

The Freethinker

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AN ENGLISH DOCTOR has been studying the latest "miracles" at Lourdes. This is a veritable "atomic," anti-Lourdes bomb to explode on the eve of the centenary of the Shrine—this time from England. The bomb in question is Dr. D. J. West's *Eleven Lourdes Miracles* (reviewed recently in these columns by Colin McCall) which is not strictly rationalistic because the author is a Doctor who has the benedictions of the Society for Psychical Research of London and New York.

Sixty years ago, the same Society published an "Enquiry" by F. H. Myers and A. T. Myers entitled *Mind Cure, Faith Cure and the Miracles of Lourdes*, in its *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* for September 1894; and at the time, this must have rejoiced the friends of Lourdes. It is true that the authors were sometimes severe, but their conclusions admitted the possibility of rare cures; they said, "A first group of cases were nothing but legends without any value; a second group contained descriptions of all kinds of fraudulent practices; a third group, no doubt very restrained, contained cures quite conclusive which merit very careful consideration."

Pseudo-Miracles

In my own book, *Lourdes and Illusion*, I, with my late wife (a doctor also), came to some very definite conclusions. There is nothing at Lourdes except pseudo-miracles of suggestion. Dr. West, who seems to have read my book and was influenced by it, has come to the same conclusion.

For Dr. West, it all began in April 1954, when he was sent as a delegate to a Conference on Psychical Research at Saint-Paul-de-Vance, where one swam happily in the supernatural. And there he met Dr. Leuret, the President of the Lourdes Cases Bureau. Among specialists, one is in a sort of family circle, and Dr. Leuret promised Dr. West to allow him to see the "Archives" at Lourdes. Actually, the Bureau does not contain more than a hundred of extraordinary cases, for cures have become very rare, about one for each million pilgrims; and, of course, these are considered miraculous by a canonical commission. But out of something like 6,000, only 52 have been proclaimed really "miracles" in a hundred years.¹ Of course, the Medical Bureau must find such a case at least every year, for even one miracle at least can prove that the Catholic religion is the only one inspired by God for mankind.

Unfortunately, Dr. Leuret died, and his successor, Dr. Larget, also died, so that it was the present head of the post, Dr. Pellissier, who opened the "Archives" to Dr. West.

But are there any Archives at Lourdes? During the late war, a number of Catholic doctors under the crossier of R. P. Riquet, did their best to piece the mysteries of Lourdes for the very Catholic *Cahiers Lannec* (*The Lannec Papers*), but they saw nothing on the pretence that the Archives had to be closed because of the war. They waited until 1948, and as they were still barred from see-

ing anything, they declared that there were no documents or archives at Lourdes. Since then, these *Papers* have gone quickly out of print—and I have been assured that copies were burnt wholesale. One thing is certain—the *Papers* have not been republished and they never will be. "Lord," Mgr. Theas, the Bishop of Lourdes, is reported to have said, "Save me from my friends—I can look after my enemies." His first task was to create some "Archives" which now exist, but are most difficult to get at. That has been my own sad experience.

Dr. Vallet, who is the president of the *Medical Bureau* at Lourdes, declared in his book, *The Truth on Lourdes*,

that all doctors can receive "The Bulletin of the International Association of Our Lady of Lourdes." I believed him, and asked to become a subscriber. Since then, I have written five times—twice by registered post—only to learn that the Bulletin was destined for the friends and not for the enemies of Lourdes, and they didn't want my money.

Dr. West was luckier than I, for they allowed him to look at the archives of eleven cases which since the war are looked upon as true miracles. Out of these he has found ten absolutely "grotesque," and one only worth looking into from a scientific point of view. Unfortunately, for this one the dossier has mysteriously disappeared! Do we detect the hand of the Devil in this, or is it a clever move of someone who pulls the strings at Lourdes? Dr. West does not tell us, he prefers to indulge in no discussion, but simply to state the facts without any commentary.

Dumbfounded!

For the other ten, Dr. West tells us what we already know from the Catholic press and, in addition, what he could find out here and there from the documents. We are dumbfounded! A Bureau which is supposed to have some pretensions to scientific evidence is nothing but false money. For example, how do they proceed to explain the cure of a virgin (in menopause), a Mlle. X, whose contortions impressed her examiners very strongly. The doctors gravely discussed if hers was not a simple case of hysteria but, overwhelmed by their Catholic faith, they stuck pins into her to see if her body was insensible to pain. It was not; so they at once concluded that she was not hysterical. The technique of these doctors belongs to the Middle Ages, worthy inheritors of the doctors who helped magistrates centuries ago in cases of "witchcraft." When these people discovered, in suspected cases of heresy, some body-zone not very susceptible to pain, they at once deduced it as of diabolical origin, sufficient to send the unfortunates at once to the stake. In his book, *Modern Miraculous Cures*, Dr. Leuret devotes 26 pages to the case of Mlle. X—but does not breathe a word of such practices—and we can perfectly understand his prudence.

In another case, catalogued as one of cancer instantaneously cured at Lourdes, Dr. West was literally astonished to find that the doctor who diagnosed it as one of

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

Lourdes

— By DR. GUY VALOT —

cancer of the intestines did so without any radiological or rectoscopic examination. It began to look to Dr. West as if French doctors are content to rest 50 years behind in medical technique, but I know this particular doctor well through reading the "Bulletins" of Lourdes. He is very Catholic, and he discovered another "miracle" in another of his patients—a case of Pott's disease, also without the use of radiography—and we can ask whether Heaven has graciously presented him with so many miracles, or if the only ones are those he himself creates?

The Real Enemy of Lourdes

No, Dr. West, all French doctors are not like these caterers of miracles from Lourdes; they are quite capable of going where necessary to X-rays and the other resources of our modern laboratories. The great enemy of Lourdes is not a Materialist doctor, but the development of modern technique. As soon as we got good pulmonary radiographs, there has not been a single cure of pulmonary tuberculosis at Lourdes; while in that happy epoch when there were no radiographs or cases which could not be understood the medieval Bureau at Lourdes recognised hundreds of cures of pulmonary tuberculosis!²

But in this case of "cancer," Dr. West came to the conclusion that it was not cancer at all but of what may be called very bad constipation, and he proved it. He found in the Archives the careful notes of one of the nurses who looked after the pilgrims going to Lourdes. The patient was always crying for morphia to deaden the pain, and the doctor in the train advised the nurse to try injecting camphor without telling her. This proved quite as efficacious as morphia to deaden the pain—but it had as well the admirable result of relieving the constipation brought on by the morphia. The excrement was evacuated at Lourdes, but she still yearned for morphia and it took seven months to cure her.

Let us close with a monumental gaff committed by the bishopric. In the dossier of a case which the canonical commission proclaimed miraculous, Dr. West found two astonishing documents. The Bureau asked two specialists their advice on this case, but at Lourdes this is only done if they are very, very Catholic; they came to the same conclusions without consulting each other—no proof of any organic disease. But the Bishop was getting old and he had to have a miracle—so, against the advice of its own experts, the Bureau proclaimed an extraordinary cure and the canonical commission put the finishing touch by recognising it as a "miraculous" cure.

Let me advise Mgr. Theas as charitably as I can to destroy all compromising documents before opening them to independent enquirers. In spite of all its stupidities, the commercial success of Lourdes will be as brilliant as last year. The biggest fraud of the century will attract over five millions of people. There will be many deaths and accidents on the way to Lourdes, as well as in the crowds in its narrow streets, which are unfit for huge numbers of people. This will never prove that Lourdes is of divine origin, but we can quote Renan affirming in his own century—"Human stupidity and nothing else gives us the idea of the Infinite."

¹Seven miracles were recognised as having been performed in the "Vision" year of 1858, thanks to Mgr. Laurence, Bishop of Tharbes, and they were all invented by Dr. Dozous, who had been dismissed from the hospital at Lourdes in 1856. But the invisible conductor of the orchestra who conducts everything at Rome was watching. He asked that the thousands of cures should be recognised as extraordinary, but henceforth not to proclaim them miraculous. Doctors could testify to them as extraordinary, but only a canonical commission composed of priests filled with the Holy Ghost could declare that an extraordinary case was in reality a miracle. This is why for 45 years no miracle was recognised. We can thus understand how supremely clever the Church

can be. There was a fall in the number of miracles, and then there were more than fifty in fifty years. This proved that the waters at Lourdes were never dead—on the contrary, they have never been more efficacious. Let us never forget how perfect an illustration of pure reason at the service of lying is Lourdes.

²There are always doctors who can be recruited for miracles at Lourdes. Some hospitals make a speciality of them. The most fantastic specimen of one is furnished by the Sanatorium of Villepinte, which from the beginning of this century has regularly sent numbers of its patients to Lourdes, where Dr. Boissarie and the Medical Bureau used to publish dazzling statistics of cures. They reached 50% except in one year when the Immaculate Virgin manifested her hostility to an anti-clerical government, and cured no more people with pulmonary tuberculosis. Since then, we have had lots of governments, not at all anti-clerical, inundated with Catholics. The French Army presents arms at Lourdes (often in the rain) and elsewhere, and France is now "the eldest Daughter of the Church." All the same, the patients from Villepinte are no longer cured at Lourdes. Its doctor has gone, and his successor has installed X-ray and laboratory equipment—which is very unfortunate for now there are no more miracles of healing at the Sanatorium.

[Translated by H. Cutner from the French journal *La Raison*, December 1957.]

Adultery, Custody and Adoption

THE RECENT CASE in the Edinburgh Court of Session, when custody of an eight-year-old son was refused to a doctor, who was an atheist, and was granted to his wife, who had admitted misconduct, reminds us again of the popular association between religion and morality—or more particularly, Christianity and morality. The doctor said that if he were granted custody he would not remove the boy from religious instruction in school, but he would not let him go to Sunday school or church. The judges regarded religious training as important for the boy and, in fact, implied that atheism is a worse crime than adultery. It is a mode of reasoning that strikes us as strange in 1958. There is much that is anachronistic about the law, but these judges have the outlook of the Middle Ages. We hope that a question will be asked in the House of Commons.

Another related matter that urgently needs investigation is that of adoption. On February 14th we quoted a *Daily Herald* report (January 23rd) that a "very decent couple, who badly wanted a child to care for" were turned down by the National Children's Adoption Association "for their honesty in describing themselves as agnostics." The *Herald* investigated and found to its "astonishment," that, though the Association is non-sectarian, it does "insist on some religion" in those who adopt children. We now hear of a similar case in Sunderland. After being married for five years, a young couple were told by their doctor that the possibility of their having a family was remote, so they tried to adopt a child. The result was the same: because the husband honestly admitted his atheism, the Adoption Society refused to allow the adoption. The couple were acceptable in every other way.

This deplorable state of affairs has often been commented on in these columns, but it continues unaltered. Not only are good prospective parents prevented from having a child to care for; it must also be remembered that children are being deprived of good homes and family affection. Readers might well write letters to their M.P.s. Adoption Societies should not be a law unto themselves in these matters.

C.M.C.C.

—NEXT WEEK—

THE HOLY PREPUCE

By C. G. L. DU CANN

Muhammed and Charlemagne

By F. A. RIDLEY

ON MAY 4TH, 1935, the Belgian historian, Henri Pirenne, completed his book, *Muhammed and Charlemagne*. A few weeks later he was dead. His last, and perhaps most original book, was thus published posthumously and was translated into English in 1939. Perhaps because of the contemporary impact of World War Two, Pirenne's historical swansong does not seem to have attracted the attention that its original thesis deserved. Freethinkers in particular ought to be interested in the subject matter of this remarkable book, which, if its main thesis be considered proved, sheds a flood of light not only upon secular, but upon Church history, during the formation of the Ages of Faith in which the Christian Church enjoyed its maximum degree of power.

Briefly, Pirenne's thesis is this: that the traditional account of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire and civilisation in Western Europe is, if not entirely erroneous, at least gravely defective. The classical culture, he argues, was not obliterated by the German Barbarians who overran the Empire in the 5th century; all that they actually did, asserts Pirenne, was to displace the political sovereignty of the Roman Empire over Western Europe and North Africa. The classical culture which underlay the political structure of the Roman Empire was not affected—or, at most, was affected only superficially by the German conquerors of Rome. In fact, as Pirenne demonstrates with a wealth of appropriate detail, the Barbarian Kings who then divided the old Roman Empire, were mostly ardent admirers of the old classical civilisation which they imitated to the best of their ability, sometimes in rather grotesque forms! Whilst the political structure of the Roman Empire in the West crashed before the German invaders during the 5th century—that era sometimes described as "Migration of the Nations"—the essential continuity of classical European culture remained unbroken up to about the end of the 7th century. And both the direction and the cause of this final cultural downfall were due to entirely different causes to those which had operated during the political collapse in the 5th century. Here, Pirenne's novel thesis breaks sharply with the traditional view of "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire" as expounded by Gibbon.

The first invaders who overran the derelict Empire in the 5th century were primitive German barbarians from the northern forests, or still more primitive nomads from the Russian steppes such as the Vandals (whose "vandalisms" have become proverbial), the Goths, Franks and Huns. Such primitive savages could only ape Roman culture; they were too primitive to replace the old civilisation with anything permanent. Therefore, their impact upon the old civilisation was superficial and transient. Even in their political administration of the Roman provinces they were compelled to rely chiefly on the old Roman administration, whilst such culture as they were capable of came to them via the agency of the Church. From all of which it follows that whilst the German Barbarians could overrun the Empire, they were too primitive to replace the classical civilisation with any new one of their own. But this state of things did not apply to the next wave of Barbarian invasions which broke upon Europe in the 7th century from the deserts of the East, not from the forests of the North whence the earlier German Barbarians had come. Muhammed died in 632 and the Arab invasions started immediately after; in about a century, the Arab Empire

extended from India to the south of France and to the gates of Rome. The Arabs, who burst like a thunderclap on the Western world, brought with them a new creative principle, a new religion, that of Muhammed, which came in time to provide the basis for a new culture and social order which permanently broke the mould of the old Roman world. Hence, whilst Rome's German conquerors in the 5th century only destroyed her Empire, the Arab invaders in the 7th century destroyed the ancient civilisation itself.

The Arabs accomplished this destruction—not so much by their land campaigns, startlingly successful as these were—as by their maritime expansion, which eventually gave them the mastery of the Mediterranean—*mare nostrum*—the "great sea" of classical antiquity. It was by her initial maritime defeat of the naval empire of Carthage that Rome had originally acquired the Empire of the "World"—that is, of the Mediterranean world. It was similarly the Muslim Arab conquest of the Mediterranean in the 7th century that, according to Pirenne, spelt the irrevocable downfall of the old Græco-Roman civilisation. As he tells us—"With Islam a new world was established on those Mediterranean shores which had formerly known the syncretism of the Roman civilisation; a complete break was made which was to continue even to our own day. Henceforth two different and hostile civilisations existed on the shores of *mare nostrum*, and although in our own days the European has subjected the Asiatic, he has not assimilated him. The sea which had hitherto been the centre of Christianity, became its frontier. The Mediterranean unity was shattered." Later, Pirenne summarises his essential thesis: "The classic tradition was shattered because Islam had destroyed the ancient unity of the Mediterranean."

The net result of the Muslim conquest of the Mediterranean was to isolate Western Europe—or what was left of it in Christian hands—for the Arabs occupied Spain, Sicily and, for a time, even Southern France. And the further result of this was enormously to increase the power of the Catholic Church, which remained the sole rallying point of Christian Europe against the onslaught of the Infidels. The ages of faith, says Pirenne, in which society was subjugated to the totalitarian despotism of the Church, did not begin with the political débacle of the Roman Empire before the German invasions in the 5th century, but with the Arab conquest of the Mediterranean in the 7th. "It is strictly correct," he tells us, "to say that without Muhammed, Charlemagne would have been inconceivable." For Merovingian France, the most powerful of the German monarchies, was a secular State in which the Church was quite subservient to the State. The succeeding Carolingian Empire of Charlemagne—established after the Arab conquests—was, however, a theocracy: the Holy Roman Empire which began with the coronation of Charlemagne by the Pope in Rome in 800. With the Empire of Charlemagne, the Christian Middle Ages really began and they were the direct result of the Arab-Muslim invasions. In a sense, one might even add that Muhammed made the fortune of the Roman Catholic Church in the West.

Well, that is Pirenne's original thesis. I recommend this fascinating volume to all readers who are interested in the broad lines of both secular and religious history.

[*Muhammed and Charlemagne*, by Henri Pirenne. Allen and Unwin.]

This Believing World

Spiritualists got one of their regular shocks the other week when the *Sunday Pictorial* quoted a "well-known" medium, Mr. William Roy admitting that he was a "phoney." He added: "It is true that I have tricked women at seances but I did no harm." But the *Sunday Dispatch* and the *People* published interviews in which he protested that he was innocent of all the charges made against him. This reminds us of the way the Fox sisters, after making spirits rap for the American public for over forty years, also admitted that Spiritualism was a pack of lies—and then "retracted" their confession. The gullibility of the average person in "spiritual" matters is fantastic.

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Here is a particularly interesting example from *Two Worlds* (1/3/58). A correspondent writes to say, "I have become a staunch supporter of Spirtualism even without any evidence of Survival." Evidence is about the last thing a believer in spooks looks for or wants; and this appears to be equally the case with Christians. But the gentleman who believes without evidence wants to know where is Spiritualism's "philosophical side"? Alas, *Two Worlds* did not and probably could not answer him. Fancy asking for "philosophy" from some of our moronic mediums!

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Christians in Australia are broken-hearted that its educational system allows only Secular Education, and the Council for Christian Education in Schools has taken full-page advertisements in national newspapers such as *The Sun* pleading to be supported in its fight for *Christian* education. It is asking for £33,000 a year for, it moans, that there are 100,000 children in Victoria alone who receive no religious education except from a few visiting teachers and chaplains. The problem is a huge one for by 1960 it is estimated that there will be 400,000 children in Government schools.

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It goes without saying that this Christian Council wants highly paid (by the State) religious teachers, and it is quite interesting to note that in 1950 there was an Amendment of the Education Act allowing religious visiting teachers. Which proves once again how necessary is "eternal vigilance" against the priest and the parson. The aforesaid Council, of course, asks for your prayers as well as your cash!

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In California, the Roman Church is much more subtle. The terrible scourge of cancer gave it an excellent opportunity of battenning on more gullibility by discovering a heavenly saint—a cancer saint. This was St. Anthony Mary Claret, whose speciality was comforting and curing cancer sufferers—that is, so long as they supported "Novenas" organised by the Church. Sufferers could buy pictures of the Immaculate Heart of Mary or a "reliquary crucifix" of St. Anthony or his picture or medals or even an expensive book about him. St. Anthony is probably as imaginary a Saint as most of the others whose "biographies" were cooked up in the *Golden Legend* by Jacobus de Voragine in the thirteenth century. And there are still people who believe these lying stories!

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It would have been very surprising if Christian "scholars" had not speculated on those missing years of Jesus—from the day he "confounded" a bunch of Jewish scholars by his marvellous learning at the age of twelve to the glorious time when he preached his Gospel for the first time when he was about thirty. One gentleman, a Mr. Geoffrey Ashe (in the *Sunday Express*) thinks it highly probable—nay,

perhaps quite certain—that Jesus paid a visit to Britain with his uncle, St. Joseph of Aramathea. Jesus has been traced so far to Egypt, to India, to an Essene monastery, to Tibet—he could easily have come to Britain, especially with the aid of a humble miracle or two. It should not take too long before Jesus is proclaimed the Greatest Traveller that ever lived.

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But even Mr. Ashe has to talk about the "legends" which connect Joseph of Aramathea with Glastonbury, legends which obviously deserve another name, that of "lies." There isn't a scrap of evidence that there ever was this Joseph, or that he was the uncle of Jesus. Mr. Ashe cannot produce a scrap of evidence himself, but he nobly admits that if you prefer to believe them, he "has no idea how anybody could prove you wrong." He could have said the same of Santa Claus or St. Denis of France, and dozens of others who had no more real existence than Aladdin and his Wonderful Lamp.

Religious Assembly

THE SITUATION arose in the school in which I teach. Another member of the staff and myself wished to be excused attendance at religious assembly and asked the headmaster to allow us to do this officially. (Several members—so-called Christian—absented themselves regularly on the slightest pretext, and apparently "got away with it.") We asked because we could no longer be associated with many of the remarks made during this assembly.

Believing that this world is being torn apart by dogmatic beliefs and their inevitable associate, intolerance, we felt that we had to make a protest, especially when the headmaster insisted that only those who believe in Christianity, and have Christian standards, could lead a "good" life. This we know to be false, and a belief that can only lead to further intolerance towards, and even hatred of, non-Christians. Our protest took the form of this request to absent ourselves from religious assembly.

Our meeting with the headmaster was a stormy one. He gave us an ultimatum—either we attended assembly, or left the school. Although we knew that he was overstepping his authority, we could not then definitely quote the relevant Section of the 1944 Education Act. Later we found this Section, and again approached the head. This time he admitted that we were not compelled to attend any religious assembly, but referred us to the chairman of the school governors. By this time the affair had taken an unpleasant turn. We were called "disloyal and selfish."

I was absent when the chairman came to the school. My colleague in this matter—a younger man aged 29—was exhorted to renounce his beliefs because he might change them when he was older!! This is the essence of the chairman's part in the affair. Like the head, he agreed that we could not be compelled to attend any religious assembly, but asked my friend to reconsider his request, adding that he was prejudicing his career in even asking such a thing.

My colleague then asked for the matter to be referred to the divisional education officer. This was done, and, of course, we were allowed our request.

When telling us this, the headmaster said angrily that although we did not have to attend assembly, we must not, under pain of instant dismissal, discuss the matter in the staff room, or write to the press about it. He also added that we were employed by the divisional education officer, who was our master.

I add that although we requested a staff meeting, so that all the staff could hear about the matter, this was refused.

K. R. WOOTTON

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 welcome during normal office hours.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

A. L. BROWNE.—You could join the local N.S.S. Branch: Secretary, Mr. T. W. Hogan, 1 Lenthall Street, Liverpool, 4.

COLLIN COATES.—Your open letter, to be effective, should appear in an Australian paper.

B. J. LENEHAN.—Thank you for copies of the *Catholic Worker*; Mr. Ridley notes that it is still being published. We do not doubt your sincerity, but we should be insincere if we "humbled" ourselves before a God we do not believe in.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Room 4, 83 Suffolk Street).—Sunday, March 23rd, 7 p.m.: F. J. CORINA, "Millions now Living...?"

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics Institute).—Sunday, March 23rd, 7 p.m.: A Lecture.

Bristol Rationalist Group (Co-operative Education Centre, Prewett Street).—Wednesday, March 26th, 7.30 p.m.: Alderman W. H. HENNESSY, "Rationalism in Local Government."

Central London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, 5 minutes Edgware Road Tube).—Sunday, March 23rd, 7.15 p.m.: A. TURNER, "Marxism Today, a Critical Analysis."

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, March 25th, 7.15 p.m.: KATHILEEN NOTT, "Life and Literature in Post-War Japan."

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, March 23rd, 6.30 p.m.: E. TAYLOR, "Technology and Religion."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Hall, Upper Parliament Street).—Sunday, March 23rd, 2.30 p.m.: M. REDMAYNE, M.P., "The Nature of Modern Conservatism."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, March 23rd, 11 a.m.: A. ROBERTSON, M.A., "The Kingdom of Darkness."

West Ham and District Branch N.S.S. (Wanstead Community Centre, The Green, E.11).—Thursday, March 27th, 7.45 p.m.: L. EBURY, "Atheism and Morality."

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.: G. WOODCOCK. Sunday, 8 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, MILLS and 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.

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

M. ROGER PEYREFITTE'S brilliant best-selling satire on the Church of Rome, *The Keys of St. Peter* (Secker and Warburg, 18s.)—reviewed by Colin McCall in these columns last week—has, not surprisingly, been the centre of much controversy. The Rome newspaper, *Paesa Sera* recently reported that M. Peyrefitte intends to sue the official Vatican paper, *Osservatore Romano*, "to defend my honour

and my work as a writer." He had been accused of insulting the Pope. In Australia, the (London) *Evening News* now informs us (March 7th), the Customs Department asked booksellers to cease selling the book because it was "offensive to Roman Catholics" and referred the matter to the Literature Censorship Board. Fortunately, there was a strong press protest against possible banning, which presumably had an effect. Now the Literature Board has decided not to ban the book and the demand for it has exceeded supply. *The Keys of St. Peter* will interest and amuse all FREETHINKER readers and we shall be printing another article on the book (this time by Mr. C. G. L. Du Cann) next week.

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THE public meetings held by the Central London N.S.S. Branch continue to attract large audiences and, despite atrocious weather, there was another capacity audience on March 9th to hear Mr. Avro Manhattan. Nor do the lively discussions end with the closing of the meetings; in fact, there was an interesting sequel to a recent address by Dr. Manfred Lowengard, PH.D., a brief report of which appeared in our issue of February 14th. Dr. Lowengard had spoken on "Parapsychology," and in the course of his address claimed some measure of personal success with "Extra-Sensory Perception." Mr. Avro Manhattan, whose presence and participation in the meetings has been most welcome, invited Dr. Lowengard to attempt a demonstration of extra-sensory powers privately before a gathering of friends. The doctor accepting, a most interesting evening was enjoyed some days later at Mr. Manhattan's charming Kensington flat, with a dozen guests whose approach to the question of E.S.P. was open-minded and critical.

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Among the guests were several N.S.S. members, including Mr. J. M. Alexander, who chaired at the original meeting and at whose invitation Dr. Lowengard had given the address, and Mr. G. H. Taylor, who had offered some opposition at the meeting and who proposed certain tests for the demonstrator. Mr. Nigel Dennis, the playwright and author of *The Making of Moo*, gave much pleasure by his presence and participation, but Dr. Marie Stopes, who was to have come, was unfortunately snowbound.

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Faced with such a gathering it was apparent that any results would have to run the gauntlet of critical tests before being counted as successes. However, the experiments were quite negative, for neither in the capacity of agent nor recipient did Dr. Lowengard produce anything extraordinary. Nevertheless, thanks to a perfect host, the occasion was an entirely enjoyable one. This seems the right time to mention that Mr. Manhattan is a man of many parts and not merely the scourge of the Vatican. He is a writer of science fiction, an artist of no mean ability, and his address to the Branch on the "Problem of Time" showed him as a keen student of philosophical speculation.

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THE debate between Mr. T. M. Mosley, Vice-President of the National Secular Society, and the Archdeacon of Nottingham, the Very Rev. J. H. L. Phillips, at Ruddington Parish Hall on March 14th attracted a good audience. The Rev. Phillips, however, seemed extraordinarily apologetic—in the ordinary sense of that word—about his religion. As usual, Mr. Mosley put his views clearly and straightforwardly and, when discussion time arrived, other N.S.S. members contributed. Among them were Mr. J. W. Challand and Mr. R. Morrell. Mr. Morrell, incidentally, has had further letters published in his local press.

Joseph Lewis on American T.V. Again

(Address delivered January 20th, 1958, over Radio Station WMIE, Miami, Florida)

(Continued from page 83)

Man was not conceived in iniquity and born in sin. He is no more sinful than any other living creature.

And let me tell you another thing. A wrong act is irreparable. It cannot be wiped out. We can make amends, and try to atone for the injury inflicted, but the wrong *cannot be undone*. It cannot be eradicated.

Even a God is impotent in the face of a crime. For, when,

"The moving finger writes; and having writ,
Moves on: nor all your Piety nor Wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a line
Nor all your Tears wash out a Word of it."

The better code of morality is to understand the consequences of your acts and try not to commit a wrong; restrain yourself from inflicting an injury upon another.

It is often true that virtue is its own reward and a clear conscience is better than gold.

Perhaps with your cunning brain you cannot understand such an ethical code in the field of morality.

Do you keep a record of the conduct of those you have "saved for Jesus Christ"? How do you know that many do not commit the same "sins" over and over again—the so-called "back-sliders"?

The state is very much interested in keeping a record of its criminal population. Statistics are a valuable instrument in determining punishment and providing a means for the study of the elimination of crime. Must we, in this enlightened age, abandon all of our accumulated knowledge regarding the criminal tendencies of the habitual law-breaker, for your up-to-the-minute method of selling indulgences?

Look at the criminal records of the inmates in our penal institutions for proof that the religionists and those whose "souls" have been "saved for Jesus" fill our prisons and penitentiaries.

Let me give you but one instance, and I could give you thousands, of the falsity of your preaching, if such a thing were necessary. Do you remember the Bible-carrying and daily-praying Ronald Morrone? This pious young man regularly attended Billy Graham's New York Crusade at Madison Square Garden this past summer. He made a "decision for Christ." What did it do for him? The following morning, after he had given his "soul" to Jesus, he viciously and brutally killed an innocent fifteen-year-old girl because she refused to submit to his savage lustful advances.

Did "giving his soul to Jesus" restrain his criminal tendencies? It did not. He believes as you preach—commit any crime and God will forgive you. And that was exactly his defence. While sitting in his cell, reading his Bible, he consoled himself with the thought that God has already forgiven him his horrible deed.

What a perversion of Justice! Is it not obvious, even to the simple-minded, that such a system of religion breeds crime rather than prevents it? Not only that, but it makes the perpetrator callous to his own misdeeds!

Has Ronald Morrone any remorse for his dastardly crime? Is his conscience being scourged? It is not. On the contrary, he boasts that he finds consolation in his Bible reading, perhaps from the stories of rape and murder with which the "Holy Scriptures" abound and where the perpetrators find forgiveness and consolation from the Bible God. Shades of Ammon and King David!

And if Ronald Morrone is released from prison with no

remorse and with no lesson of restraint learned from his brutal murder, would he not commit the same crime and with the same feeling of impunity as when he so savagely killed his lovely schoolmate?

So much for the "saving grace" of Christianity, which R. G. Ingersoll so aptly said, "Sells crime on credit."

In addition to using the name of Jesus as an hypnotic medium to lull your audience into a state of lethargy, you resort to the use of the most degrading and horrible idea of fear ever conceived to stupefy the people. That is the doctrine of Hell. It is so monstrous that words are inadequate to properly describe it or to characterise the scoundrels who preach it. In your own words you call hell "a place of torment" and "where the worm dieth not."

As an added technique is your method of frightening people to give you their hard-earned money, to save them from the so-called wrath of your God and your mythical hell (and this is your own quotation), "If we miss the first resurrection, then the body shall remain in the grave for another thousand years." Mind you, another thousand years of torment! But if you believe in Jesus, you say, if you "accept Jesus, the book will be open—the book of life, which has the names of those who believe in Christ . . ." and they shall be saved from this eternal torment!

But, you continue, if you do not believe in Jesus, if your name does not appear in the book of life, then (and here are your own words again), "... whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."

And how will it be determined whose names appear in the book of life—by the simple expedient of giving you a contribution for God?

Man, have you no conscience? Have you no feeling of compassion for the sick and for the suffering? Don't you know that fear produces one of the most poignant sensations of pain? What kind of sadistic God, what kind of sadistic Saviour do you preach?

If I had the power to fashion the Universe, there would be no blind, no deaf, no dumb, there would be no crippled, and each child born would live free of disease, and possess a mentality capable enough to withstand all the rebuffs and disappointments of life.

You are merely using this monstrous idea of hell to make the poor deluded fools you preach to give up their hard-earned money for you to grow rich.

However, if there is such a place as the Hell you describe, then you are a fit subject for its torment. Here again, in your own words, is your own indictment. You say: "If you love money and you keep making money and you can't ever make enough and you're never satisfied, then you are in Hell."

I have a financial report of your condition—and how you must enjoy Hell! This report states that your wealth runs into the millions of dollars and that you are getting richer every day! And yet you call your evangelistic quackery a "non-profit organisation"! Non-profit to the gullible and the deluded men and women who give you their money on your false promises. What an outrage!

While you full well deserve to go where you so glibly tell others will be the fate that will befall them, if they fail in their contributions to you for God, you nevertheless will *not* go to Hell. You know as well as I do that there is no such place.

You are a scoundrel to preach such a depraved doctrine.

Let me repeat, you are a scoundrel to preach such a depraved doctrine in order to grow rich. It is too monstrous, too despicable, too reprehensible for words. And if language is incapable of characterising such a doctrine, how utterly inadequate it is to properly condemn the scoundrel who so brazenly, and so barefacedly, preaches it!

You are as guilty of a crime as the man who sells contaminated food. You poison the mind just as surely as the contaminated food poisons the body. Only one who possesses the mentality of a cunning hypocrite could stoop to such a nefarious and unscrupulous scheme for deceiving people with such callous indifference.

At one of your meetings you report that you "called for those who were suffering from tuberculosis to come forward." You say that "about 400 victims of the dread disease came and stood in front of the platform..." You infer in your statement that you cured these 400 victims of tuberculosis.

Where are they? How do you know that they were cured? How do you know that they were not moved to do your bidding out of pure mental suggestion or hypnotic influence on your part, or out of a form of exhibitionism "to demonstrate for God"?

You know that by preaching the "saving grace of Jesus" your audience is stirred to an emotional fanaticism which stultifies their brain and paralyses their intellect and makes them an easy prey to your charlatanism, only to leave them, upon realisation, with nothing but a cruel delusion.

How do you know that these people had tuberculosis in the first place? Do you have the medical knowledge and are you capable of diagnosing this frightful disease? Why

didn't you have a reputable physician present to examine these people when they came forward, and after they had been "cured," so you could be certain of the results?

What a wonderful opportunity you had to prove your powers. Do you know that there are thousands of institutions throughout the world who make it a speciality of treating tubercular patients who would have hailed your results with the greatest acclaim? But you know better than I do why you had no physician present. You know why. He would have given the *lie* to you.

And then again, don't you know that tuberculosis is a frightfully contagious disease, and if 400 sufferers gathered together in a public meeting of thousands of people, there was grave danger of infecting others and imperilling the health of the community?

You should be made to submit proof of your claims of healing or pay the penalty the law provides for misrepresentation.

Then you say, "I prayed for one boy who was suffering from epilepsy and he was cured." How did you know that he had epilepsy? Did he suffer a seizure in your presence? Have you enough medical knowledge to know whether a person is suffering from epilepsy? And if he really had epilepsy, how do you know that he was cured? What proof have you that he did not suffer a seizure after you left? Epilepsy is a baffling disease. It has afflicted and plagued mankind for thousands of years. If you could cure anyone of epilepsy, what a crown of glory would be placed upon your head. But you are lying. You are lying to make people believe that you have some kind of special power to relieve them of their afflictions. What a mountebank!

(To be continued)

Almighty God

By A. R. WILLIAMS

OCCASIONALLY a philosophical theologian discusses in vague, abstract or generalised terms the limitations of God, but for standard religious practice and among ordinary people God is Almighty; Almighty God! So nearly everyone is taught in the religious instruction he or she receives. Those with a taste for big words, hoping thereby to be more impressive, perhaps deluding themselves into the belief that they are thinking, may call the Deity omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient, but Almighty God is comprehensive enough.

This raises a host of problems. Sceptical or irreverent individuals may ask: If God is Almighty, why doesn't he cure the sick, heal the afflicted, give sight to the blind? On a broader scale: if God is Almighty, why doesn't he control the great phenomena of nature, such as plagues, pestilences, famines, earthquakes, droughts, hurricanes and other violent forces which torment and often destroy thousands of his favourite creation, man?

Or why did his creative Almightyness bring into existence so many birds and beasts of prey, reptiles and insects with poisons and stings, or capable of spreading disease as well as directly inflicting death; toxic vegetation, beside viruses and bacteria, some deadly to animals and man?

Such questions have teased and baffled priests and theologians for centuries, but no satisfactory answers ever come.

Vastly more intriguing is the problem: If God is Almighty, why doesn't he do more for himself? The human organisations devoted to propaganda on behalf of Almighty God are staggering in numbers, variety and intricacy of operations. We are told by the Churches that their

hierarchy consists of bishops, priests and deacons. That trinity is too simple for the complexities of advertising and publicising Almighty God; usually at profit to themselves.

So we read with awe, if not admiration, of popes, cardinals, archbishops, bishops, deans, canons, prebendaries, archdeacons, rectors, vicars, curates, ministers, pastors, lay readers and other witchdoctors all engaged in the stupendous task of helping God Almighty. Monks and nuns join in this divine mission. Artists and sculptors are commissioned to draw and paint and carve pictures and statuary, turning people's minds in the same direction. Likewise have musical composers fitted together their jigsaws of sound, with organs, orchestras and choirs proclaiming to the world the Almightyness of God. Yet that is not enough; poetry and periodicals and books must be devoted to it. In schools it is compulsory for teachers to instruct pupils that God is Almighty; outside a day has been set apart for the purpose, and laws passed, as Blasphemy Acts, defending God Almighty against attacks of puny humans who are supposed to be in the hollow of his hand. Not missing modern opportunities, the Churches have gained generous time and space in Press, broadcasting and television to boost the Almightyness of God.

It is all very curious. If God is Almighty, why doesn't he do all this advertising and propaganda for himself, leaving limited mortals to carry on with their comparatively petty activities? As Browning noticed: "And yet God has not said a word." One suspects he says nothing, no more than he does anything, because he does not exist to speak or act.

CORRESPONDENCE

WARTS CHARMED AWAY

In the weekly B.B.C. feature "What do you know?" there is an interval devoted to "What do you want to know?" in which questions asked by listeners on more or less scientific questions are answered by experts. On Thursday evening, January 30th, the question asked was "Can warts be charmed away?" To my surprise, the doctor brought in as the expert, and who for reasons of etiquette was anonymous, replied to this in the affirmative. When asked by the quiz-master if he was perfectly serious he said he was, quite firmly. This doctor said 70% of the cases of warts subjected to charms and similar magic treatments were successful. He said warts could by a magic ritual be passed on to an ash tree! He also said he had bought warts from patients and even mentioned a price of 2½d. per wart, after which transaction the patient's warts vanished! He even said that in cases where other treatments put away the warts, 70% of the cures were due to faith! He said a good deal more in the same strain. It seems to me this is of more than passing interest to Freethinkers. If a professional man subscribes to this sort of thing, officiating on the air as an expert, it is not to be wondered at if many still credit the Bible miracles.

Of wider interest is this doctor's statement in the discussion that warts are caused by a virus. As almost every disease nowadays except broken legs seems to be caused by viruses, it's a pity their vulnerability to magic has not been exploited to a greater extent to check the ever increasing cost of the Health Service.

G. S. BROWN.

THINGS TO COME?

The Archbishop of Colombo exalts the Church of Rome on the strength of a pun perpetrated by a medieval "Ronald Knox"—"Thou art 'Petrus' and on this 'petra' shall I build my church." Having perched Peter on the Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture, "mental reservation" compels the Most Rev. Dr. to add, "Here endeth the reading of God's Word." It is not meet to read further and find that, within minutes of the alleged "momentous declaration," Christ had put Peter in his *proper* place—"Get thee behind me, Satan, for thou observest not the things of the spirit!" It was remiss of the monkish interpolator of the falsehood to omit to expunge the fact, which reduces to an absurdity all Papal claims to authority.

As late as the 1940s we saw the Catholic "Christ" march with the Ustashi in Serbia, murdering 85,000 defenceless civilians and forcibly converting as many more! We have documented evidence that in one concentration camp they had a King of Cut-throats; his record, 1,320 in *one* day!

He was a graduate from a university dedicated to Saint Francis of Assisi!

Surely a forecast of things to come if the Diabolic Alliance of the Dollar and the Vatican is allowed to attain its objective of World Domination!

THOMAS DAVIDSON.

JESUS UNWORTHY OF DU CANN

Whether Christ was, or was not, mythical is immaterial. If we examine the "Teachings" on their own merits they do not stand up to scrutiny as well as the aphorisms of that other mythical figure mentioned by Mr. Du Cann—Hamlet!

The teachings seem false, nebulous, impracticable and ambiguous; when we look for a guide on mental afflictions we are fobbed off with nonsense about swine possessed by devils; when we turn the hallowed pages we find we are told to tear out an offending eye, and also to give all our possessions to the poor, thus impoverishing ourselves. Must we then wait for another Christian to give us *his* possessions, we being the *new* poor?

We can get no worthwhile guidance on disease, poverty or war, we are told He came not to bring Peace but a Sword. Whether mythical or not, these are hardly the teachings we might expect from an omnipotent and omniscient god. What would He have answered had He been asked about the shape of the earth? Would He have proved to be a Flat Earther? Could He have explained the motion of the planets or the properties of electricity? Judging by what is recorded, He seems to have had less knowledge than a modern twelve-year-old schoolboy. Why did He not use his alleged powers to improve the material wellbeing of his oppressed and backward people? He could have made them masters of the Eastern world and gained Himself credit and renown. I always enjoy reading Mr. Du Cann; I understand that he is a barrister. If I ever commit a crime I hope he will be my advocate. He is a wonderful defender of a poor case.

H. A. ROGERSON.

ROME'S ADVANTAGE

The best of luck to you in your cause (and mine) in trying to liberate our fellow men from the superstition that now seems to possess them. I fear greatly that we who cannot obtain a word in edgewise on any of the popular media, radio, TV, press, etc., are beating our heads against a stone wall, when compared with Romanist propaganda via films, radio, TV, etc. The ordinary person seems incapable of reasoning why a woman suffering from arthritis or glaucoma has to pay the expenses of a visit to France in order to be cured of her complaint when her poorer counterpart has to stay at home and get on with it. Only one in ten thousand is cured, and who created the germs, or allowed the disease to start in the first place?

A. L. BROWNE.

SERMONS IN CINEMAS

According to press reports, the Sedgley (Staffordshire) urban council have hitherto refused permission for the opening of the town's three cinemas on Sundays. "Now they have relented," so the report states, "on condition that an opportunity is given for a parson to deliver a short sermon from the stage, during an interval in the performance." But the clergy are not having any! The local vicar is reported to have stated in response to the request, that he had no curate nor had he any time to address cinema audiences on Sundays, while the president of the Local Free Church Council also "doubted the suitability of the occasion." Surely the Rip Van Winkles who compose the Sedgley council are old enough to realise that ministers of religion are too cunning to face the general public in an alien atmosphere. Besides if they are to be allowed to address cinema audiences on Sundays, it might give the local atheists the opportunity to get in a few awkward questions.

The big question now is: Will the cinemas be allowed to open without the entertaining clergymen? God only knows.

JAMES HUMPHREY.

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