

The Freethinker

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THE PRESENT YEAR of grace represents not only the year 1958 as calculated by medieval monastic chronology, but equally the year 100 of the descent of the Virgin Mary to the Grotto of Lourdes in 1858. There, where the Mother of God appeared to Bernadette Soubirous—or so, at least, the visionary herself reported—centenary celebrations are being held this year. The citizens of the formerly insignificant French mountain town at least, have very material reasons for thanking the Mother of God for putting them on the map—and in the money. We assume that the blessed Mother of God has long since been presented with the freedom of Lourdes, upon which she has seen fit to confer, not only celestial beatitude, but equally, terrestrial prosperity.

Feminine Saints

The biographies of saints are, with rare exceptions, dull affairs; and that of the pious but illiterate Bernadette appears to be no exception. Nor does that of the still living recipient of the more recent communication of the Blessed Virgin at Fatima. Truth to tell, we think that Matthew and Luke were well advised to spare us more biographical details about the Holy Mother of God herself and thus to leave so much to be filled in by the pious imagination of the faithful themselves! Female saints appear to be, in general, even duller than their male counterparts in the celestial hierarchy. One only occasionally encounters a Joan of Arc or a St. Theresa of Avila. None the less, for reasons strikingly analysed by a French psychologist and sociologist, the Catholic Church seems nowadays to have quite a line in feminine saints who, if viewed simply as human beings, do not reveal those remarkable qualities which are no doubt visible to the angels. Not to mention the appropriate ecclesiastical authorities at Rome, who are technically responsible for the elevation of departed Christians to the rank of canonised saints. One of the most mediocre of these holy personages who have been canonised in recent years was the French nun, St. Thérèse de Lisieux (1873-1897), who was canonised by Pope Pius XI in 1925, and whose brief earthly career and posthumous sanctity forms the subject of a revealing study by a French author, Pierre Mabille.

It is now being translated into English, and it is to be hoped that this penetrating study of modern Catholicism will soon be made available by some enterprising publisher for the benefit of the critically minded.

St. Thérèse de Lisieux

Froude once concluded an ecclesiastical biography with these words: "Such is all that is known to men about the Blessed [So-and-so] but not more than is known to the angels in Heaven." One might, as far as the facts of her earthly pilgrimage are concerned, say much the same of the more recent French saint. She was born at Alençon in 1873 and died in 1897. She had been in the convent since the age of 15, a vocation in which she had been preceded by her four sisters. Thérèse, who was the youngest, came

from a bourgeois and military family and was reared in what her biographer describes as "the dull mediocrity of a French provincial Catholic bourgeois family." The only unusual incident in her placid, obscure, terrestrial existence was a visit to Rome to overcome certain, not clearly specified, difficulties which hindered her entry into the convent. Her earthly Carmelite life was not apparently marked by any exceptional deviations from the monotonous conventual routine—certainly not by any intellectual interest even of a theological character. Though some of her diaries were published posthumously by the Church for the edification of the faith-

ful, as quoted by M. Mabille, they are mediocre indeed. Bernadette's thoughts would, no doubt, have been equally puerile if committed to writing—not to mention those of the Portuguese shepherdesses who conversed with the Virgin at Fatima. However, Thérèse, as befitted a member of a bourgeois family and the granddaughter of a Knight of St. Louis, was at least literate, unlike the shepherdesses of Lourdes and Fatima, who appear to be the company which the Mother of God—who was probably illiterate herself—prefers. Whilst, however, the earthly life of St. Thérèse of Lisieux seems to have been monotonous mediocrity—like her recorded thoughts—her posthumous career was startling, and her successive promotions in the celestial hierarchy were of an almost unprecedented rapidity. Born in 1873, dead in 1897, she was beatified in 1923 and canonised in 1925. The most famous saints of the Catholic Church, her greatest thinkers and organisers, Sts. Thomas Aquinas and Ignatius Loyola, were hardly canonised quicker by their grateful Church than was this obscure French Carmelite nun.

Why Saints are Made

As will be seen from the above record, the life of St. Thérèse was in no way remarkable, nor had her recorded character any striking attributes. Why then did she acquire such speedy posthumous celebrity? Briefly, why are saints made? Here, her French biographer's comments are analytical and absorbingly interesting. As he shows, Catholicism reacts differently in different epochs of its chequered evolution. In general, Catholicism is a gloomy and life-renouncing creed based on a dualistic antithesis between man's perishable unclean body and his pure immortal soul; but these traits become more evident when secular ideals are in the ascendant and when the Church is in opposition to the "World," which it then systematically denigrates as "the realm of Satan" or as a "vale of tears." At times, such as the era of St. Thérèse, when anti-clericalism was in the ascendant and the Church in open opposition to the then dominant scientific and secular culture, then pious mediocrity, saintly stupidity, an ascetic renunciation of life and its pleasures—all conspicuously evident in Thérèse—were the characteristics which the Church looked for (and found) in its saints. Whereas in epochs like the high Middle Ages, when Catholicism effectively controlled the current

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

A Modern Catholic Saint

—By F. A. RIDLEY—

culture, the Church tended to take a less pessimistic attitude to a world and culture for which it was largely responsible. This attitude was reflected in the people it made saints. St. Thomas and St. Augustine were at least men whose intellect commanded respect, even from their critics. Nowadays in opposition to secular culture, clerical obscurantism fastens on ignorance and fear, and we see an ignorant and frustrated death-addict like Thérèse de Lisieux canonised, while a Cardinal Newman remains still among the rank and file in the Heavenly hierarchy. We

have not either the space or the technical knowledge to do justice to the author's masterly analysis of Thérèse's personal and sexual case history, in which morbidity and hereditary syphilis appeared to have figured largely. In which respect M. Mabile's little biography is a most valuable contribution to what we may perhaps term the pathology of Catholic Christianity. We eagerly await the completion and, we hope, speedy publication of Mr. Simon Watson-Taylor's current translation of this masterpiece of critical hagiography.

“In God We Trust”

By LEON SPAIN (U.S.A.)

IN THE U.S.A. TODAY, the motto, “In God We Trust,” is conspicuously displayed upon coinage, postage stamps, political platforms and schoolrooms, and has even been endorsed as a national motto. While “In God We Trust” has been inscribed upon coinage, it has been no deterrent to the reduced purchasing power of the coin upon which it has been inscribed. The characteristic rise and fall of unsettled monetary values, as a result of competition in the economic sphere, limited purchasing power, inflation, etc., has continued. Despite the backing of the “bank of eternity,” banking institutions on the temporal level are still disposed to the uncertainties prevailing in their own and foreign countries.

The appearance of the motto upon postage stamps will not make easier or less difficult the processing and delivery of the mail. A letter without that engraving upon its postage stamp will reach its destination as assuredly as a letter whose postage stamp bears such a pious profession lettered on it. It has been a matter of common knowledge that the U.S. post office has for some years been operating at a deficit, and there have been proposals by various Congressmen to increase postage rates to help reduce or meet the deficit. Despite the “In God We Trust” engraving upon three cent postage stamps, the deficit in the accounts of the U.S. post office department has steadily increased, and will increase, because of lack of proper methods to meet their particular situation.

Political candidates have been vying with one another in trying to court the vote of the electorate by being present at Sunday services, making token gestures to religionists as a whole by stating how the constitution is supposedly predicated upon the belief in a divine power to guide its future destiny, and that democratic institutions have originated and evolved because “they were founded upon the rock of faith, and not reason,” etc. Prayer sessions have preceded Cabinet meetings and have been conspicuous on the agenda of various political assemblies. Despite all the profusions of piety and divine adherence, politicians and political parties, political institutions and political interests have moved in the general direction of where their needs invariably carry them. In America, with its many religious sects, politicians have listened to the words of religious leaders by emphasising the need for religious brotherhoods and the need for better understanding among the numerous religious bodies. Each group is requested to “adore” the Divine Being in its own way, thus giving an added touch to the tyranny of conformity which has cast a long shadow in the recent past. Prominent politicians have made mention of the fact that they retire for “prayerful meditation” before reaching a decision on issues of political importance, and even daily “refresh themselves by dipping into spiritual truths and the eternal verities.”

The desire for military supremacy, by those who also

implicitly place their trust in divine assistance, has found an invaluable accessory in possessing weapons as destructive as those of the nuclear variety. Despite absolute or limited reliance in supernatural assistance, present day military rivals unhesitatingly feel that their respective chances in out-and-out warfare will be assured if they can outdo their prospective enemies if they possess weapons reaching the zenith in destructiveness. The self-evident inconsistency between offering lip service to world peace, by openly affirming dedication to a deity controlling and guiding terrestrial affairs in the best interests of those whom He created in His own image, and the experimentation and perfection of frightful weapons, should raise serious doubts to the peacefully-minded observer. While “In God We Trust” is echoed and asserted in sundry ways, greater confidence in the outcome of political issues is held if one is in possession of weapons with which a potential enemy is unprepared to cope. The stress upon intercontinental ballistic missiles and the latest hydrogen bombs exemplify such instances.

That the present balance of nature will be seriously impaired and altered to an extent which no divine activity can rectify, does not seemingly worry those ready to go to the ends of using such weapons. The present state of nature, with its animate and inanimate *status quo*, which has evolved through eons of our planetary history, will certainly go by the boards if the latest type weapons are employed, and no amount of faith and trust in divine assistance will be able to reverse the processes of nature to the state conducive for the existence of organic life now prevailing. Natural processes, in their blind interplay, and if uncontrolled, go their invariable ways and affect earth-bound mortals for better or worse. No amount of human application will make them do otherwise. Consequently, “In God We Trust” can be set at nought, for, in the final analysis, it is human activity, directed or misdirected, which leaves its mark upon events in the human sphere, and not assumed divine activities.

The following questions may be posed to the politicians who sponsored the “In God We Trust” movement and officially committed the nation to a vague form of theism: Is it the personal deity of orthodox Christianity and Judaism, the limited liability god of various theologians, the god of Spinoza, the different gods of different theistic systems, or the various definitions of a god as defined by sundry religions, in whom they placed their trust?

STARTING NEXT WEEK

MY LIFE AS A MONK

By O. C. DREWITT

A Jesuit Poet

By COLIN MCCALL

BETWEEN MIDNIGHT AND MORNING of December 7th, 1875, five Franciscan nuns were drowned in the wreck of the *Deutschland*. Their fate was immortalised in a poem by a Jesuit priest, which had been suggested by his rector and was turned down by the editor of the Jesuit magazine, *The Month*. The poet was Gerard Manley Hopkins, for a long time the most neglected and yet now among the most acclaimed of Victorian poets. He was born in 1844 and brought up an Anglican, but he became a Roman Catholic under the influence of Newman at Oxford in 1866, and two years later entered the Society of Jesus. For seven years he wrote little poetry and he destroyed what he could of that written before his conversion. *The Wreck of the Deutschland* was his first important work; it is his longest, and among his best.

It is not my purpose here to judge it as a poem. I think, though, that it will repay some study from the religious angle, for it is definitely a religious poem as, in fact, is most of Hopkins's verse. And I must confess, at the start, that I find it uncongenial. Indeed, my uncongeniality begins before the poem itself; in the wording of the dedication: "To the *happy* memory of five Franciscan Nuns," etc. (my italics). I realise that, according to his creed, a Christian should feel happy when another Christian dies and thereby joins the Elect; but I realise, too, that it is unnatural. It is human, wonderfully human, to mourn.

Hopkins, however, held that man does not only learn to apprehend God through beauty. Pain, too, plays its part. And in the same way that the suffering of Christ helps the Christian to apprehend God, so may the suffering of these nuns. There is no sentimentality in the poet's faith, as these two lines (in the second stanza) indicate:

Thou heardst me truer than tongue confess
Thy terror, O Christ, O God . . .

He refers to "The dense and the driven Passion, and frightful sweat"; urges "Hither then, last or first/To hero of Calvary, Christ's feet"; and hails "Thou are lightning and love . . . winter and warm." He wants God to make man merciful, but considers it more important that He should make us adore Him—King. And Hopkins finds reason to adore God even in terrible tragedy.

The poem is often difficult, and we may sympathise with Robert Bridges (recipient of many of Hopkins's poems and his first editor, who compared it to "a great dragon to forbid all entrance" to the remainder. "Great dragon" is apt, because there is power and mystery in *The Wreck of the Deutschland*, and a strange, haunting beauty; though of tenderness, little or none. The ship foundered, not on a rock, but a sandbank:

She drove in the dark to leeward,
She struck—not a reef or a rock
But the combs of a smother of sand: night drew her
Dead to the Kentish Knock . . .

And the nuns were:

Loathed for a love men knew in them,
Banned by the land of their birth,
Rhine refused them. Thames would ruin them . . .

while—in Hopkins's curious imagination—God's "unchanging poisoning palms were weighing the worth." In His sight "Storm flakes were scroll-leaved flowers, lily showers—sweet heaven was astrew in them." A mystical comparison with the Crucifixion ("Lovescape crucified") follows. And we are led through the stigmata of St. Francis to the Franciscan nuns: "these thy daughters," who are "To bathe in his fall-gold mercies, to breathe in his all-fire glances"—the "mercies" and "glances," that is, of Christ.

One of the nuns, it is said, called "O Christ, Christ, come quickly." And Hopkins ponders her meaning. He asks of "lovely-felicitous Providence": "is the shipwreck then a harvest, does tempest carry the grain for thee?" "I admire thee, master of the tides," he says. God's mercy is still evident to him, in some strange, paradoxical way. "The Christ of the Father compassionate, fetched in the storm of his strides." "Kind, but royally reclaiming his own."

It is impossible to separate Hopkins's religion from his poetry; we cannot understand the latter without some knowledge of the former—without an idea of the "principle of individuation" of Duns Scotus. Yet, far removed as our philosophies are, I am intrigued by the Jesuit poet. Indeed, it is our "far-apartness"—to use a rather humdrum Hopkins-like term—that makes him interesting to me and possibly to other Freethinkers.

Strength, masculinity, a steely coldness; these are the characteristics of his verse—and of his conception of God. In the *Wreck*, God is "Orion," the heavenly hunter. And Hopkins's best known and perhaps his best poem, *The Windhover*, is dedicated "To Christ our Lord"; the equating—or, at least, the associating—of Christ with a bird of prey being again rather strange. The hawk impresses the poet—as it would anyone—with its mastery in the air, and the descriptions of this are superb. But Hopkins switches then to Christ ("my chevalier").

. . . AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion
Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!
he cries—and "dangerous" shows us that the predatory habits of the hawk have not been overlooked by the poet. Things are beautiful insofar as they fulfil their purpose which, by implication, means the purpose of God. What could possibly be God's purpose in creating a bird of prey like the kestrel (or windhover) is not a question that seems to worry Hopkins. There is a terrible acceptance of pain as part of the divine scheme of things, that I find disturbing. And the last words of the present poem, "gash gold-vermilion," bring us again to the Crucifixion that must have occupied so much of Hopkins's thoughts.

Yet, strong though he could be, Hopkins also had his periods of religious unrest. And, not surprisingly, they were equally terrible as those of cold conviction. To such a period belong the sonnets *Carrion Comfort* and "No worst, there is none"; the first ending in the horrible feeling that he might have been doing wrong in the sight of God:

Of now done darkness I wretch lay wrestling with (my
God!) my God.
—the exclamation accentuating the horror.

"No worst, there is none" expresses a sense of utter desolation. "Pitched past pitch of grief," it continues, and later asks significantly:

Comforter, where, where is your comforting?
Mary, mother of us, where is your relief?
And this magnificent sonnet ends with echoes of *King Lear*:

Here! creep,
Wretch, under a comfort serves in a whirlwind: all
Life death does end and each day dies with sleep.
Hopkins was obviously no ordinary Roman Catholic, any more than he was an ordinary man. (Perhaps no poet is an ordinary man?) He must have presented something of a problem to his Jesuit superiors who, however, did their

(Concluded on page 116)

This Believing World

There ought to be sackcloth and ashes, to say nothing of weeping and wailing in the Christian Church at the news that the Rev. J. McClean had won £9,000 on a twopenny line in the football pools. There was a time when the Man of Sorrows would have looked upon a game of cards or a glass of beer or a visit to a theatre or a bit on a horse as Devil's work. Nowadays, our clergy fling themselves sturdily into worldly pleasures which once were denounced as the straight path to Hell; and for that matter, they still are, in some devout quarters. But Mr. McClean has, fortunately for him, been brought up as much in a purely secular environment as in a Christian one, and we are pleased to report that the secular one has won.

★

Converts to Roman Catholicism often have curious reasons for going over, but it is no tribute to the Roman Church to say, as the Rev. C. A. C. Hann does when giving his reasons for going over, that it was due to the attitude now of the Church of England on divorced people remarrying. Surely the Pope is God's own representative on earth, always speaking with the voice of Christ Jesus; he is mostly infallible, and an out-and-out believer in Miracles and Relics, while his Church stands solidly for everything that Jesus said—properly interpreted, of course, by appointed and holy priests—to say nothing of such trifles as the Assumption of Mary and her Immaculate Conception? Surely Mr. Hann believes all these things, and lots more which are only in the possession of Rome?

★

One of the writers on the "Daily Mirror," Cassandra, who has had the luck to visit Palestine, gave a most edifying picture of what he saw there recently, in its pages. The Mountain from which—we are told—Jesus gave his famous Sermon, and which Cassandra used to think was "a dark and terrible place, a sombre, stony mountain," was nothing but a *hillock*; while Nazareth, which he envisaged as a tiny village, is a "sizeable duty town." The Sea of Galilee was quite beautiful; on the other hand, he found the room where the Last Supper was held "reminiscent of a small annexe in the Alexandra Palace," and King David's tomb "like something out of Drury Lane."

★

Cassandra no doubt believes that all the show pieces he was shown are genuine. Perhaps, if he had been shown Aladdin's Lamp, he would have thought that also genuine, especially if he were told that the geni had died since it was last rubbed. It can be said with absolute certainty that all the pious show pieces are frauds. Just because Jesus is said to have walked on the Sea of Galilee no more proves that he did anything of the kind (or that he even existed) than putting Mr. Pickwick into the then existing Fleet Prison proves that it really happened, or that Mr. Pickwick really existed. Still, "where Jesus trod" brings in the cash, and that is the main thing—not whether it is believed or not.

★

Not only is the Bible being put into our modern idiom, thus completely destroying its "reverent" atmosphere, but now that Jesus is being renovated to suit modern conceptions of him, we should not be surprised that he is shedding, when pictured, his usual "nightie" for a sweater and jeans. In fact, he is beginning to look more like an angry young man than the pitying Man of Sorrows we are all so used to. The innovator is the Rev. Simon Phipps, who is directing ITV's "About Religion," and he is very anxious to get people to "listen" to its programmes. As he so elo-

quently pointed out to the *Daily Mail* the other week—"Christ in his day" used "mass media of communication."

★

Mr. Phipps was asked, "Could religion be sold and marketed like any other commodity?" And his answer was, "Certainly, if it can be done without vulgarity." Putting Jesus in jeans and a fancy pullover as a means of making people believe in the Crucifixion is absolutely right and proper. Why not dispense with the Devil also and make Jesus get to the pinnacle of the Temple in a helicopter? After all, jeans plus a helicopter should bring our teenagers to Christ quicker than even a discourse by the Rev. S. Phipps.

Lock up the Spoons

THE MORE CIVILISED a Church has become, the more it hurries to lock up the spoons when its doors are rushed by Original Sinners. A civilised Church, such as the Church of England, shares with the humanist a dislike for barbarism: it regards its earlier history as largely an ugly story, to which it has no intention of returning. It has matured into a friendly, helpful body seeped in Pelagianism—which is to say: it believes that men and women have an immense amount of good in them, that they are perfectly capable of helping themselves and of being helped by others. That decisive help must come from Grace, through faith in God, is still essential to Protestant belief; but most clergymen have long ceased to badger people with this conviction; they merely offer it to them on a plate. Protestantism retains its barbarities only in verbal form; worshippers still sing "There is a fountain filled with blood," and even ask to be washed in it; but by now the blood has ceased to register as such and would create sheer disgust were it not regarded simply as a colourful word in a fanciful jug. This is the civilised condition of invisible worship—and it must pay the penalty of having its restraint and amiability denounced as "decadence."

Revivalism and Fundamentalism of any sort can only remind such a Church of the decent gap that exists between its theory and its practice and can only seem like a barked order to recapture primitive energy at the cost of new decency. Consequently, when Mr. Billy Graham comes to town, to enunciate in studied syllables, messages that the Church has spent centuries growing out of, a revulsion fills the clerical air until the short-trousered apostle has gone his way and the dogs are back in Harringay arena.

[From the Preface to his plays, *Cards of Identity* and *The Making ... of Moo*, by Nigel Dennis; published this month by Weidenfeld and Nicolson.]

A JESUIT POET

(Concluded from page 115)

best to find the right niche for him. His God was awful (in the true meaning of that word). That I can understand, but it seems to me that the sense of awe is emotional, non-intellectual; that to intellectualise it is impossible, though the attempt to do so may be stimulating. So it proved in Hopkins. I read him to try to understand a man of conflict. A sensuous man who accepted the rigid ascetic discipline of the Society of Jesus; who disciplined his verse but adapted the language freely. A man whose poetry is disturbing rather than moving, yet which moves one by one's apprehension of the poet behind it. Rightly or wrongly. I feel sorry for Gerard Manley Hopkins. True, his last words were, "I am so happy, so happy," but is it not notable that he ended one of his sonnets with the plea to God, "send my roots rain"?

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. MCELVAIN.—It has all been said so many, many times before. We doubt if there is anything new to be said. If you want something "in place of" religion, you must first prove religion has a place in a civilised society.

J. KING, S. AYRES, F. BARBER.—Many thanks for interesting letters.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (83 Suffolk Street).—Sunday, April 13th, 7 p.m.: J. W. BARKER, "The Church and War."

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Wheatshaf Hotel, High Street).—Sunday, April 13th, 7 p.m.: D. SHIPPER, "The International Freethought Scene."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, April 13th, 11 a.m.: R. PETERS, PH.D., "The Training of Character."

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

A SPIRITED correspondence has been taking place for some months in the *Jersey Evening Post* on religious education, the Catholics pressing for separate schools so that they can "vet" the ordinary State-set curriculum to fit in with Roman Catholicism as envisaged by the Pope and his Italian Cardinals. In this controversy, Mr. H. Cutner took a part, pressing for secular education, and protesting against the State being asked to pay for Roman Catholic education. Catholics, of course, very angrily replied.

BUT they got a severe shock when the question was recently debated by the Jersey Debating Club. The motion that the State should provide for Denominational Schools was put by two leading Catholics and discussed. It was heavily defeated—105 voted against, and the only ones for were the proposer and seconder. The *Jersey Evening Post* called it "the biggest defeat in the history of the Jersey Debating Club." We are pleased to note that "behind the scenes," so to speak, was one of our enthusiastic readers, Mr. A. G. Bedane.

WHEN the Humanist Council (which is composed of representatives of the various Freethinking bodies in this country) made representations to the BBC for broadcasting and

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged., £312 5s. 11d.; A. Hancock, 4s.; C. H. Clarkson, 2s.; G. Swan, 5s.; T. Yelland, £1; D. W. Butler, 10s.; I. Newman (South Africa), £1 10s.; W. Scarlett, 5s.; S. Clowes, 2s. 6d.; D. Dainow, £1 1s.; E. Capey, 10s.—Total to date, March 28th, 1958, £317 15s. 5d.

TV time, it was often told "You get a good share on the Brains Trust." And it is true, of course, that quite a number of Freethinkers have appeared on this programme, though we think it is because they are leading thinkers and not because of the views they hold. But the BBC still controls the questions, it must be remembered. And here is one that never got in: "One frequently hears that this is a 'Christian' country. At the same time we are daily made aware of appalling accidents which cause so much grief and suffering due, for some wise purpose, to the Will of a Supreme Being. Would the Brains Trust agree that 'God's Will' or 'Act of God' should more appropriately be substituted for 'accident' and the word 'accident' be expunged from the English Dictionary as having no meaning in a 'Christian country'?" It was sent by one of our readers.

ANOTHER reader, Mr. C. England, has just returned from Canada, where he spent four months on business. He tells us he attended many Freethought lectures during his stay, as well as others in the united field of science. And, during his travels, he met many Freethinkers. Catholic Quebec has the most atheists, says Mr. England, and "a priest told me how disturbed he was by the increase of heathens." "Science, that's the trouble"—added the cleric—who thought that atheism was a cause of crime. A police officer, on the other hand, deplored the "lack of fun"—the jailhouse being half empty. A youth provided Mr. England with another "quote." "Why doesn't God show his face—or his hand, so we can believe?" Why indeed?

WE published in December last a brief account by Kathleen Tacchi-Morris of her visit to Moscow. While there she planned to return and bring if possible a party of friends to meet representatives of social organisations in and around Moscow. Undeterred by a recent serious operation, "Tacchi" is now preparing her return trip in August and would be interested to hear from Freethinkers who may like to join her. The tour is by a luxury coach of European Motorways (Tour No. 12, 105 guineas) through Belgium, Germany and Poland, and Mrs. Tacchi-Morris's address is Long's House, North Curry, Taunton.

WHEN the Russian Sputnik first began to circle the earth, Mr. F. A. Ridley referred to the different approach towards science of the U.S.S.R. and U.S.A. Whereas the former concentrates purely on naturalistic lines, the latter is hampered by "primitive survivals" of one kind or another. This point was underlined the other week when the American Navy's Vanguard I was successfully launched into orbit. The *Daily Telegraph's* Washington Correspondent informed us (19/3/58) that a St. Christopher's medal was attached to the rocket "to ensure good travelling." He explained that the medal was placed at the foot of the gyroscope in the second stage at the suggestion of Mr. F. P. Lipinski, of the Martin Aircraft Co., who is, needless to say, a Roman Catholic. "Eleven other workers supported the idea by putting in a formal request for the Vanguard design to be slightly altered to accommodate the medal." (Our italics.)

Chosen Question

By H. CUTNER

A READER from Canada puts three questions to us, and he challenges us to answer them. Now even he must admit if this journal were quite unable to answer them, that does not prove anything but that we can't answer them. It does not prove anything else. He could ask me why we cannot see electricity, and if I could not tell him, does it mean that there is no such thing as electricity, or that it was an emanation from Jesus Christ? Here is the first question:

Posed by Madame Blavatsky—"If people, and they the most learned, believe in gravity, ether, force, and all the what nots of science which they have neither seen, smelt, touched, nor tasted, why should not others believe, on the same principle, in the permanent ego, a far more logical and important hypothesis than any other?"

Let me begin by pointing out that it is Mme. Blavatsky who tells us that her "permanent ego" is an "important" hypothesis, and if I do not agree with her—what then? May I also point out that she includes "ether" in what we are told scientists believe, but that is because she wrote in the 80's of last century. Most of her "science" is as dead as mutton. Science simply *postulated* ether, and now it has gone quite out of fashion.

In asking his question our reader should have told us what he and Mme. Blavatsky meant by the word "ego," and what it means when you add the word "permanent" to it. The word "ego" simply means "self," and I take it that this self is considered by Mme. Blavatsky to be "immortal" unless "permanent" in this connection means something else. She herself was obsessed by the word "ego" and was always writing about it. She had more or less given up the idea of *Christian* "immortality," and she tried to supplant this by her own opinion that "the upward progress of the Ego is a series of progressive awakenings"—which I take from her *Secret Doctrine*, and which, alas, sounds gibberish to me. Another description of the "permanent ego" is, "The Monads or Egos of the men of the Seventh Round of our Earth . . . will, as the 'Terrene Ancestors,' create those who will become their superiors." If that is not exactly crystal clear, we can turn to, "Who is bold enough to say that the *divine Egos* of our mankind *will not become in their turn* the 'divine' instructors of a new mankind generated by them on a new globe called to life and activity by the disembodied 'principles' of our Earth?" There are dozens of similar stimulating and provocative contributions to Science on the "permanent ego" in the *Secret Doctrine* which no doubt our questioner knows by heart, but, I am sorry to say, seem to me to show Mme. Blavatsky completely fuddled in thought. But then I never have been susceptible to "occult" blandishments, especially in that mystical vein which bowled over Mrs. Besant in 1890 once for all. Incidentally, after Mme. Blavatsky's death, her permanent ego got in touch with Mrs. Besant in many letters "wafted" from Tibet, and which were angrily claimed by her as absolutely genuine. Even when she had to admit that they were all written by her friend William Q. Judge, it made no difference. I take it from our questioner that he believes both the permanent egos of the two B's are still in existence. What a pity that, like gravity, they cannot be seen.

The second question is:

If scientists have had to postulate ether to explain certain phenomena which could be explained in no other way, why should not other people postulate something even more tenuous than ether to explain Extra Sensory Perception? Surely this is

more scientific than to deny its existence when some of the most learned people can testify that it does exist?

The plain and sufficient answer to this is that whether people are learned or not, the only way to prove that E.S.P. exists is by scientific evidence. The Archbishop of Canterbury can testify till doomsday that his Jesus was truly carried about by a Devil and put on the pinnacle of the Temple, but this does not prove it. All our questioner has to do is to produce unquestionable documentary evidence that E.S.P. exists, and then there will be no need to go to a hypothetical postulate like ether to have it accepted. So far no one has shown that E.S.P. exists.

It has been said, of course, that some of the E.S.P. experiments have been done under "the strictest scientific conditions"—but have they? Are Dr. J. B. Rhine's experiments accepted, without question, by reputable scientists? Dr. Rhine believes even in a "mind-reading horse" which responds to telepathy. Does our theosophical reader? And who, by the way, are the "most learned people" who "testify that E.S.P. does exist" as Mme. Blavatsky insists? Who were they at the time she was writing? Can our reader *prove* that "something even more tenuous than ether" exists at all? What we need is *evidence* and *proof*.

Question number three is:

Like everybody else I have changed a great deal both mentally and physically since I was a child but how do I know that I have changed unless there is something permanent in me which perceives the changes but does not itself change?

If one compares photographs taken at different times it is easy to see how we change *physically*. This is simply natural growth, and there is nothing mysterious about it, but because we cannot see "mind," the mind that perceives the changes, this does not prove that it is permanent and unchangeable in any way whatever. All that it proves is that we cannot "see" mind. So long as we are alive and in normal health, we can "perceive" ourselves—this is as natural as seeing the changes time makes in us physically. When we die we can no longer see ourselves—and by death I mean a "physical" death. We know no other.

Of course, I emphatically deny that the "mind" which "perceives" us does not "itself change." I see myself in a hundred ways quite different from what I was years ago. My "values" have changed; and if our questioner disagrees, let him produce scientific evidence that his "mind" hasn't changed. And I am *not* going into the age-old problem—what is "mind"? It has come into this world of ours as the result of millions of years of evolution, and the "why" and the "how" still eludes us.

Our questioner "challenges" us to answer his questions and to deny that "Eastern philosophy with its doctrines of reincarnation and Karma are the only *just bases* for ethics." And he adds that "to say that Humanism any more than religion is a just basis" is nonsense.

I suspect that our questioner, like Mrs. Besant, has gone over to Theosophy, and in this article I have no intention of discussing it. If, however, he would like to frame, say, six questions from Theosophy, I would be very pleased to have a try and answer them—though not from the "Humanist" point of view but from that of Freethought. Like the late G. W. Foote, I look upon Theosophy as a system of "esoteric" bunkum. Its mixture of Hinduism and Buddhism and Oriental "philosophy" is enough to make even the gods laugh.

Mrs. Knight's Recent Activities

DURING THE PAST WINTER Mrs. Knight has had a most active time "corrupting" the youth of the universities and taking part in newspaper controversies. We note with much satisfaction that our contributor, the Rev. J. L. Broom, M.A., has twice taken the chair at meetings addressed by Mrs. Knight and has also participated in the press controversies which invariably follow her meetings.

In our issue of November 15th last Mr. Broom reported the public debate at Aberdeen between Mrs. Knight and the Rev. Ian Pitt-Watson. Since then she has spoken or debated at the universities at Cambridge, Durham, Liverpool, Nottingham and Leeds; at Moray House Training College, Edinburgh; as well as at meetings organised by the Edinburgh Humanists, the Aberdeen Humanists and the Aberdeen Law Society (where she had a debate on divorce).

In addition, Mrs. Knight appeared twice on TV; once on the BBC (reported in these columns), and latterly at very short notice on ITV in a foursome with Dr. Bronowski, the Abbot of Downside and Dr. Mackay, the young London physicist who put up such a feeble, novice-like performance against her at Stratford under N.S.S. auspices.

The *Guardian Journal*, reporting the Nottingham debate, gave Mrs. Knight all the headlines and six times as much space as her opponent, in spite of the actual vote going against her. The latter fact, of course, merely indicates that there were more Christians than Humanists in the audience, and therefore more potential converts for Mrs. Knight to approach. Reports show her to have been in excellent form. Proposing "that religion is an obstacle to clear thought," she put forward scientific explanations of the Ascension and the Resurrection. As for the conversion of Constantine, he was converted after seeing a cross in front of the sun. But for a formation of ice crystals, therefore, he might not have declared for Christianity and Mithraism might have taken its place.

How did the Churches square their intellectual conscience with their beliefs? she asked. An institution which officially subordinated reason to authority was an obstacle to clear thinking, whether the authority were the Catholic Church or the Kremlin. The Protestant Church, she observed, took a different line, requiring its members to assert solemnly on Sundays all sorts of extraordinary beliefs that could be discarded for the rest of the week. Gallup Polls and opinion surveys, she remarked, showed that the majority of the people of Britain had now abandoned orthodox Christian belief—although they might often pay lip service to it. But the Church was still powerful enough to ensure that state schools should instil dogmatic Christian belief into children from the age of five. It was a paradoxical situation that school children should be thus indoctrinated while in other lessons attempts were being made to train them in scientific thinking.

Father Shaw, an Anglican, who opposed the motion, is reported as saying that if religion impeded clear thinking, believers should be worse at mathematics than non-believers.

At Leeds Mrs. Knight's opponent was Father Huddleston, of Johannesburg fame. The *Yorkshire Post* gave an impartial and objective report. Fr. Huddleston naturally spoke of his work in S. Africa but was made to declare that "Dogma is essential to the Christian religion," while maintaining that "the Christian is inevitably a humanist." Mrs. Knight's contribution explained rather more clearly what Scientific Humanism really involved.

Debating with Fr. Keenan (R.C.) at Edinburgh, Mrs.

Knight again produced the figures for Catholic delinquency, showing them to have by far the highest rate in the country. In 1957 the proportion of Catholics in Scotland was about 15% but the proportion in Scottish prisons was about 40% and the proportion in Borstal institutions was about 36%. How, then, can the Catholic maintain that belief in God produces better behaviour? Mrs. Knight also appealed for a new unbiased approach on the part of Christians to the personality of Jesus.

The debate had good notices, especially by the *Daily Mail* of March 7th, which give Mrs. Knight heavy headlines and the whole of the report except five lines for Father Keenan. This sort of treatment is, indeed, a refreshing reversal of the usual treatment which freethinkers have become accustomed to for many decades!

While at Edinburgh she also addressed the newly formed Humanist group. The *Bulletin* gave a good factual and heavily headlined account. There was absolutely no evidence, she said, for the claim that religious beliefs have a good moral effect. The only people who said so were Christians, who were without evidence which was scientifically verifiable. They merely gave vent to biased personal expression. Again Mrs. Knight ruthlessly quoted crime figures with particular emphasis on the Catholics, and this again collared the headlines. "It is interesting that this is also found in other countries," she remarked, in pursuance of the theme, a theme, one might add, of which Catholics are now getting heartily sick, to judge from recent expositions and attempts at escape.

As for the Protestants, said the speaker, the Bible was causing them considerable embarrassment and they would be better without it. If Bible stories could not be described as literally true they were described as "symbolic truth." It was time they were recognised in a category with the story of George and the Dragon.

Following reports of this talk, a controversy developed in the *Glasgow Herald*. Mrs. Knight was given a good showing and was allowed the final letter, but unfortunately the editor had to cut it severely.

Mrs. Knight's figures for 15% of R.C.s in Scotland, as against the Borstal and prison figures, are from the Scottish Home Department in Edinburgh. She has also found that in 1938 the proportion of Catholics in Glasgow was about one in three, but the proportion of Catholics in Barlinnie Prison was 42%, and in Duke Street Prison 51%. These figures are from the Report of the Prisons Department for 1938, and figures showing the religion of the prisoners are no longer published in these reports. We wonder why!

The last report to hand comes from the Rev. J. L. Broom, who presided at a discussion between Mrs. Knight and the Rev. K. McKenzie at St. Mark's Unitarian Church, Edinburgh, recently, on "Humanism or Christianity?"

Mr. Broom tells me there were some 250 people present and, though the church was cold, the atmosphere was electric. The discussion followed along lines much the same as at Aberdeen and resulted in a most enjoyable evening. Mrs. Knight's opponent conceded too many points to please some of the Christians in the audience, and there was the spectacle of a Fundamentalist lady thundering fire and brimstone upon both speakers impartially, and upon the chairman as well, from the back of the hall. Again, there have been good reports in the *Herald* and the *Bulletin*, with letters following.

Secularist talks to Sixth Formers

IN THE FREETHINKER for January 17th, 1958, we reported that a correspondent holding an educational post in a British Federated territory had been pleasantly surprised by a request from his Principal that he should talk to the Sixth Form on Rationalism. We now print his own summary of the first three lectures delivered. Readers will, we think, find them both interesting and encouraging.

In the first one I spoke of what Rationalism is, taking first the statement of the Rationalist Press Association; then reading the National Secular Society Principles and Objects. I next read the aims of the Society of Atheists in Poland, as reported in a recent copy of THE FREETHINKER. I then sketched an outline of the Rationalist Movement, from the days of the Ancient Greeks—Lucretius—the Renaissance—18th century deists, etc.; pointed out that there were problems which the students may never have considered: What is meant by Time, Reality, etc.?

In the next lecture I discussed the existence of the Universe and showed that to talk of time in the absence of matter and space was meaningless. Hence talk of the creation of matter presupposed a beginning of time and space and the creator as functioning without space or time. I asked whether the existence of the Universe presupposed a creator and showed that the introduction of one explained nothing and left us worse off than before. I pointed out the non-sequitur in the statement: Every effect has a cause; therefore there is a first cause. I showed that if every cause is itself an effect or aspect of effect, the statement is, logically, not merely a non-sequitur, but that its conclusion contradicted its premise.

In the third lecture I dealt with aspects of Morality and Ethics. If we assume an omnipotent principle of good, we have to explain the existence of evil. I proved that the usual religious arguments for the existence of evil are untenable since they force one back, step by step, to the acceptance of the creation of an evil principle by an omnipotent principle of good. I mentioned the Zoroastrian solution of a dual principle, but pointed out that (a) the good is not then omnipotent and (b) we have now, gratuitously, introduced two principles, each with the same original difficulties as an eternal *material* universe. I then went on to the "internal" aspect of morality—what do we mean by "goodness"? If it stems from god it should have an absolute standard. But our concepts of good are dependent on time and geographical position. That the universe is completely amoral (various rather unpleasant examples). Contrast this welter of confusion with the rationalist's attitude: Morality, the concept of good and evil are functions of society. The selfishness of the undeveloped organism evolving into care for the progeny, then the pack and, in the case of mankind extending to tribe—nation—race—the whole of humanity and beyond. I touched briefly on the danger of the "double standard," etc. The young men seemed deeply interested, and the Principal, who was present, seemed very impressed.

I have also had a word with the Head Boy of last year. He, with a number of others, has gone to University, and I had heard that he was not convinced of the truth of Christianity. I had a long talk with him the night before he left and received a most interesting letter from him later.

CORRESPONDENCE

FREETHINKER OR FREE THINKER?

May I make a few comments on recent items you have published?

(a) Reply to Ellis Allen (February 4th). Tense is wrong. Not "will... be decided..." but *has been* decided. Suggest he reads

Race and Psychology (Prof. Klineberg), *What is Race*, etc., Unesco Publications, and the conclusions of 99% of the world's top-rate psychologists.

(b) Mr. Du Cann's articles: His definition of "freethought" is not a definition. "Freedom to think" has no meaning within the usual forces of "freedom" and "think"—freedom to act—Yes. Freedom to think—No. Freedom, to have meaning, surely implies the conceivability of its opposite; and, without discussing what is meant—or not meant—by "free will," thinking, in the sense of cogitating, surely involves "the will." In short, talk of freedom to think in a way that I please implies the concept of ability to compel me to think in a way contrary to the way in which I am willing to think. This is certainly meaningless. What, then, does Mr. Du Cann mean? Frankly, I don't know but if, as I suspect, he means an original thinker, then we must ask him: Original to what degree? If he means that Jesus taught anything entirely and absolutely new, then I think Mr. Du Cann is talking nonsense. If he means an original thinker, then we must ask him: Original to what extent a "free" thinker, but he shares the privilege with a number of other people—including the Pope—since Christianity, in any form, is in a minority among men. Does he mean that Jesus opposed some authority or tradition—most people do at some time or other. To what extent must they do so to be "free" thinkers—and, in any case, argue as Mr. Du Cann may, Jesus was, in every respect, thoroughly hidebound in his beliefs. It is worth noting that this all assumes the very big premise that Jesus ever lived and spoke or acted in a way remotely resembling his reported behaviour in the gospels. In fact, of course, as Cohen, I think, pointed out, Jesus never *did* live. It is useless to say that the Jesus of the gospels had a historical basis. In what way did he? Remove the miraculous and supernatural and you have a few poor shreds which would fit innumerable petty leaders. I can see Mr. Du Cann's point in objecting to the assumption, *in toto*, of the term Freethinker by atheists. Nevertheless that is what the word means today. The etymological derivation is of little consequence in determining the meaning of a word. All modern philologists insist that "usage" is the criterion. It is stupid to argue that the Frenchman in the lower bunk should separate the two words when his seasick English travelling companion shouts from the upper bunk, "Look out!"—or that albinism in black-birds is impossible. It is, of course, in black birds; but if you try to apply the same rule to Freethinking or freethinkers, you have to explain what you mean by "free thinker" and Mr. Du Cann emphatically fails to give us a meaningful definition. If he wants one—and I suggest that, in view of the contradictory nature of the implications he shouldn't—I might suggest: A person whose thinking is free from contradictions in the context of his knowledge. By such standards Jesus was *not* a free thinker. No one who believes in a deity with its usual attributes is a free-thinker. If we impose the perfectly reasonable (see Occam's Razor) principle that no *unnecessary* entity be introduced in providing a reasonable hypothesis, then *no* deist of *any* description is a free thinker—and, Mr. Du Cann, Atheism is *not* my god! It is simply that atheism is scientifically sound and theism is not.

MALCOLM G. CLARKE (N. Rhodesia)

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