

The Freethinker

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IN A LETTER to this journal published some time ago, our old friend the Reverend Father Paris of Malta joined issue with me on the subject of the original draft of the Gospels. In a previous article I had made the (surely obvious) deduction that the opening chapters of Matthew and Luke in the original edition of these Gospels, cannot possibly have been identical with what we read there now. A very important addition—particularly from the dogmatic point of view of Catholic theology—must have been made: the story of the Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ. To which objection the Reverend Father made the quite irrelevant rejoinder that I could not possibly know that this was so since the original copies of these Gospels had long since disappeared. By one feels like adding—a most unkind failure of the Holy Ghost to preserve these priceless “evidences” of the Truth of Christianity for the effective confounding of rash Freethinkers, who dared to question the truth of their Divine Inspiration! And for the relief of hard-pressed Catholic apologists like, say, Father Paris? Surely this would have been a useful miracle from the point of view of the Catholic Evidence Guild or Father Paris’s own gallant little Maltese publication, *The Faith*, which boldly crusades into enemy territory—in this case, into the columns of THE FREETHINKER.

Common Sense and the Gospels

However, as the Holy Spirit, who is alleged to have “inspired” Matthew and Luke, has for some inscrutable reason known only to himself, unfortunately omitted to preserve the original MSS, we have to do the best we can to conjecture their actual contents with the aid of critical scholarship or, as in the present instance, with plain common sense which, to judge from current exegeses does not appear to be very common among theologians—and in particular among current defenders of Christ. As it is, we think it is generally accepted that the oldest versions of the Gospels (along with the New Testament in general) do not go back beyond about the 4th century—that is, to a period when Christianity was already a religion of respectable antiquity with several centuries of theological speculation behind it. At least, I do not know of any older existent Gospel texts than Sinaiticus and Alexandrinus, which are believed to date from about that era. Accordingly, one must necessarily rely on internal evidence as to what was, or was not, contained in the original Matthew and Luke.

Joseph Begat Jesus

Here was are at once confronted by a contradiction so obvious and gross that only the most powerful of theological and ecclesiastical interests could have succeeded in suppressing it for so long. This concerns the Catholic cult of Mary the Virgin—Mother of God. For both Gospels, Matthew and Luke—the sole Gospels which recount the story of the Virgin Birth—begin with alleged, but largely contradictory, genealogies which in the one case trace the descent of Christ from Adam and in the other, from

Abraham, allegedly the respective founders of the human race itself and of Israel, the Chosen Race. And in both cases the descent is traced through the *male* side exclusively; that is, from Joseph and not from Mary. Now the Catholic Church prides itself on its logic. We ask Father Paris this, what lawyers might call, leading question: if, say, the Court Heralds produced a genealogy of her present Majesty, Queen Elizabeth, tracing her descent from King

Alfred through her *Father*, the late King of England (and Malta!) would not this *ipso facto*, rule out any possibility of a *Virgin* birth, even assuming that such a genetic miracle was possible nowadays? One can add that, if such a *Virgin Birth* could be proved in

the above case of Queen Elizabeth it would, again *ipso facto*, invalidate the whole Royal succession previously traced from Alfred—besides incidentally depriving Her Majesty of any legal hereditary right to the Throne! Similarly if, as both Gospels imply (otherwise their extremely detailed genealogies become meaningless nonsense) Jesus was descended via Joseph from Adam and Abraham, then obviously Joseph must have been his actual father in the opinion at least of the *original* authors of the Gospels, who drew up the genealogies. In coming to such an obvious conclusion, we are not—as the Reverend Father appears to imagine—assuming the existence of the original Gospel MSS. We merely make the modest assumption that, in the first—as in the 20th—century, in the Gospels as in THE FREETHINKER—or in Father Paris’s own journal, *The Faith*—logic still exists. Actually, I understand that an old manuscript of, I think, Matthew, was recently unearthed in a monastery in Sinai, which actually completed the original genealogy in the only possible way (*viz.*, “Joseph begat Jesus.”). However, its existence in the *original* text is sufficiently guaranteed by the current context.

Christian Interpolations

The fact, of course, is that the *original* authors of Matthew and Luke knew nothing about any *Virgin Birth*, a dogma regarded as blasphemous by pious Jews then and now. The dogma of the *Virgin Birth* originated at some unknown but fairly early date in the Gentile world, when Pagan converts who had worshipped virgin goddesses from time immemorial came flocking into the Church. It was among such Gentile converts that the belief originated and at an unknown date (perhaps as early as the second century) came to be inserted in the original text of Matthew and Luke and, no doubt, assisted these two Gospels eventually to become Canonical in the eyes of the Church. Apollo, Plato and other famous Greek characters in fact and fiction had their *Virgin Births*; so the new god had to have his, too. But it really was inexcusably bad editing on the part of the Church to leave the genealogies which are utterly incompatible with what immediately follows in the current text. Evidently “inspiration” had unaccountably lapsed at this juncture.

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

The Gospels and Father Paris

—By F. A. RIDLEY—

The Church and the Gospels

The fact is that the New Testament as we have it today, is far from identical with the *original* texts which comprised it. It has been interpolated again and again in the interests of what later became Catholic orthodoxy. As the earliest surviving critic of Christianity, Celsus, wrote, the Christian scriptures had been rewritten "once, twice, several times." The Virgin Birth was only, perhaps, the most conspicuous addition; judging from the fact that neither of the present texts of Mark and John mention it, one may perhaps suppose that the Churches responsible for these particular Gospels did not at first accept the new dogma.

However, there were other interpolations. As Reinach aptly commented in *Orpheus*, the famous text, "Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church," cannot date from before the second century at the earliest, since only then did a Church, distinct from the Jewish Synagogue, begin to exist. Yet this text is the one upon which the Papacy is based and from this obvious forgery, Father Paris derives his clerical status. The day when the Gospels are criticised on the same assumptions as any non-religious book will mark the end of Christianity as the theologians have interpreted it for the last nineteen centuries on the basis of spurious texts.

Exit Adam

By DR. EDWARD ROUX

SOPHISTICATED CHRISTIAN THEOLOGIANS who accept the principle of evolution as applying to man as well as to the lower animals may still cling to the doctrine of the Fall and Atonement. This obviously requires a certain amount of mental juggling on their part. If the Adam and Eve story is a myth, there could have been no Fall, and if no Fall, there was no need for the Vicarious Atonement on the Cross.

It would seem to be fairly obvious that evolutionary theory has no place even for a hypothetical Adam and Eve, a single couple from whom all human beings are descended. Many parsons do not see this, because they are not biologists or have never thought clearly about the matter.

Though evolutionists cannot reconstruct man's family tree in detail, the following generalisations are now widely accepted. At some time in the Miocene Age, roughly ten million years ago, a group of tailless tree-living anthropoid apes separated into two major groups. One lot remained in the trees and became increasingly adapted to an arboreal mode of existence. Their modern descendants are the gorillas, chimpanzees and orang-utans. The others for some reason took to the ground, where they developed a more erect posture and other humanoid characters.

The existence of a ground-ape stage in the evolution of man could easily be postulated by evolutionary theory. It is interesting that a number of fossil forms have actually been found which confirm this view. The first of these fossils was recovered at Taungs, about 200 miles west of Johannesburg, in 1924, and was described by Professor Raymond Dart, of Witwatersrand University. Others were found at Sterkfontein and vicinity, just west of Johannesburg, by Dr. Robert Broom, of the Transvaal Museum. Still other specimens continue to be found. Known as australopithecines or more popularly as Dartians, these ground-apes combine a form of body almost human with a brain-capacity no greater than that of an average gorilla or chimpanzee. No one claims that they are the direct ancestors of modern man (their date is too late for that), but they do seem to represent a general type of ground ape from which both they and the more advanced ape-men have descended.

Among these ape-men, more advanced than the Dartians, and having larger brains, are Peking Man, the Ape Man of Java, Rhodesian Man and Neanderthal Man. All of them are known only as fossils. The last of these has been included in the same genus as ourselves. *Homo neanderthalensis* appears to have been exterminated during the ice age by *Homo sapiens* (our own species), though the presence of neanderthaloid traits in some groups of modern man suggests that extermination was not complete and that some of these "heavy brows" were racially assimilated.

We cannot be certain of the interrelationships of the various types of pre-sapient hominoids. ("Pre-sapient" means "pre-*Homo sapiens*," not necessarily "lacking in wisdom.") They may very well have formed an interbreeding population such as the modern groups of man do. If our civilisation were wiped out, a palæontologist of the future, considering an odd collection of fossils including a bushman, a mongoloid, a few caucasians, a negro and an Australian aborigine, might quite logically classify them as separate species. The same might apply equally to the Dartians, for they also exhibit an amazing variety of form.

Thus we get the following picture: a population of ground-apes, spread over Africa and possibly southern Asia, and already differentiated into various types. From them arise other forms with larger brains. The larger-brained ape-men both interbreed with and wage war on each other. Finally there emerges, probably in Asia, a more dominant type which swamps the others and then proceeds to colonise the earth, whilst still differentiating to produce the various races of modern man.

If any theologian can suggest at what stage in this process man acquired a soul and became eligible for church membership and for a seat (post-mortem) in heaven, we shall be pleased to listen to him.

We conclude that the idea of a first man and woman is purely mythological. Between modern men and modern apes a great gulf is fixed. But this is only because there has been divergent evolution, while the intermediate forms have died out. The survival of *Homo sapiens* alone among the ground-living forms may simply be due to the fact that he exterminated his nearer relatives.

Thus, while man is man and ape is ape, no one can say at what stage ape became man. If a race of neanderthaloids were found living in some unexplored part of the world today, they might possibly be accepted into the community of nations and granted membership of UNO. If a race of Dartians were found, they would give headaches to administrators as well as to theologians. Fortunately for all of us, humanists as well as Christians, this is not likely to happen.

We could arbitrarily choose some event—control of fire, use of tools, invention of a spoken language—to mark the beginning of humanity. The finds at Sterkfontein may throw a little light on this question (without, I think, solving the theologian's difficulties), but the subject is too lengthy for inclusion in the present article.

—NEXT WEEK—

THE WORK OF SECULARISM TODAY

By G. I. BENNETT

Self-Salvation For Us All

By C. G. L. DU CANN

CLEARLY life is a perilous business, and if one does not believe in a gratuitous Saviour, decidedly one must set about saving oneself. To some degree we all attempt to do that—so far as we can. That is not very far, for there are certain perils such as heredity, senility and death from which we can hardly escape.

Such is the consciousness of peril in life, that the immemorial cry rises to the unheeding heavens everywhere and in every generation: "*What must I do to be saved?*" Christians want to be saved, like the hero of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, from everlasting flames; but Christians and non-Christians alike want security from nuclear weapons and war; cancer and other disease; predatory Governments and our fellow-men; accident and other hazards; poverty and "all the ills that flesh is heir to." Some of us need to be saved from our nearest and dearest; others from ourselves.

Hell in these modern days is perhaps the least of most people's fear. There is so much hell-in-this-life that we can no longer believe in a Being so malignant as to give us any more, or any worse, in a life-to-come. When the clergy are forced by the spirit of the age to modify hell from a place to a state of mind and everlasting fire to metaphorical flames only, we may be excused if we dismiss the future hell and concentrate on hell-here-and-now. Especially on our own particular torment, whatever that may be!

Still, we want to be saved from something—if only from the frustrations and futilities of life in England in 1958. We look at Christ; but modern minds question the morality of being saved by another's blood at all, while others, the unbaptised, the pagans, and the wicked go unsaved. We feel we could not be comfortable in heaven while others are in hell—unlike St. Thomas Aquinas and Jonathan Edwards having their felicity increased by the sight of the tortures of the damned in hell, and unlike Lazarus, snug in Father Abraham's bosom, looking upon hell-tormented Dives wanting one drop of water in vain.

Turning from "Salvation through Jesus Christ," what then?

There is no complete salvation for individuals whether virtuous or vicious, rich or poor, thoughtful or thoughtless, religious or irreligious. Yet some measure of self-salvation is within the compass of us all. By taking thought we can preserve ourselves from many of the perils of existence.

In saving oneself, one needs to work out one's own scheme. For one man's salvation is another man's damnation—a truth too often forgotten in Christian thought. Each can only attain salvation in his own way with his own weapons. Bernard Shaw said that he saved himself by refusing to engage in the struggle for livelihood and by throwing his mother into it instead. No doubt he did—and did rightly.

Though each must save his soul so far as may be, in his own way, are there no general principles applicable to us all? I think there are. Obviously we can save our bodies by observing the laws of their being; the rules of health. Equally we can save our souls by observing the laws of their being: by being ourselves; by self-ownership; by living the fullest, freest life of which we are capable; by rejecting all enslavement whether to a person, a thing or an idea. Just as we can destroy, or injure, body or soul by exactly contrary conduct.

In pursuit of self-preservation one needs to be egotistical, selfish and self-regarding like a Christian pursuing his per-

sonal salvation. In spite of what is commonly believed, few people are sufficiently selfish. Narrowly watch your own conduct and thoughts and you will be astonished to find how little you live for yourself and how much for other things and people. Check your thoughts, and you will be staggered to find how much your mind is occupied, indeed obsessed by—everything and everyone except your own self. Modern life "conditions" us, to all except the self.

Selfishness, so often condemned by parrot-minds, does much good and little harm. Much more evil is done by do-gooders and busybodies: as Mandall Creighton, Bishop of London, mordantly said: "*None do so much harm as those who go about doing good.*" And Pascal well observed that most of men's troubles arise from the inability to sit quiet alone in a room. Solitude is safer than multitude. We should learn to live by our own selves for we shall certainly die by ourselves though we perish in a holocaust.

A new morality, a new set of values is needed by the self-salvationist. His seven deadly sins are the sin of anxiety (which is self-torture); the sin of ill-health (which Butler's "Erewhon" taught); the sin of ennui; the sin of failure to live to the appropriate utmost at every moment (upon which Walter Pater has some pregnant words, and a respect in which we all have come short of the glory that might be ours); the sin of unhappiness; the sin of self-forgetfulness or self-immolation; the sin of living in the past or the future. These cardinal offences by no means exhaust the crimes we foolishly commit against ourselves. Sins against oneself are unpardonable. They can be atoned for only by their contrary virtues: equanimity, tranquillity, joy, gaiety, enchantment, delight, happiness, self-realisation, making the best of every moment and all circumstances.

It may well be—I do not pretend to know, as priests and pundits and ignoramus do—that these being the true laws of Life, are therefore the true laws of God for those who believe in God-outside-books. Decidedly they are direction posts upon the path to self-salvation.

If the young aspirant to self-salvation requires a Bible for his cult, though I am no Bibliolator, I suggest Max Stirner's difficult and too-little-appreciated *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*, which might be translated as *The Unique One and His Self-Ownership*. But really every man should be his own Bible, for self-saving is practical work to be done daily, hourly, and momentarily. It is not mere theory to be written and talked about. Its gospel is the gospel according to yourself.

Self-salvation is an excellent creed for atheists, agnostics and freethinkers, amongst others. Since we are impelled by nature to believe in something, it seems sense to believe in ourselves—as far as we dare! For certainly if experience of human life is any guide, it is unwise to credit anything or anybody else. It is also unwise to believe in ourselves too much. For this very moment we may die bodily or disintegrate mentally. . . .

And then—where are you?

Ah, where indeed? Even in life itself, we are engaged in nothing more than daily dying and disintegrating, the process that all nature obeys. Truly, as the Christian Bible has it: "In the midst of life we are in death." If you cry aloud, "O Death, where is thy sting, O grave, where is thy victory," every piece of land and every ocean in the whole world answers mournfully, "Here" on behalf of plants,

(Concluded on next page)

This Believing World

Christians will be thrilled at the way our High Wycombe magistrates have sternly dismissed an application by cinema owners to open at 4.30 instead of 7.30 p.m. on Sundays as at present. And even more sternly they rejected an application to show X films on a Sunday. Our people have to be guarded against this dreadful desecration of the Sabbath—or the Lord's Day, for it is not at all clear in Christian circles which Sunday really is. Grudgingly the High Wycombe magistrates might allow one of God's elect to see an X film on *weekdays*—but on Sundays!! However, we hope the inhabitants of the little town will enjoy the crumbs given by their lords and masters. And never, *never* revolt.

★

Of course, these and similar magistrates are almost unanimously supported by all the parties in the House of Commons. In the recent discussion on revising Sunday laws, Mr. W. T. Jones (Lab.) called "for stricter enforcement of the Sabbath laws." Mr. M. K. Macmillan (Lab.) said, "As far as I know, it [the demand for an enquiry into the Sunday laws] has not the support of even one Scottish Member." As for TV, Mr. Renton, of the Home Office, allowed you to watch it on Sunday, though "it might be illegal under the Act of 1677." But this Act was "not enforced"—for which relief much thanks.

★

The well-known dramatist and ex-M.P., Mr. Edward Percy, recently made a slashing attack in the *News Chronicle* on "the Last Tyrant"—our Theatre Censor—with the plea "to abolish his powers." This censorship started in the eighteenth century, mostly designed to prevent political lampooning; and it was strengthened by the Theatre Regulation Act of 1843. Yet plays denied the legitimate theatre can be produced by "theatre clubs." Mr. Percy managed to get his Bill to abolish the Censorship passed by a majority in 1949, but unfortunately it got no further owing to Mr. Attlee dissolving Parliament.

★

But there is a worse "censorship" still supported by all parties in Parliament, and that is the Law of Blasphemy. Although prosecutions for blasphemy are not actually encouraged by the authorities, it is still *a crime* to criticise Christianity in a way which may "wound" Christian susceptibilities, though exactly what this is depends not on any exact definition, but on what a Christian policeman or magistrate may feel about it. It is as big a scandal—or even bigger—than the dramatic censorship. We wonder where Mr. Percy stands on this?

★

Some of our national newspapers make a big splash with "Your fate in the stars," but can anything be much more amusing than a comparison of them all? They never, of course, foretell the same fate for anybody, but the "Stars and You" are perhaps the most read feature in their columns. It is extraordinary what a lot of things can be foretold by the stars—though, of course, Astrology is of no use whatever when it comes to helping the police to find out the truth about some brutal murder. Like our Spiritualists, Astrologers have consistently failed at solving murders. Except, of course, *after* the police had succeeded without them.

★

ITV'S contribution to Religion the other Sunday was a discussion between the Rev. H. A. Hamilton and an agricultural expert on grass—the idea being getting "down to the roots." Needless to add, the expert told us a lot about

grass, with Mr. Hamilton, who had to bring in Jesus somehow, adding that "our Lord" talked also quite a lot about grass. We looked this up, and found that Jesus mentioned grass four times as a good place for his disciples to sit upon. Our parsons certainly can get Jesus across to a breathless public!

★

At Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park two gentlemen were seen grovelling on their knees before two men, one of whom was counting beads, and the other exposing a picture of Christ on a cross. It made such a beautiful, pious and touching a picture that it was promptly photographed and duly appeared recently in the London *Evening News*. Ribaldry, heckling, debate, as well as a swirling crowd, passed them by—the four men took no notice—but, in truth, what a terrible picture of ignorance and stupidity these grovelling shows give us in this year of grace 1958! Of what use are these people? Even in a wicked world?

Pious Origins

It is interesting to trace habits to their origins, and we think we might have tracked down that deplorable one of littering the countryside, against which radio and press seemingly appeal in vain. Our clue came from an old Religious Tract Society pamphlet dated about 1846. Under the heading "Hints for Usefulness," we read "Many sincere Christians have not unfrequently remarked—'We should like to be useful, but we are really at a loss to know what we can do to benefit our fellow creatures.' A few suggestions will be here given, which may be of service to those who are really anxious to do good." And suggestion number 2 is as follows: "In your walks in the country drop Handbills or Tracts, or place them on the hedge or stile by the roadside: some passer-by may thus have his eye arrested, and his heart impressed." What a nuisance some "do-gooders" can be!

SELF-SALVATION FOR US ALL

(Concluded from page 131)

animals and men, not to speak of bacteria, viruses and every living and unregarded Life Force, born to perish and make way for other manifestations.

Self-salvation has its limits, I fear. How I wish I could believe the remarkable word of Glanvil which so aroused the imagination of Edgar Allan Poe: "*Man doth not yield himself to the angels nor unto Death utterly save only through the weakness of his feeble will. . . . The will, which dieth not. . . . Who knoweth the mysteries of the will with its vigour? For God is but a great will pervading all things by nature of its intentness.*"

"Man doth not yield himself unto Death utterly save through the weakness of his will." No wonder such a concept whipped the genius of Poe into a magnificent flowering—but who dares to accept Glanvil's word? We all think that we yield ourselves to death through the weakness of our feeble bodies. But according to the great word of Glanvil, our self-salvation depends in the end upon our strength of will, whose feebleness alone yields us to Death.

Here indeed is the absolute zenith of self-salvation. But Glanvil is dead, Poe is dead—and I do not feel any Wordsworthian intimations of immortality myself at the present moment. A realist, I know that my will cannot keep me awake for more than 48 hours, and I imagine that Death will be more compelling than Sleep when he comes to me. Yet all this does not prove Glanvil's inspiring speculation to be wrong. Indeed, like a gold coin flung upon a counter, it rings true to my ear.

THE FREETHINKER

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Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

Details of membership of the National Secular Society may be obtained from the General Secretary, 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1. Members and visitors are welcome during normal office hours.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Room 4, 83 Suffolk Street).—Sunday, April 27th, 7 p.m.: L. EBURY, "Wherein is Salvation—Science or God?"

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Co-operative Hall, Parliament Street).—Sunday, April 27th, 2.30 p.m.—Debate, "Is Belief in God Justified?" Aff.: K. HUMPHREYS. Neg.: F. J. CORINA.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, April 27th, 11 a.m.: R. CLEMENTS, O.B.E., J.P., "The Humanism of Shakespeare."

Wales and Western Branch N.S.S. (Bute Town Community Centre).—Tuesday, April 29th, 7.30 p.m.: H. A. PRICE, "Superstition, Ancient and Modern."

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.: J. W. BARKER.

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, A. ARTHUR and J. W. BARKER.

Notes and News

LAST week we referred to Sir Harold Nicolson's review in *The Observer* of the new, unexpurgated edition of *The Autobiography* of Charles Darwin. We were pleased to note that *The Observer* (13/4/58) printed a letter on this subject from the General Secretary of the National Secular Society.

★

CONGRATULATIONS to National Secular Society members, E. Mills and Harry Fiddian, for getting splendid letters in the *Daily Mirror* on the same day—Wednesday, April 16th. Congratulations, too, to the *Daily Mirror* for printing them.

★

FORMER Blackpool Branch, National Secular Society, Secretary, Mr. J. G. Burdon—now living in Bolton—is another who has recently had letters published, this time in the *Bolton Evening News*. Told that what the world needed was "the clear signposted truths of the Holy Scriptures," Mr. Burdon replied: "Pious and earnest men have brooded over the Scriptures in search of guidance, and from their sordid pages of history we may read of the Dark Ages, the Crusades, the Inquisition and the slaughter of witches."

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £317 15s.; A. Hancock, 2s.; A. Peries (Ceylon), 10s.; D. Pezze (U.S.A.), 5s.; R. Reader, 5s.; A. H. Briancourt, 15s.; R. Muir, 14s.; J.T., 5s.; E. Roux (South Africa), £1 2s. 6d.—Total to date, April 18th, 1958, £321 13s. 11d.

MR. W. WALKER, of Gateshead, is among our most active writers to the press, and he must be well known in the North-East after his recent successes in the *Newcastle Journal* and the *Newcastle Evening Chronicle*. On the question of creation, he recently wrote to the latter paper: "As I see it, if anything is eternal and self-sufficient, it might well be the functioning universe. That, we can examine gradually... whereas postulation of a Creator remains arbitrary and inconclusive."

★

DR. GUY VALOT is the foremost Freethought expert on Lourdes and author, with his late wife Dr. Thérèse Valot, of the book, *Lourdes et l'illusion*, now in its fifth edition, and obtainable from Librairie Maloine, 27 rue de l'Ecole de Médecine, Paris 6e, for 300 francs plus postage. When Dr. Thérèse Valot was tragically killed in a motoring accident at Easter 1956, the French Catholic press attributed her death to an act of God. Her husband refers to this in his latest article on Lourdes, *The Truth about the Origins of Lourdes*, which we shall be publishing in translation. Dr. Valot recently addressed a very strongly-worded open letter to the French Television authority deploring programmes on Lourdes which had favoured Catholicism. As a result, Dr. Valot himself appeared on TV (Télé-Paris) on April 21st.

★

A CORRESPONDENT in Glasgow, Mr. J. S. Clinton, raises the very difficult problem of dealing with intelligent people who nevertheless believe in the absurdities of Christianity. Many Roman Catholics, he points out, graduate from our Universities still believing in their religion. He instances a lady he knows, unmarried, who frequently bestows holy medals, rosaries, pictures and icons upon her nine nephews and nieces. "You might think she was feeble-minded or grossly ignorant," he writes, "but as a matter of fact she is a graduate in mathematics from Glasgow University." "How educate her?" Mr. Clinton asks. We can suggest no short cut. The lady is the product of a centuries-old religious environment that Freethinkers just have to keep pegging away at. The Church of Rome wasn't built in a day, and it won't be destroyed in one either. But the picture is not by any means all black. The Freethought movement, here and abroad, contains many ex-Catholics in its ranks; many other Catholics drift away from their Church. Even priests leave. And perhaps the present series of articles by ex-Father Drewitt will provide some encouragement in the great task that Freethinkers undertake.

★

THE *Manchester Guardian* (15/4/58) gave an amusing illustration of the common error of spelling "dog" backwards. A correspondent reported being approached by a Boy Scout in connection with the recent "bob-a-job" week. On the card presented, the previous entry read: "For taking god for a nice long walk, 1s. 6d." The responsibility entailed no doubt accounted for the extra sixpence pay!

ANNUAL CONFERENCE, Nottingham, Whit Sunday, May 25th, 1958. Members who want to reserve accommodation should inform the General Secretary, N.S.S., 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1, as early as possible. Please state number of double or single rooms and nights required.

My Years as a Monk

By O. C. DREWITT (EX-FATHER NORBERT, O.P.)

(Continued from page 127)

For two years I tried the experiment of working as a priest in the Anglican Church, but, finding it already impossible to pronounce a word of the Nicene Creed with a normal interpretation, I gave up and returned to teaching. The final disappearance of religion and the accompanying sensations did not occur till nearly twenty years after ordination. This gives an idea of the hold which assimilated dogma can have. It also underlines the fact that high-powered religion is fundamentally sincere. Humanist writers tend to impugn the sincerity of the Church, implying, for example, that theologians hang on to their jobs for economic reasons. This attitude baulks the main issue, namely the sinister hold on the believer exerted by dogmatic and moral theology. Such an attitude is dangerously superficial. The psychological reasons for the hold and how it can be relaxed will be indicated in the sequel.

But first the external working of the religious mechanism must be described, starting with the novitiate.

The novitiate is the Dominican house for the novices, who enter for a trial year. The novitiate of the English province was in the Cotswolds near Gloucester, and we joined in the autumn, at the beginning of the penitential part of the year when life is made more difficult than it is in the summer. Still, it was a warm September, and the priory was attractive: a pretty little monastery, grey stone, nineteenth-century Gothic in style with a church in keeping. As soon as you entered the enclosure the atmosphere was medieval. It was like being translated back seven hundred years in H. G. Wells's time-machine: the silent figures walking in the cloister, in white habits and with tonsured heads; the chapter-room where the monks confessed minor transgressions against the rule; the garth or quadrangle, shut off from the world on three sides by the cloister, on the fourth by the church; and the refectory, with its plain wooden tables, and the strange Madonna fastened near the ceiling, with an infant Jesus holding a symbol of the world that resembled a football.

Then there was the barrier, beyond which no woman could pass under pain of excommunication. Other romantic features were the many paintings of Dominic, and a favourite one of Peter Martyr, the inquisitor, showing his bleeding head cracked by the assassin. It was all very attractive and peaceful.

My room faced the inside of the enclosure and overlooked the quadrangle. The view was pleasant, particularly in winter when the roofs of church and priory sparkled in the moonlight. We shall call it a "room," because, although "cell" is more correct, it can be misleading. Strictly the expression "my room" is doubly inexact, because monks individually own no property, and one is taught that it is "more perfect" to call one's room "our cell." However, language becomes involved, and only the rigid monks try to be consistent. The letter of the rule would require them to speak of "our trousers," and it would be "more perfect" to do so.

The "cell," then, is an ordinary room, but plain. It contains a bed, with rough blankets and no sheets. In some priories the mattress is made of straw and the bed is a wooden tray. There is a writing-table, also a bookcase, and a chair, and a good light and sensible heating in winter. Hanging behind the door is a discipline, with which you are supposed to whip yourself three times a week, to the

accompaniment of a penitential psalm. The purpose is repressive, but the operation almost impossible to perform. That may be why it never worked.

In the novitiate we did no regular study. This began the following year. The novitiate is a period of experiment in keeping the rules of poverty, chastity and obedience. These are the basic principles of any religious order. They were explained in the *Rule of St. Augustine*, which was read aloud in the refectory every week, once in Latin, and again in English for the benefit of the lay-brothers, many of whom were workpeople.

Special Dominican rules, many and complicated, were contained in the *Constitutions of the Order of Preachers*. The three basic rules, however, are the only ones that need occupy us here. The basic rule of poverty means that you individually own nothing, that it is spiritually dangerous to want to own anything. Although all property is held in common, certain articles, like books or garments, can be made over to your use. If they bear your name, the Latin words *ad usum*, "for the use of," are written before it. Property held in common can be of great value, from cloth-of-gold vestments to land.

The basic rule of chastity means that you should live without giving natural motility to half your instinctual drives. About this there will be more in the sequel. It holds the clue to the religious position and the meaning of religion.

The remaining basic rule, that of obedience, involves submission to the orders of a superior without question and immediately. It also involves perfect patience: anger and aggression in thought or deed are forbidden. This again is important, for we shall see in what follows how both the libidinal and the aggressive drives of the monk are given neurotic forms of outlet. The power of the Church is anchored in the unconscious mechanisms thereby kept in movement.

The rule of obedience applies not only to external actions, but to your judgment, which you must conform to the mind of your superior. It is considered imprudent, and consequently dangerous, to judge his orders to be either bad or even foolish, unless they are plainly unethical, in which case you should disregard them. As it is rarely plain to any religious that a precept is unethical in the eyes of the Church, this provision is unimportant unless you are told to murder a humanist philosopher—and in the Catholic Middle Ages, or under a totalitarian government, to do even this indirectly through the "secular arm" could be judged meritorious.

It should be noted, before leaving the subject of obedience, that a superior has to obey his own superior, and so on, up to the Master General in Rome, who is in turn responsible to the Pope. The organisation of the Order is therefore monolithic.

Turning now to the time-table, as it is regulated under obedience and Dominican traditions. There is a rule of silence—"simple" in the day and "solemn" at night. The simple silence can be dispensed with for reasonable needs of discussion, and it is always dispensed with for the daily periods of recreation after lunch and supper. The solemn silence is rarely dispensed with. Both types, however, only obtain inside the enclosure. If the monks are out walking, they can talk, although even then there are limitations on

natural motility. The rules told us it was "imperfect" to shout or get excited, to laugh immoderately, to exercise too much curiosity about trifles, or to attend "spectacles." "Spectacles" was a medieval term suggesting public hangings and the like, but I suppose it really meant circuses or a public appearance of Diana Dors. Anyway, it was "imperfect" to attend them.

Inside the novitiate (the part of the monastery where the novices lived) other forms of contamination were removed. There were no wireless, gramophone, or secular newspapers. We had some religious magazines, in one of which I remember an old priest who used to advertise week after week that he had three hundred and ninety-six children and no money. After the novitiate year more latitude was

granted, particularly concerning music, but the general feeling among superiors was that even music should be introduced with caution, and the little there was would have to be "serious." There were holiday orgies of swing sometimes (it was the worst period for jazz, before the revival), but good religious frowned. I do not know what music they have in the novitiate at present, but I guess it won't be Louis Armstrong or Chris Barber. The bio-physical, somatic currents associated with jazz are irreconcilable with Catholic ascetism.

Music was thought sensuously material; which, of course, it is, being the production of new qualities in self-moving matter.

(To be continued)

Dr. Hepburn and Paradox

By COLIN McCALL

Christianity and Paradox is a curious book. It both pleased me and disappointed me. Perhaps it is a matter of temperament, and Dr. R. W. Hepburn's is clearly very different from my own. And perhaps our two temperaments are representative of the two wings of the Freethought and Rationalist movement. The blurb tells us that "A new phase in the discussion between philosophy and religion is beginning"; that "we are far from the days when the Logical Positivist could confidently brand religious statements as 'nonsensical' by showing that their truth or falsity could not be confirmed in the same ways as statements in science. . . . May not religious language have a function which it alone properly performs? Could it not have a logic of its own, although a very different one from the language of the laboratory?"

This sort of attitude, it seems to me, is fatal to philosophy. Man has laboriously built up a method which is daily proving its worth; this method—the scientific method—has rightly become our standard. We all use it in everyday life (in judging the truth or falsity of stories and reports, etc.) its language has permeated our common speech and is by no means confined to the "laboratory"; and it must, I maintain, form the basis of any worthwhile philosophy. A philosophy that does not measure up to scientific requirements is valueless. I do not mean that philosophy and science are identical. As the outstanding modern exposition of Materialism (*Philosophy for the Future: the Quest for Modern Materialism*, edited Sellars, McGill and Farber) puts it, the philosopher "accepts what the physicist, chemist, biologist, histologist, etc., say as the best approximation at any given time. But he should be able to add considerable epistemological clarification along with semantic and categorial analysis." But science must form the basis.

I hold, then, that it is completely valid to test religious theories by scientific standards. I go further and say that this is not only valid, but necessary. And if they do not satisfy those standards, I reject them without regret. Dr. Hepburn is of very different temperament. Although he knows that "a number of influential theological views . . . are exposed to a variety of logical objections which render them untenable," he hastens to assure us that his criticisms of them "are not negative polemic with a purely destructive, iconoclastic purpose." This sort of apologetic writing is, alas, all too common today. If a view is logically untenable, why be ashamed about critically destroying it? Humanists are so afraid of being labelled "negative" that they tumble over backwards. "Don't let's be nasty to the Christians" might well be their motto.

In fact they only deceive themselves and, if anybody

benefits, it is the Christian. In Dr. Hepburn's case, his criticisms *do* destroy theological arguments—and very well at times, too—but he attempts a last minute salvage operation: a secular religion which retains the "pilgrimage-motif."

This is a book—a very able and useful book—written by a "reluctant sceptic who has a 'naturally religious mind.'" It would not have been written—Dr. Hepburn tells us—"but for my personal pilgrimage in search of a satisfactory justification of religious belief." And it is "a *continuing* pilgrimage"—he adds—despite the fact that none of the approaches discussed in this book seems to me to survive scrutiny." I should say here that the arguments considered are very representative of modern theology. Karl Barth, Professor H. H. Farmer, Dr. E. L. Mascall, Reinold Niebuhr and Professor Alan Richardson—these names give some idea of the views presented and shown wanting. Dr. Hepburn's iconoclastic operation is performed quietly, regretfully, but it is nonetheless effective: it leaves nothing behind. Presumably he will continue his surgery on each new theological case, equally regretfully, ever hoping to find the impossible—a patient sound in mind and body. My use of the term "impossible" may sound dogmatic. It is justified, I suggest, because there are in reality no *new* theological arguments, merely old ones presented in modern guise. However, Dr. Hepburn's surgical technique is good. Therein lies the value of his book.

Dealing with the Christological movement (of which Barth is the best known exponent), Dr. Hepburn denies the possibility of treating God and Jesus as identical. There are Biblical passages that warrant it, but there are others that contradict it. Philosophically, the Christologist sets himself the impossible task of "conjuring transcendence out of immanence, infinity out of finitude, eternity out of time." He has to show, for example, why Christ's "waiting for the hour" cannot be adequately described in temporal language; why it cries out for a "further description in terms of eternity revealed" as Hans Von Balthasar claims.

Barth himself denies that Christianity possesses any features that are not present in other religions. It differs from them only because it has been "adopted" by God as the vehicle for his revelation. Dr. Hepburn asks the very useful question developed by Professor Antony Flew: what would have to happen for Barth to change his mind about the truth of Christianity? "In what circumstances would he change his mind and opt, say, for Islam?"

But perhaps the most interesting chapter in *Christianity and Paradox* is the one on "God and the Cosmos." A great many remarks that one can make with perfect propriety about limited things, says Dr. Hepburn, "quite obviously

cannot be made about the cosmos itself. It cannot, for instance, be said meaningfully to be 'above' or 'below' anything, although things-in-the-universe can be so related to one another. Whatever we might claim to be 'below the universe' would turn out to be just some more *universe*. We should have been relating part to part, instead of relating the whole to something not-the-universe." The same, of course, applies to "outside" or "behind" the universe. Developing this theme, we can argue similarly about causes. Because things in the world have causes, we cannot logically conclude that "the sum of things" must have a cause.

And if St. Thomas's much vaunted "contingent and necessary being" argument demands a "regress from beings whose non-existence is conceivable to a being whose non-existence is inconceivable [which it obviously does—C.McC.] then it fails," says Dr. Hepburn. "There can be no such regress, for its terminus would be not only infinitely remote but also logically impossible." The notion of God as an "unconditionally necessary being" is "logically vacuous."

Yet, though Dr. Hepburn is sceptical about the Cosmological Argument, his scepticism "takes the form of a genuine suspension of judgment, rather than a hostile dogmatism" (why "hostile dogmatism" instead of "rejection"?). He is able to "attach something rather like good sense to the notion of a Ground for the world's existence that is not strictly its cause or its designer . . . especially when the vision of such a being is expressed through the medium of great poetry."

This is, roughly, where we came in. If you notice the capital "G" in "Ground," and ask yourself what relevance has great—or for that matter, bad—poetry to a logical criticism of theology, you are probably "iconoclastic." Perhaps, like me, you see merit in iconoclasm. In that case, Dr. Hepburn's book will irritate you at times, but you will also find it thoughtful and useful, though not without its own paradox.

[*Christianity and Paradox: Critical Studies in Twentieth-Century Theology* by Ronald W. Hepburn. C. A. Watts and Co. Ltd., 1958. 18s.]

Adopting a New Religion

IN ADOPTING the Christian religion what exactly were the Northmen and our own Old English forebears doing? For the ordinary folk of both branches of the North-Western European race Christianity did not mean anything like what it has come to mean in latter centuries—the 39 Articles or the Pauline Doctrine or even the tenets of the Sermon on the Mount. It meant a story of a child born miraculously of a virgin mother, born in the dead of Winter, surrounded significantly by the beasts of the field, the ox and the ass with the sheep and shepherds hard by on the frosty hill. It is the story of a baby whose birth was mystically connected with a time of peace over all the earth, who grew to manhood, suffered a bloody wound and died to be resurrected again from the dead. And perhaps most important, the death and resurrection of Jesus was a necessity that the world might live. This was what the "new" story, the "new" myth, the "new" religion meant to the ordinary people, and it was compatible with many fertility rites and observances such as the blessing of the plough, of rivers and sea, with the conjuration of fruit trees with prayers for good seasons, rain and the general fertility of the earth, with thanksgiving at harvest, with mourning and rejoicing at Easter for the death of the god and his resurrection.

[Brian Branston, *The Lost Gods of England*, 1957.]

CORRESPONDENCE

THE HOLY PREPUCE

Mr. Du Cann seems to treat M. Peyrefitte's session of the Holy Office (which gives the article its title) as having actually taken place in 1954. As I read the book I took the session to be procedurally accurate only. And in his *Report on the Vatican*, Mr. Bernard Wall asks: "How could Peyrefitte have got to know what happened behind the sealed doors of the Holy Office?" "I now understand"—Wall continues—"that he found a report of a session that took place hundreds of years ago and then substituted the name of living Cardinals for those of the original participants."

ROBERT DENT.

LECTURE REPORT

THE Manchester N.S.S. Branch ended the indoor season on April 13th with an address by Mr. D. Shipper on a subject in which he has made himself an authority, "The International Freethought Scene." The speaker outlined the current struggles and successes of our freethought comrades in many different parts of the world, and displayed, in the course of his address, some eighty free-thought and humanist periodicals and local bulletins from various countries, a collection which must be unique in this country at least.

G.H.T.

N. S. S. EXECUTIVE

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 16TH.—Present: Messrs. W. Griffiths (Acting Chairman), Alexander, Arthur, Barker, Gordon, Hornibrook, Johnson, Taylor, Warner, Mrs. Venton and the Secretary. Apologies from Messrs. Ridley, Ebury and Mrs. Trask. New members were admitted to Blackpool, Central London, Dagenham, Merseyside, North London and Portsmouth Branches which, with individual members numbered 10. The passing over of moneys and work of the Society for the Abolition of the Blasphemy Laws to the Humanist Council was recommended. Support was given to proposal for a visit to the newly renovated Bradlaugh statue at Northampton on Saturday, June 21st. Branch matters were dealt with. Conference agenda was approved for printing. The next meeting was fixed for Wednesday, May 14th, 1958.

Obituary

THE Leicester Secular Society regret to announce the death of their oldest member, Mr. A. J. Essex, at the age of 88 years, on March 18th, 1958. We shall remember him as a man athirst for knowledge. Understanding, eager and friendly in discussion, we are proud that for so many years he chose to associate himself with us and, in fellowship, share our aims and ideals. To his sorrowing relatives we tender our deepest sympathy.

A secular service was conducted at Gilroes Crematorium by the undersigned.

G. A. KIRK, President, Leicester Secular Society.

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.

FOR YOUR LIBRARY

A CHRONOLOGY OF BRITISH SECULARISM.

By G. H. Taylor. Price 1/-; post 2d.

CAN MATERIALISM EXPLAIN MIND? By G. H. Taylor.

Price 3/6; postage 6d.

THE THINKER'S HANDBOOK, A Guide to Religious Controversy. By Hector Hawton.

Price 2/6; postage 7d.

WHY I AM NOT A CHRISTIAN. By Bertrand Russell, O.M.

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