

# The Freethinker

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—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

## A Vanished Christian Church

—By F. A. RIDLEY—

STUDENTS OF COMPARATIVE RELIGION know the extraordinary and unforeseen vicissitudes which have befallen so many of the world's religions. Thus, Buddhism, traditionally founded in India, is now virtually extinct in its land of origin. Similarly, Christianity, an Asiatic religion, has barely touched the fringe of its native Continent but has gained extraordinary and quite unexpected successes in Europe and America—continents with which the original preachers were totally unfamiliar. These turns and twists of fortune are not only interesting in themselves but have also a certain significance; pointing as they do towards a natural and human explanation of the rise of the religions in terms of their contemporary culture and sociology, as against their own claims to possess a supernatural origin.

### The Ancient African Church

One of the most conspicuous examples of a land which has undergone a total change of religious allegiance is North Africa—the modern Barbary States, Algiers, Tunis, Tripoli, Morocco—nowadays a fanatical Muslim land, as its present French rulers know to their cost; but in ancient times one of the most fanatical strongholds of Christianity. In classical North Africa—the Roman province of Africa—Christianity represented one of the most brilliant, as well as powerful, of the Christian Churches. The Roman African Church produced great men, men whose names have passed into history—Augustine, Tertullian, Cyprian—besides many lesser lights. Its impressive monuments still dominate the surrounding African desert. For Christianity in North Africa is “a tale that is told”; the owl and the lizard alone frequent the ruins where Augustine once shaped the outlines of history for the next millenium. Christian culture and Christian fanaticism have given way to the exclusive domination of the rival creed of Islam.

### The African Donatist Church

This little-known but extremely interesting episode in Church and in social history is admirably demonstrated in a scholarly book, *The Donatist Church*, by Dr. W. H. C. Frend, of Nottingham University. The Donatist Church—which Dr. Frend describes in his sub-title as “a movement of protest in Roman North Africa”—was an African schismatic Church which, for more than a century, vigorously opposed the orthodox Catholic Church in Roman Africa. We know a good deal about it from the writings of St. Augustine, who was one of its principal opponents, and who was the Catholic Bishop of the African seaport of Hippo during the heat of the Catholic-Donatist controversy, 395—430. In the opinion of Dr. Frend, this bitter struggle, which led at times to civil war, was one of the reasons for the subsequent obliteration of Christianity in North Africa. For, as he demonstrates, the struggle between Donatists and Catholics represented a social as much as an ecclesiastical combat between rival Churches. “What has the Emperor to do with the Churches?”

The above slogan of the Donatist Church was taken from

their African predecessor, Tertullian, who also ended by breaking with the Catholic Church. The actual points at issue between the Donatists and Catholic Orthodoxy were ethical and sociological rather than dogmatic. The Donatists, like Tertullian, opposed the growing worldliness and corruption of the hierarchy which, particularly after Constantine, had become more and more a State Church serving both God and Mammon. More and more it had allied itself with the old Roman state which the early Christians had denounced as the work of Satan. At bottom the clash was between two divergent views of Christianity. The Donatists were rigorists, the

“fundamentalists,” whilst the Catholic Church was increasingly prepared to compromise even to the extent of recognising such institutions as Caesarism, to which early Christianity had been bitterly opposed. Named after its first leader, Donatus, the Donatist Church arose over the question of the readmission of the *Traditores*, apostate Christians who had handed over the Scriptures at the order of the pagan officials during the last great persecution under Diocletian (303—311). The Donatists were not prepared to readmit such backsliders; the Catholics were more accommodating. From this comparatively trivial problem arose a merciless conflict within African Christianity. It drenched the country in blood and paved the way for foreign conquest: first by the German Vandals in the fifth century, then the permanent Arab conquest in the seventh.

### A Social Revolution

The Donatist “Church Militant” consisted of armed peasants known as “shrine-gangs” (*Circuncelliones*), who forcibly expropriated the Roman officials and the Catholic landlords in an agrarian revolution. The cleavage between the rival Churches was very marked. The Catholic, then as now, stood by the old social order—it was on the side of the Roman Empire and the big landowners, who were ruthlessly exploiting the impoverished peasantry of the North African countryside, under a system of chattel-slavery. The Donatists seem to have opposed the current social as well as religious order. And it is significant to note that, like the rather similar Anabaptists and Fifth Monarchy men of the Reformation, they set great store by the Apocalypse, no doubt because of its vigorous denunciations of the Roman Empire. Tychonius, the leading Donatist writer, wrote a commentary on the book, besides—according to Dr. Frend—providing St. Augustine with his famous conception of the Two Cities, which, as indicated before in these columns, was probably borrowed from Augustine's former Manichean co-religionists.

### St. Augustine: The First Fascist?

St. Augustine (354—430)—whom our author describes as “one of the leading men in human history”—was the great opponent of the Donatists in both Church and State. It was he who, more than anyone else, effected a viable compromise between Christianity and the old social order based

on political despotism and economic slavery. He may be described as the founder of ecclesiastical fascism, even perhaps the first Fascist? In ancient Africa, Augustine linked the Church and the old order just as his modern successors have linked them up in Spain. The result of this unholy alliance in Africa was the subsequent obliteration

of Christianity. Will a similar result eventually emerge in Spain? Did not someone once describe history as "Philosophy teaching by example"?

*The Donatist Church*, by W. H. C. Frend. Oxford University Press, 1952.

## The Ethics of Vivisection

By M. BEDDOW BAYLY, M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P.

THE SUBJECT OF VIVISECTION, admittedly a controversial one, is primarily ethical in its nature. For the justification of vivisection involves the right of the strong to exploit the weak, of the clever to take advantage of the less well-endowed with intelligence; it also places at a discount those human attributes of pity, compassion, justice, courage and *noblesse oblige* which are usually considered to distinguish mankind from the so-called brute creation.

In other words, it presumes a philosophy of selfishness; appeals to the instincts of fear and self-interest which most people deplore in the world to-day; and excuses any cruelty on the plea of expediency and advantage to the material welfare of mankind. The same arguments as those which are now used in the defence of vivisection were, in times that are past, advanced by the supporters of slavery, prostitution, cheap labour, and, I had nearly written, industrial unemployment. But this latter, one must still confess, is maintained by some to be an essential factor in industry. The "tyrant's plea—necessity" has in these cases, as in many others, been used to excuse the most devilish deeds.

Before we go any further, let us define precisely what we mean by vivisection. It may be popularly described as the subjection of living animals to various forms of experiment in the pursuit of scientific knowledge or in the course of pharmaceutical manufacture. It is a world-wide practice which by its very nature, and by reason of the endless permutation of possible investigations to which each new experiment leads, tends to increase in every country in the world where medical and scientific research is pursued.

The nature of the experiments to which animals are subjected is revealed in the scientific journals by the vivisectors themselves, and it is from this source that the evidence is culled by those who oppose the practice. The pain and suffering involved is, in a large number of cases, quite obvious and indisputable. In fact, it is freely admitted by many leading experimenters, has been the callous boast of some, and is taken for granted in the provisions and regulations of the Cruelty to Animals Act of 1876, which is supposed to restrict vivisection. The so-called "pain clause" which is attached to every licence to experiment allows an animal to be kept alive in severe pain that is not likely to endure, or in prolonged pain which is not severe until such time as the main object of the experiment has been achieved; after this point the animal must be killed if the pain is either severe or prolonged.

The ineptitude of this supposed safeguard is apparent the moment one realises that no one has ever defined either severe pain or prolonged pain, and in any case the research worker himself is allowed to be the judge of the animal's suffering. In addition an inspector may order the destruction of an animal under experiment if he considers it to be suffering "considerable pain." There are now five inspectors to supervise over 2,790,000 experiments in one year.

Now in Great Britain and Eire, experiments involving cutting operations have to be conducted under some form of anaesthesia, except in cases where this would frustrate

the object of the experiment, when an appropriate certificate dispenses with an anaesthetic. In other countries, there is not even this safeguard. But, in any case, the experiment proper frequently begins when the animal has recovered from the narcotic and it is during this observation period that much suffering may be endured before the animal dies or is killed.

Similar considerations apply to those so-called "pin-prick" experiments, which consist in the inoculation of bacteria and other noxious substances, in feeding and starvation experiments, in exposure to poison-gas, atomic radiation or blast; in exercising to the point of exhaustion in motor-driven revolving cages, and in many other types of experiment in which the use of anaesthetics is dispensed with. Space precludes the giving of examples; but so numerous are the types and variations of experiment, so repulsive many of the details recorded by the experimenters, that when they are quoted by anti-vivisectionists the reader is mistakenly led to believe that there must have been some exaggeration.

The ethical reasons for opposing the practice, then, are briefly that the doctrine that the end justifies the means is unsound, and that the qualities of the human character that alone make it desirable that man should survive on this planet are kindness, pity, compassion, courage and a clear perception of the kinship of all living things.

The scientific reasons are no less cogent. Logically the two viewpoints cannot be separated; for as the Universe is regarded today by scientists and philosophers alike as an integrated whole, it is clear that what is ethically right and approved by the highest instincts of mankind must also be scientifically sound. Only knowledge gained by ethical means can in the long run serve man's material health and welfare. In an ordered Universe man has no need to do violence to his humaneness in order to achieve that knowledge which he needs in the fight against disease, although desperate and determined efforts are constantly being made by supporters of this kind of research to prove the contrary.

From this point of view, then, vivisection stands condemned as an obstacle to true scientific progress. Medical history is strewn with examples of discarded theories and remedies based on animal experimentation which prove that the quick returns so confidently claimed and often sensationally advertised in Press and on the radio as being the result of vivisection, fail to be justified by later experience.

The alternative is, of course, clinical research, the study of man himself both in health and disease. More and more man is being regarded as an integrated whole, a synthesis of all those levels of conscious experience which constitute the Whole Man. Within himself, therefore, will the answer to his problems be found, for in a truly harmonious relationship between the different levels of his being—between his body, soul and spirit, some would say—and between him and his environment, including all other living things, animal as well as human, lies the key to his health, his happiness, and ultimately his attainment of world peace.

# The Holy Prepuce

By C. G. L. DU CANN

THE FRENCH NOVEL, *The Keys of St. Peter*, by Roger Peyrefitte, the diplomat, deals with Vatican society from the Pope downwards; and in so doing it is the most devastating and ironical exposure since the writings of Voltaire. The book gets its effect upon the reader by abstaining from all direct denunciation and ridicule, and by merely painting what exists in a factual manner. Its writer evidently knows Papal Court life of today at first-hand and pretty intimately.

After reading this book, one can never take the Roman Catholic Church and its pretensions seriously again. It becomes crystallised in the mind as absurd, grotesque, and contemptible for ever.

All very well for Cardinal Belloro, the real hero of the book, to say to young Victor Mas, the ostensible hero: "My very dear son, you must learn to know what the Holy Roman Church really is; and then love her all the more." But you just cannot—after this book. You can hardly retain a tinge of respect for her, except as the most successful of all criminal and ridiculous lunacies that have engaged the credulity of mankind. It will make many exclaim with Voltaire, "Stamp out the infamous thing," not, however, so much for its infamy, as for its idiocy.

Though the book is a very remarkable one, it is not a great novel. Its plot is negligible, almost non-existent. Except now and again, when they spring into momentary life, its characters are mere marionettes. Indeed, to my mind, Cardinal Belloro—though his talking is first-rate—only becomes alive when he dies, in the celebration of Mass at the end of the book. Victor, the young French seminarist, his spiritual son, is any young French seminarist. The heroine, Paola, the mistress of this young ecclesiastic, is any young harlot, chasing a cassock.

Indeed, the merit of the book is far less fictional than factual. Therein lies, no doubt, the secret of its success with the multitude as with the individual reader.

The Pope is the actual Pius XII of today, and there are other recognisable portraits of Vatican society, not even thinly disguised. The secret inner workings of the Church on such matters as canonisations, beatifications, indulgences, elections, relics and American finance, as well as ordinary cash transactions, are calmly depicted. We, like Victor, learn of such grotesque frauds as a feather of the Archangel Gabriel; clippings of the Holy Head, Beard, and Nails of the Lord Jesus Christ; and enough pieces of the True Cross to make a fleet of wooden battleships.

Of course, St. Peter's keys are the keys of the treasury holding Peter's pence, shillings and pounds—perhaps today, one should say dollars—the money upon which this Church's power and prestige securely rests.

Rome possesses even today many wonderful relics such as the 17 arms that belonged to St. Andrew, 13 of St. Stephen's, and 12 of St. Philip's. But formerly, if not now, she had much greater treasures: a sneeze of the Holy Ghost; a sigh breathed by St. Joseph when sawing wood at Nazareth; the tail of Christ's Ass; the Virgin Mary's milk. After the fall of Rome in 1870 many Italian reliquaries were seized and sold. Syndicates of Jews bought them up cheaply—and later resold them to the Church. Ultimately, it was discovered that the Church had rebought ten times as many relics as she had ever had, many being products of a fake-relics factory.

Perhaps the best story in the book concerns the sacred foreskin of Jesus Christ. St. Luke's Gospel tells how Jesus

was circumcised according to the Jewish law. But the apocryphal "Gospel of the Childhood" (not accessible to most English readers) tells us how the prepuce after being cut off in the cave, was put in an alabaster jar filled with oil of nard.\*

Working from this, in the Middle Ages, there were 14 "Holy Prepuces" of the Saviour piously revered in France, Italy, Spain, Belgium and Prussia. Barbarous Britain, and even Ireland, had none. However, in course of time, most disappeared. Fortunately for us all, one—needless to say the True One—remains to bless humanity. It is most reverently kept in the church of St. Cornelius and St. Cyprian at Calcata, near Rome.

In the year 1900, the Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office, in its wisdom, prohibited all writing or speaking of this holy relic—on pain of excommunication. It could only be exhibited to the local population on their annual feast-day from a distance, and without commentary. Foreigners could not see it without a special authority from the diocesan Bishop.

But in 1954, a petition was presented for the restoration of the Holy Prepuce to the devotion of the faithful. A Special Session of the Holy Office met to consider the question.

Four Most Eminent Lord Cardinals and other high dignitaries sat in conclave to debate this delicate and sacred subject. The miracles done by the Holy Prepuce were solemnly considered. Had not the sweet scent of this holy relic perfumed three women for two days? Had it not distinguished itself from the toe of St. Valentine and a tooth of St. Martin?

Ultimately, by five votes to four (one abstaining), the petition was carried. But the Lord Cardinals rejected it. The position of the year 1900 was restored, so that the authenticity of the relic stays unquestioned and it is available for veneration. One can only suppose that if the world lapses again into the superstition of the Middle Ages, when several Popes recognised such a relic, the Holy Prepuce may come in useful.

In the novel young Victor Mas, having the recommendation of the Cardinal, got the authority of the Bishop easily and went to see the Holy Prepuce at Calcata Church.

In a reliquary, costly with gold and diamonds, yet dust-covered, locked away from the profane, Victor and his four companions—two priests and two *chierichetti*—saw a couple of greyish membranes, curled into balls, and lying on a crystal disc.

And Father de Trennes, speaking "with fire," demanded: "Is not this the most extraordinary sight in the world?"

(In a sense, it certainly was!)

"Gentlemen," said the priest in a grave voice, "make the most of your privilege."

"A part of Christ's body."

While this exposure was going on, a fearful storm of thunder and lightning raged outside (the proper thing on such occasions, as we all know). The villagers, angry at their precious and unique relic being shown to strangers, came to the church demanding that it should be put under lock and key again at once. Evidently their ignorance agreed with the wisdom of the Lord Cardinals that their

\*Others say it was the navel-string that was preserved." I. Infancy 2. verse 2.

(Concluded on page 101)

## This Believing World

Almost with cheers, both sides of the House threw out the Bill demanding that our utterly absurd Sunday laws, some dating back to 1625, should be the subject of an inquiry. At the moment, it is illegal to row in a boat on Sunday, to play cricket outside one's parish, to sell ice-cream (God knows what the penalty ought to be for eating it on a Sunday), to dance or play billiards or go to a theatre, and there are lots more of things we mustn't do on God's Holy Day. As Mr. George Thomas, Labour member for Cardiff West, pointed out with emotion, "I happen to believe that Sunday is one of our remaining bulwarks of democracy. This motion will be open to floodgates." Mr. Thomas must thank the Lord for providing another bulwark in the Lord's Day Observance Society.

★

It would be a pretty safe bet to make that all the pious Members of Parliament who voted against the enquiry would see any TV show on a Sunday, and eat ice-cream at the same time, without turning a hair. Yet it is illegal to Watch TV on a Sunday, as any indignant member of the L.D.O.S. would tell them; though, of course, as Mr. Renton, of the Home Office, was obliged to admit, this would be under an "obsolete" law. But what about the utterly absurd "blasphemy" laws? Are they not also just as silly and as "obsolete" as our hopelessly antiquated Sunday laws?

★

Many of the most callous and fiendish child and animal torturers are fully-believing Christians, and a typical example has just earned a year in prison for burning her twelve-year-old niece with a red hot poker. The unfortunate child was the household drudge and she "took" a biscuit, for which heinous crime her aunt, Mrs. Box, deliberately branded her with the poker. In sentencing her, Mr. Veale, Q.C., the chairman, said, "The whole of this case makes us think that somewhere at the back is a twisted and perverted religious motive..." Why "perverted" religious motive? The wholesale burning of witches only 300 years ago, some of them mere children—was that also due to "perverted" religion?

★

From the Vatican comes the heavenly news that 70 Roman Catholic universities and hundreds of colleges "are spreading modern science and ancient Catholic doctrine in the world." The operative word is "modern" science—as if modern science and ancient (and, of course, primitive) beliefs could perfectly mix. Leaving aside the burning of Bruno and the inhuman treatment of Galileo, what about Professor Mivart? He was an eminent Catholic scientist who was forced to accept Evolution, and was promptly excommunicated by the medieval monks in the Vatican.

★

In the "Sunday Pictorial" last month the Rev. C. O. Rhodes was told by a reader that "there never has been or never will be a miracle," though this reader actually believed in God. He claimed that if miracles were possible, then God must have slipped up. And how did Mr. Rhodes answer? He merely pointed to the way "medical science is now helping us to explain the healing miracles of Jesus," which came as a result of "his perfect love and faith." Thus miracles are absolutely possible, and God never slipped up! Could anything more eloquently prove the reverend gentleman's supreme contempt for the gullibility of the *Sunday Pictorial* readers?

★

The speaker on ITV religion the other Sunday was the Rev. Fr. S. Blake, O.P., and his subject was "Peace" with

a special emphasis on the utter failure of Science during last century and this to maintain it. From his long discourse, one would never have suspected that the two world wars this century were actually waged by *Christians* for the most part—indeed their armies all had chaplains whose special mission was to see the soldiers had plenty of Christianity. It was almost impossible for a British soldier to affirm his non-belief, while in the first World War all German soldiers had "God with us" inscribed on their belts. Fr. Blake knew this, of course—but had he said it, no doubt some "fault" would have caused the TV set *not* to function!

## FROM SARAWAK

MY CORRESPONDENT IN SARAWAK tells me that prudish missionaries have recently been responsible for causing trouble between the natives of the Dyak tribe and Europeans. It seems that tribal converts were stopped from attending an R.C. service as they were "improperly dressed on parade" (the girls wear only a skirt traditionally—it's a hot climate!).

Another mission in the interior, Protestant this time, had a special shipment of brassieres and blouses brought in. Mothers used to breast-feeding their babies without enraging the public morals now "run for cover" if they see a missionary approaching.

That well-known product manufactured by the Protestants—the "Gloomy Sunday"—has been exported to the natives, and villages accustomed to week-end jollity have been reduced to Sabbatarian morbidity.

Besides insisting on a silent Sabbath, the Protestants have preached the evils of smoking and drinking. As the native diet includes an alcoholic rice drink which supplies necessary vitamins, the result of the missionary drink-ban has been that some natives are now reporting sick—with vitamin deficiency! To those who believe the welfare of the soul takes precedence over the welfare of the body, this is a trifling matter, of course.

One tribe became extremely confused recently when rival denominations, each with their own brand of the "one-and-only Truth," became active in their area at the same time. Government officials were needed to create an uneasy armistice between R.C.s and Methodists in another area. Like gold miners (perhaps a fitting analogy?) each had "staked a claim"—to the same place!

My correspondent—who must remain anonymous—assures me that a good half of the Europeans (including many government officials) are extremely disturbed at these missionary activities.

However, traders are frightened of losing business and officials fear being reported as "anti-religious" to their superiors—who probably fear being reported to London—so few will complain.

In the meantime, the natives are being given a typically Christian education—to be ashamed of the body (which is in the image of God), to exchange native mythologies for European superstitions, to forget simple pleasure on God's Holy Day, to believe that their tribe (Protestant) is better than the neighbouring tribe (Catholic)—or *vice versa*.

Immediate benefits can be seen from this type of education. A covered bosom and a closed mind are the most apparent.

D. SHIPPER

—NEXT WEEK—

A . I . D .

By F. J. CORINA

# 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

S. W. BROOKS.—You are confusing determinism with fatalism.  
 M. J. HUBBLE urges readers to talk about *The Dollar and the Vatican* in "the places where people read, the public libraries."  
 E.F.C.—"The person who says THE FREETHINKER should take up politics usually means it should champion his politics," said Chapman Cohen years ago. We think his comment still applies.

## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics Institute).—Sunday, March 30th, 7 p.m.: G. R. ASITON, "Not by Bread Alone."  
 Central London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, 5 minutes Edgware Road Tube).—Sunday, March 30th, 7.15 p.m.: G. PLUME, "The Dialectics of Nature."  
 Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, April 1st, 7.15 p.m.: Closing Meeting of the season. Readings from Lord Snell's *Autobiography*. Social interval and light refreshments.  
 Dagenham (Methodist Central Hall, Heathway).—Friday, March 28th, 8 p.m.: Open Discussion on God. (See Notes and News.)  
 Glasgow Secular Society (Central Halls, 25 Bath Street, Room 7).—Sunday, March 30th, 3 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, "Communism and Religion."  
 Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, March 30th, 6.30 p.m.: RITA MILTON, "Religion and the Class Struggle."  
 Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Wheatshaf Hotel, High Street).—Sunday, March 30th, 7 p.m.: F. J. CORINA, "Heaven and the Space Ships."  
 Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Hall, Upper Parliament Street).—Sunday, March 30th, 2.30 p.m.: M. SANDELSON, "Labour and the Modern Society."  
 South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, March 30th, 11 a.m.: D. STARK MURRAY, M.D., "Pills and Free-will."

### 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.: Messrs. T. M. MOSLEY and R. POWE. Sunday, 11.30 a.m.: R. POWE.  
 West London Branch N.S.S.—Every Sunday, at the Marble Arch from 4 p.m.: Messrs. L. EBURY and A. ARTHUR.

## Notes and News

We have had the always unpleasant task of rejecting many articles recently. This, if course, is a constant problem with so limited a space and writers usually accept rejection philosophically. It does not always imply that the article is valueless. More often it means that the article is (1) made redundant by a similar article already in type, or (2) is received subsequent to a decision to close the controversy and thus clear the space for other topics, or (3) deals with a subject that has already had considerable airing, and to

## CENTENARY

March 31st, 1858

HYPATIA BRADLAUGH BONNER,  
 second daughter of Charles Bradlaugh, born.  
 Semper Fidelis

which nothing new is added by the rejected article, or (4) is likely to be back-dated by the time it could be got into the paper (this also applies particularly to letters), or (5) is too long in such a way that cutting would destroy the import, or (6) is illegible. Ideally, articles and letters should be presented in treble-space typing with margin left (the treble space being for sub-editing and the margin for printers' notes), and essentially written on one side only. In the absence of a typewriter, legible longhand is always acceptable.

★

AN open discussion will take place at the Methodist Central Hall, Dagenham, this evening (Friday, March 28th) at 8 o'clock, following correspondence between the minister, the Rev. C. Alan Stephens, and the Secretary of Dagenham Branch of the National Secular Society, Mr. George W. Warner. The minister has invited Mr. Warner to be there with his friends, and the occasion should be an interesting one. Secularists in the neighbourhood should attend if possible.

★

THE Manchester Branch, National Secular Society, is to extend its indoor season to April 13th, when Mr. Dave Shipper of Cardiff will be the speaker. The week following Bradford Branch will be holding an important meeting, when Mr. O. C. Drewitt will be lecturing.

★

MR. JAMES RADFORD'S debate on Survival with Mr. Horace Leaf, the Spiritualist, drew a large crowd. Many of them, of course, were Spiritualists and, as such, beyond redemption; but the Secularist's reasoned arguments must have appealed to the uncommitted. Who, for instance, would accept Mr. Leaf's view that it could be a "coincidence" that the thumb print in Mrs. Crandon's ectoplasm (alleged to be "Walter's") should be identical with that of the lady's dentist, who had shown her how to take such thumb prints by making his own, which Mrs. Crandon kept? It *could* be, of course, but it seems "stretching coincidence just a little bit too far," as Mr. Radford remarked. Funny, isn't it? For Spiritualists it can never be coincidence that one should, say, dream about a loved one about the time he or she is dying, or meet an old friend about the time one is thinking about him. No, these cannot be coincidental; but identical thumb prints in suspicious circumstances can!

## THE HOLY PREPUCE *(Concluded from page 99)*

treasure was too good for the rest of the world outside Calcata, even for such highly-favoured few as the Rt. Rev. Lord Bishop of Civita Castellana, Orte and Gallese, the local diocesan, might permit to have a brief glimpse.

It is sad to think that you and I and the rest of Christendom and Heathenese can only have access to the rest of the Body of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist, if Holy Church allows us to receive it. The doctrine of Transubstantiation never mentioned the Holy Prepuce being at Calcata.

One day when I am in Rome, I must take the train to Calcata. For it seems absurd for a citizen of the world to miss seeing "the most extraordinary sight in the world" during his brief sojourn in this vale of tears. Meanwhile, after reading this novel, no one would trust the Roman Church with the keys of a child's money-box, let alone the keys of Heaven and Hell—unless all these receptacles are empty.

# Joseph Lewis on American T.V. Again

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

(Continued from page 95)

WHAT A CONVENIENT SCHEME you have to make money! Your religion is all profit; your stock in trade is *sin*. You have no merchandise to buy, no commissions to pay, and no refunds to be made for unsatisfactory results, and on top of this you threaten with Hell-fire all those who do not believe as you want them to. And to add insult to injury, you enjoy tax exemption on your 100% profit, while honest business men must pay taxes to support your chicanery! What a mockery!

Thomas Paine said—

No man ought to make a living by religion. It is dishonest so to do. Religion is not an act that can be performed by proxy. One person cannot act religion for another. Do you know that while you can carry on your Fake Healing in the State of Florida, a reputable physician would be put in jail if he tried to practice medicine without a special licence?

I have a friend who is a distinguished physician, a graduate of Johns Hopkins University. He offered his services some years ago during an epidemic here in Miami and he was told by city officials that if he attempted to offer medical advice, he would be subject to arrest!

Imagine that! A qualified physician is prohibited from giving medical advice and rendering help to the sick and the suffering, while you can carry on your fakery with brazen impunity.

Now listen to this and see how it sounds to your own ears because they are your own words: You say that

"The most . . . exciting thing that took place (in one of your so-called healing campaigns) was in the case of a man who *indicated* to me that his feet were crippled and he couldn't walk. He tried to walk with a large cane. I prayed for him and then suggested that the man try to walk. And walk he did!"

How did you know that this man couldn't walk in the first place? Did you examine him? How could you tell whether or not he was a faker?

A writer whose father was a preacher told me that on many occasions he acted as a "shill," as the gamblers call it, under conditions similar to your scheme. Imagine, using his own son to deceive his congregation! Was this man planted in the audience to act as a stooge for you?

Have you medical knowledge enough to know whether the man was really crippled and did not feign his inability to walk? Again, why didn't you have a physician there to examine him and why didn't you have the same physician to examine the man after your ministrations, to determine the results? And where is this man? What is his name? Have you a picture of him? And what proof can you submit that he was cured?

I make this public challenge to you. Come with me, and with three reputable citizens of our choosing, to a hospital where the blind are confined. Let the physician in charge bring you a person who cannot see. I will give the Variety Children's Hospital of Miami \$10,000.00 if you cure that person of his blindness.

I do not want any of your hypocritical excuses that "under certain circumstances" or that "God does not work that way," or that you do not accept challenges. You either accept this challenge and produce results or suffer the consequences for your cruel lying. I demand that you produce one of your "miracles" today, not one of yesterday, or tomorrow, but today, in broad daylight, where honest men can witness it.

There is a special reason why I make this offer to you. It is because you have the dastardly and unmitigated gall to announce that you have printed some of your sermons in Braille for the use of the blind!

Here is further evidence of your brazen hypocrisy and callous disregard for the feelings and afflictions of others. In all the history of imposture I do not know of a comparable instance.

In the first paragraph of your letter, from which I quoted, you state that "a man received his sight," referring, of course, to your healing powers because of your direct contact with Jesus. Where is that man? What proof have you that he was ever blind? What proof have you that his sight was restored? Until you produce such proof, certified by people of unquestionable integrity, you must stand condemned as a cruel impostor.

If you can cure the blind, as you say you have done, what need is there for them to read your sermons in Braille? Why not let them read your sermons with their restored eyesight? So insatiable is your greed for money, and so utterly indifferent are your feelings as to the sufferings of others, that you impudently beg from those who can see to contribute money to be used to print your nonsense and lies for the blind to read in Braille!

How utterly incongruous! How utterly unbelievable. To add insult to injury, you have the brazen effrontery to tell those who suffer from blindness that it is God's will that they are so afflicted! If so, then why do you tell them that you can restore their sight? As Shakespeare would say, what "an odious, damned lie"!

If you cure but one person of blindness, if you cure but one person of tuberculosis, if you cure but one person of cancer, if you cure but one person of heart trouble, if you cure but one person who is dumb and make him talk, if you cure but one person of his deafness, if you make but one person walk who is crippled, if you relieve the pains of suffering humanity, as you so boastfully claim, then I shall go to Washington, D.C., our nation's capital, and seek a personal interview with the President of the United States, and shall urge upon him that you be appointed the head of the nation's Department of Public Health, Education and Welfare, and I shall write to every United States Senator to approve your appointment. I shall, in addition, petition the American Medical Association to confer upon you its highest and most exalted honours for your achievements in the field of medicine, and I shall personally appeal to such philanthropic organisations as the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations to give you a minimum of one million dollars for your services to mankind. What more do you want?

An honest man who claimed to do what you so boastfully announce you have accomplished would accept this offer with gladness. A liar, a hypocrite, and a scoundrel would not accept this challenge. In what category do you belong?

(To be concluded)

## TURN THE OTHER CHEEK?

AFTER a woman had hit a priest with a bottle during High Mass in Westminster Cathedral on Sunday, March 23rd, Father Adrian Arrowsmith said: "The next time anyone tries anything like this there will be a Rugger tackle from half a dozen priests to stop it." (*Daily Express*, 24/3/58.)

# Old English Deities

By G. H. TAYLOR

## REVIEW

*The Lost Gods of England* by Brian Branston. Thames and Hudson London, 1957. 194 pages. 25/-.

THE MYTHS which amuse us today were not originally devised for that purpose. They arose as explanations of man's world, embodying stories of creation, fertility, doom, salvation and disaster. The instrument of "revelation" was the poet or the minstrel-poet like Caedmon; with the advent of the scientist his occupation is gone; he is no longer needed in that capacity.

If a community is without the means of committing its lore to writing its myths will certainly tend to disappear, or at least to become swamped by rival myths which are communicated to successive generations by written records.

The Old English were converted to Christianity before they could write their ancient pagan myths. Writing became a prerogative of the Christian clergy, who then seized their chance to suppress native pagan lore. In order to reconstruct the Old English mythology Mr. Branston has delved into all manner of relevant material and his book is quite a minor triumph of archæological investigation.

A great joy has gone into the making of this book and the author has been able, I think, to communicate much of it to his reader. It is no mere record of discoveries—though the author has worked hard for his discoveries—and with zest for the job. It is also an essay in speculation, for there is much to explore in this field. Our author theorises without ever losing touch with the facts.

It is common knowledge that the days of our week take their names from Ex Old English deities—the sun, the moon, Tiw, Woden, Thunor and Frig, and Mr. Branston has searched for the reconstruction of their stories.

The Angles, Saxons and Jutes were worshipping such deities even after England had become "Christian" and our author contends that heathenism was not suppressed even up to the time of the Norman Conquest. (Even as late as Canute it had been found necessary to legislate against it.)

Even when Christianised, the poets would still sing about the old gods and heroes but, as often happens, the gods of the displaced religion became the devils of the new. (This is reflected in Nigel Dennis's play, *The Making of Moo*, wherein the displaced god Ega becomes the opposite number of Moo.)

Even when the names of the old gods are dropped, their stories often continue in a Christian setting. The Old English, contends Mr. Branston, made the transition from Balder to Christ easily, the later story being accepted as an extension of the previous. An Anglo-Saxon poem deals with Christ as a young hero badly treated. This is Balder, son of a goddess mother Frig (whose records are wiped out as constituting a rival to Mary). He bleeds to death from cruel wounding and goes for a time to the Underworld. His resurrection is linked with spring fertility. The parallel is worked out by our author in his chapter, "Balder into Christ."

Among other myths, the Old English had a story of a Flood, told in *Beowulf*. The Bible Flood story derives from a Mesopotamian story of a "Sumerian Noah" called Ut-Napishtim, but there are over 500 different World Flood myths from the Sumerian to the Amerindian, and the *Beowulf* poet, as Mr. Branston shows, was Christianising pagan material; in *Beowulf* there is significantly no mention of the Ark.

There are several parentheses which hint that the author would be worth reading on one or two kindred topics. I could wish to read him in greater detail on the transition from Roman to Anglo-Saxon rule. If, for instance, one could step into the Britain of 440 A.D., what sort of racial stock would be met with and what would be the social structure? If the North-West European folk had been "nibbling" at Britain for many generations despite Roman occupation, had they made any definable impact on the stock and on the customs? Could they have befriended the natives rather than the Romans, in view of the fact that some Saxons, when they came in numbers to settle round London and the Thames, already bore Ancient British names? Was the major transition smooth, facilitated by existing family ties? How much "God-swopping" was done?

*The Lost Gods of England* leaves the impression of a book well done, and, we hope, others in the making. We hope to publish an extract which will be timely for Easter.

## British University Rationalist Group

MR. P. E. J. JORDAN sends us a very full report of the first open meeting of the Bristol Rationalist Group held at the University, Bristol, on March 6th. A large audience of 150 was addressed by Dr. W. Grey Walter, of the Burden Neurological Institute, Bristol, who began by giving a few details of his personal background. He was an atheist, not by any emotional reaction to upbringing, but because his family had been so for the last two generations. He had also grown up with a world outlook.

Turning to other matters, Dr. Walter referred to the intense specialisation necessary for scientists today, which resulted in their inability to assess situations outside their particular field of inquiry. A similar process, he said, was taking place throughout society: one's friends tended to be less and less one's immediate neighbours and more and more scattered throughout the country and throughout the world. Dr. Walter did not know his neighbour's name, but he was a great friend of, here a Russian scientist, there an American one.

As leisure time increased with automation, people's decisions on what they did would become more important. In perhaps 20 years' time the ordinary man might be faced with the possibility, not only of reading a book or going for a walk, but whether to do this in his own town or at the South Pole.

Dr. Walter then spoke about probability. All events, he said, were probabilistic, though the degree of uncertainty was very small in the field of everyday life. Religion, in its final phase, was—thought Dr. Walter—staking all on the fact that events were probabilistic, not certain, but he himself saw only a natural process in the probabilistic nature of events. Theistic deductions which religionists were trying to make from this uncertainty represented a dangerous modern trend which scientists should expose, he concluded.

Mr. Jordan emphasises the success of this first meeting, which augurs well for the future of this Bristol Rationalist Group. He has, however, one comment to make on Dr. Walter's remarks. The speaker, Mr. Jordan thinks, might have indicated the distinction—even at sub-atomic level—between "undetermined" and "indeterminable" events.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### CHRISTIAN CASUISTRY

According to the author of a recent book, *Hospital in the Bush*, the heathen is not always taken in by the propaganda of the missionaries, for he recounts this incident as a reason why a chief would not become a Christian. The chief said in reply to the missionary: "You have a good excuse for everything. If a good man is rich and healthy, you say God is rewarding him. If a bad man is rich and healthy, you say he will be punished in the next life. If a bad man is poor and ill, you say that he is being punished here on earth, but if a good man is poor and ill, you say he is being tested and will have his reward in Heaven. How am I to understand you, and how do you know that these things are so?"

C. H. NORMAN.

### THE CASE FOR PETER ANNET

As author of the monograph *Peter Annet*, published by the N.S.S., may I state the case for his authorship of the pamphlet, *David: the Man after God's Own Heart, 1760?* Mr. Ridley suggests that Peter Annet should be ruled out because the author "speaks respectfully of Christ as opposed to his derogatory account of David" and that in Annet's own writings he was hostile to Christ. Admittedly, this is his general attitude, but it is not invariably so.

Voltaire ascribed the authorship to Annet. When Voltaire came to England in 1726 he was the guest of his friend Bolingbroke. He there met many of the foremost Deists of the time, including friends of Woolston, if not that great scholar in person. It seems unlikely that he should have met Peter, who was then only in his twenties. Surely, however, Voltaire would not, without evidence, have stated Peter Annet to be the author. He had made many friends in England, and was kept well informed about Woolston.

But I base my case chiefly on the similarity of the pamphlet on David to that of an earlier one, published anonymously in 1744 and known to be the work of Annet. It also is directed against the very same Dr. Samuel Chandler. I have the volume by me. Here is the full title: "The History of Joseph considered; or the Moral Philosopher Vindicated Against Mr. Samuel Chandler's Defence of the Prime Ministry and Character of Joseph. Occasionally interspersed with Moral Reflections on Important Subjects. By Marcus Philaletius." Then follow quotations from the Book of Job and from Ovid. "London: Printed for M. Cooper at the Globe 1744."

Peter Annet showed great partiality for the word "considered." He wrote in his own name "The Conception of Jesus Considered," "Social Bliss Considered in Marriage and Divorce: Co-habiting Unmarried and Public Whoring," 1749; "The Resurrection of Jesus Considered," 1744; "The Resurrection Reconsidered," "The Sequel of the Resurrection Considered," 1745.

The name Cooper appears as the printer on several other of Annet's works, and the virile, brilliant style abounding in wit is extremely similar in the Histories of David and Joseph and in the "Free Enquirer." We are unable to prove authorship but I think the case for Annet most provable.

ELLA TWYNAM.

### THE PROBLEM OF PERCEPTION

Mr. Broom raises three questions in relation to Berkeley: the "existence" of an unperceived table, the cause of our sensations, and the problem of perception. Much as I would like to discuss the second and third (and I think Russell is wrong), let us not strain our admirable Editors' patience, but rather confine ourselves to the first and easier question. Here I persist that Berkeley was right in saying that absolute certainty arises only when one perceives (sees, touches, feels) the table. What happens to the table when it is not perceived is inference only, which inference assumes varying degrees of probability according to circumstances. I freely admit that if, after I have seen a table, it is covered with a cloth, the probability that the table is beneath the cloth becomes extremely high; but it cannot reach the certainty of perception. I am pretty sure that a conjuror could produce the illusion of a table beneath the cloth.

By "existence" Berkeley meant that which is perceived. We now use "existence" to mean that which persists independent of perception, and however useful this meaning may be in rough everyday language (just as we continue to talk about the sun rising when every schoolboy learns that the sun never rises an inch), it is, I think, important to recognise that only perception is absolutely certain; all the rest, from the "existence" of matter to the existence of God, is inference, assumption, of which we can have no certain evidence, but only varying degrees of belief.

HENRY MEULEN.

### THE MOSLEM YEAR

Our doughty freethought champion, Mr. Cutner (May his shadow never grow less!) fails to appreciate that the Moslem year, being lunar, is about eleven days shorter than our solar year, and so the two cannot march in step. Any authority will confirm this. To convert dates from one system to the other it is necessary to multiply by a constant with about ten places of decimals, in which most of us could make a slip. The quickest and safest method I know for dates up to 2000 A.D. is with the aid of tables appended to Wollaston's Persian-English dictionary.

W. E. HUXLEY.

### "RACISM"

Ellis Allen, in reply to F. A. Ridley's comment that the Racist Dogma has an inherently unscientific character, asks "Would it be surprising if some races of mankind had better bodies or better brains than others?"

With reference to the better bodies, I feel sure that the brawn and bodily stature of the coloured and less civilised races compare quite favourably with that of the whites.

Regarding the "better brains," I would ask, better for what? To live, the civilised races have to manifest a different brain working from that required by the backward races living in different conditions.

I have come in contact with many of the coloured races, and have been agreeably surprised at the many academic degrees and honours of the highest order acquired by them in this country, in the U.S.A. and in other places.

This seems to show that circumstances being favourable and opportunity given, people of those races are quite capable of making full and creditable use of them.

With the coloured races, as with the white races, brain power may vary from individual and individual, but I do not think that better or less brain power is determined by colour or race.

WM. M. MCALPIN.

### OBITUARY

WE regret to announce the death of Charles Blee, of Rutherglen, Lanarkshire. Mr. Blee was brought up a Roman Catholic, but he left the Church shortly after the First World War. He was an enthusiastic member of the National Secular Society and a regular reader of this paper. We express our sympathy to his daughter, Mrs. M. Russell, and her husband, who are also members and readers.

NOTABLE PAMPHLETS: *St. George and the Dragon* by F. A. Ridley, price 1d.; *Social Catholicism* by F. A. Ridley, price 1d.; *The Religious Revival* by G. H. Taylor, price 1d.; *BBC, ITA and Atheism* by Colin McCall, price 3d.; *Problems of Church and State* by F. A. Ridley, price 4d.; *France and the Vatican* by F. A. Ridley, price 4d. The six pamphlets 1/-, including postage, from The Pioneer Press, 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

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