect, but applied it to Christianity with the same rigorous clarity which made him distinguished in the field of medicine. Nor did he hide his opinions; they were freely expressed as may be read in his book, *Some Religious Illusions in Art, Literature and Experience*. He was a member of the Committee of Honour of the World Union of Freethinkers and attended the Congress held at Brussels in 1952, and would have been at Paris last September if his health had allowed him.

For many years he was afflicted by Parkinson's disease and was painfully lame as a result of a bad street accident; two years ago cataract developed and, lastly, cancer. Yet even to the last weeks he continued his research work at Bart's—from his bed by telephone.

All through their married life he had the support and collaboration of his wife; the many valuable papers on cancer were always by Prof. and Mrs. Kennaway (after 1947 Sir Ernest and Lady K.).

Lady Kennaway is also a member of the World Union Committee of Honour. Their marriage was an ideal union, and we offer our very deepest sympathy to her in her bereavement. The loss is not hers alone; we are all the poorer for the death of this great and good man. He was outstanding not only for his intellectual powers and integrity, but also, as I discovered more than once, for his sympathy and kindness towards those who suffer pain or grief.

"A bell; they flee:

Silence then—

So will it be

Some day again

With them,—with me."

(THOMAS HARDY, quoted by Sir Ernest Kennaway in his book.)

C.B.B.

From New Zealand

By ARTHUR O'HALLORAN

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH has not remained long inactive in pressing its claims for State aid for its schools. After its drastic setback in its appeal to Parliament earlier this year, it has chosen the General Election (when Party leaders are outlining Party policies and endeavouring to swing marginal seats) to make fresh demands for financial assistance.

Whilst the Bishops have used the pulpit and school functions to highlight the "injustices" under which the "only True Church" labours, the Holy Name Society has also vigorously gone into action. It is gratifying to note that the Prime Minister, Mr. Holyoake, at the time of writing has refused to bow to the demands of the Roman Catholics.

Just what will be the position after a new Parliament assembles is as yet difficult to determine. Probably the voting strength of those sitting on the Treasury Benches will have much to do with any "adjustment of differences" which may possibly be envisaged at a later date. The political Leader of the Labour Party obviously at the moment finds himself in a dilemma—how not to alienate the Party from Catholic votes and at the same time how not to offend the Protestant votes—particularly before Polling Day!

★
The Mormon Church in New Zealand is making considerable progress, particularly in Maori converts. Financially, too, it prospers. At a Presbyterian Church Congress the other day one of its ministers spoke with considerable heat—and, I am afraid, with little charity, or tolerance. Said the Rev. D. M. Jamieson: "It was the duty and responsibility of the Presbyterian Church to forewarn people of the dangers in this bogus church. They are interested only in sheep stealing. They go from door to door infiltrating their ideas and trying to make converts. The Mormon Church is frankly and wildly heretical." Exactly. But just what is *not* heretical in Christianity and in its legion of warring sects? Much water has flowed, much blood spilt since Arius faced his angry detractors in 325 A.D.

★
As in England a private member introduced into Parliament a Bill aimed at annulling the death sentence for murder. Unlike Mr. Silverman's Bill, however, it never reached a vote of the House. Sensing embarrassment for his Party (which had reintroduced capital punishment into New Zealand's penal code), the then Prime Minister, Mr. Holland, intervened and declared for a Referendum. Now, as a result of criticism, in which the N.Z. Howard League and some the Churches joined, also *ad hoc* abolition committees, the Government at the last minute withdrew its Referendum plans and affirmed that the decision should rest with Parliament. Although it has not officially declared itself in its election programme, Labour's attitude to capital punishment is traditional and is well known. If it is returned to power the hangman will be looking for a new job. The tides of capital punishment are receding. The present Government, no doubt sensing that its earlier support for the use of the gallows could not again be made without a degree of liberalisation, proposes to retain hanging but to bring in (as in Scotland) "diminished mentality" as a loophole for juries.

However, whatever Government finds itself occupying the Treasury Benches after the election, abolitionists will be content with nothing less than total abolition of the death penalty.

CORRESPONDENCE

RIDICULE

It seems that every week now you print at least one article, which, judging from the tone, can do little else but hinder the propagation of Freethought as a systematic institution. January 3rd's was written by a Mr. G. S. Brown and entitled "Supersonic Prayer." It was infantile, to say the least!

One of the most contemptible, and least effective, methods of criticism is ridicule; and Mr. Brown's article reached the pinnacle of that form. Indeed, such a method doesn't deserve to be called criticism, the essential function of which should be to elucidate. Satire (say in Orwell or Voltaire), irony (say in Nietzsche) and cynicism are about the three most worthy forms of heightened ridicule, but unfortunately Mr. Brown has employed none of these. The article was badly written, and in bad taste!

"For the love of Michael"—an ejaculation from the Lord in praise of a suggestion from the Archangel-clerk, Michael—barely competes with the humour one hears incessantly from half-educated schoolboys. (How old is Mr. Brown?)

If, sir, in the future, you omit this type of article and present instead some intelligent, serious-minded criticisms (like Rev. John L. Bloom's) I will continue to buy your paper. J. THURSTON.

THE SPUTNIK DOG

Mr. Bennett is to be commended for the fine sentiments expressed in his recent article on humanitarianism. Particularly so in view of subsequent correspondence on the subject, which, while joining righteously in the general condemnation of fox-hunters and other Yahoos and moral invalids, yet really sees nothing amiss in torturing helpless animals in the supposed interests of science. However else they may arraign the Church, they certainly seem to regard the Jesuit motto of the end justifying the means as a sound one. In his very fine book, *Seventy Years Among Savages*, Henry S. Salt wrote: "Evolutionary science has demonstrated beyond question the kinship of all sentient life; yet the scientist, in order to rake together a moral defence for his doings, condescends to take shelter under the same plea as the theologian, and having got rid of the old anthropocentric fallacy in the realm of science, avails himself of that fallacy in the realm of ethics: a progressive in one branch of thought he is still a medievalist in another. Thus scientist and sacerdotalist between them would perpetuate the experimental tortures of the laboratory. *Laborare est orare* was the old saying; now it should be expanded by the Catholic school of vivisectionists into *laboratorium est oratorium*; the house of torture is the house of prayer. It is a beautiful and touching scene of reconciliation, this meeting of priest and professor over the torture-trough of the helpless animal."

I wish the brutalitarians could be induced to read Salt's book. What a salutary corrective to their insensate cant and slippery casuistry. I would particularly urge its reading upon the gentleman who cited Professor Haldane's willingness to endure pain in the interests of science, as apparently a sound criterion by which we might in good conscience inflict suffering on some helpless animal. What Professor Haldane's hardy declaration has to do with the ethics of the question baffles conjecture.

ALFRED ALMOND.

May I wholeheartedly endorse Mr. G. I. Bennett's lucid article concerning the humanitarian attitude to the use of animals in scientific experiments? The Sputnik dog will have served to bring into publicity the appalling lengths to which scientists will go to achieve their objectives. The Sputnik experiment cannot be hidden as are the equally ruthless experiments which go on all the year all the world over behind closed doors of research laboratories. A large proportion of these are aimless repetitions or done merely to gratify perverted curiosity. Scientists, themselves, boast about them; the operation of grafting the forelegs and head of a puppy into the neck of a large dog and keeping both alive on one heart for several days was hailed as "a triumph"!

Many medical men regard experiments on animals as "grossly misleading" and opinion is by no means agreed upon the modern craze for injecting serums into the human bloodstream—serums obtained through animal suffering. A highly qualified medical man, denouncing animal experimentation, only the other day asserted that "only a compassionate humanity will achieve health and serenity and ensure world-peace."

Mr. Bennett rightly feels that suffering is caused to animals in vivisection laboratories. Dr. Beddow Bayly, in a recent letter to the Press, writes of "the day-to-day and year-by-year use of millions of animals in research laboratories, where they are often subjected to unspeakable suffering." Mr. Bennett puts the case mildly in face of the ghastly facts. Usually the public is kept in the dark. It does not know about the piecemeal cutting out of

fox terriers' kidneys, of dogs reduced to extreme long-drawn-out agony by wax tumours fixed in their brains, of cats kept spinning for a week like tops, of large burns inflicted, some given treatment, others no treatment at all. Instead, it is lulled into a kind of coma by talk of anaesthetics. It is not told of those cases where no anaesthetic is given, or those where the initial operation is done under anaesthesia but the animal allowed to regain consciousness and kept for days in intense suffering. We hear about "a pin-prick," but what about the pain and lingering death which follow? If we are truly a civilised nation, it is high time we did something to stop all this. A determined people can achieve the apparently unattainable. G. BIBBY, L.L.A.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

In your issue of December 20th there was a very interesting comment on Cecil B. de Mille's "The Ten Commandments."

At the end of the first paragraph I read: "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."

To back up what the author says there is a book entitled *Were the Israelites ever in Egypt?* by Dr. Geo. H. Bateson-Wright, D.D., with whom, incidentally, I was personally acquainted. M. D. SILAS.

PERSONIFYING THE UNKNOWN

Re Mr. McDonald's "Hairsplitting" (November 22nd), I used the word "behind" in the sense of hidden or undisclosed. Pervades or permeates might have served better.

We know that electricity is a reality. We can produce it and control it by various means; yet no one knows exactly what it is in essence. So it is with the "Something." Possibly, patient research eventually will determine its nature but, meanwhile, logic will have it that it is, nonetheless, a reality.

Mr. McDonald imputes Theism to my thinking by his reference to creation. Why did there have to be a beginning? Perhaps Time is merely a human convenience totally unrelated to the Cosmos as a whole. ARTHUR B. HEWSON.

MISSING BOOKS

A recent letter in THE FREETHINKER prompts me to refer again to a subject in my last. The letter reports the disappearance of a book with anti-religious bias, presumed stolen and restored. But I know for a fact that religious bigots exercise pressure on libraries to have books removed from circulation. One book by an ex-policeman was so banned after I had it out for the first time. This bobby bluntly said he was an Atheist and that nobody who had seen the horrors he had seen could honestly be anything else. In that book he referred to Jesus as the gent in a nightgown with a beaver, etc. Similarly the Glasgow book, *No Mean City*, although not specially anti-religious, was also got rid of by the "unco guid." I was quite friendly with a Dundee librarian who told me much of the machinations of these gentry.

None of us can possibly read all the books published, although I personally get through plenty. But if there was some way of hearing from other Atheists of books with frankness such as above, it would be a good thing. If an anthology were impracticable, surely some list could be kept of works showing the authors to have anti-religious tendencies. From my own reading I can perceive such tendencies to be on the increase. Whereas some might decline to read THE FREETHINKER or *Age of Reason*, the breakdown of their faith might be initiated by means of this or that novel or other work. The principle obstacle to converting anyone (privately) to freethought is *egoism*, and if people are judiciously handled they can be persuaded they are sort of pioneers.

G. S. BROWN.

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for 1957

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