

# The Freethinker

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IN THE FREETHINKER of February 21st, there was a note on an ITV play about Bernadette Soubirous, to whom a lady calling herself the "Immaculate Conception" appeared in a grotto at Lourdes. The play, written by H. R. Williamson, purported "to give his viewers the 'truth'—that Bernadette was not a liar, not suffering from hysteria and imagining things, and that therefore her 'vision' was literally true and the 'miracle' of Lourdes was born."

If the story current around the Lourdes countryside is true, and it is widely believed, then Bernadette did see a real living person exactly as in Tennyson Jesse's novel, *The Miracle*, published in the early thirties, in which is described the appearance of a woman, deliberately contrived by two peasant children.

In 1936, I lived in Pau, a large town about 45 km. from Lourdes, with a French medical colleague whom I helped in his practice. We went through Lourdes quite frequently and I spent a whole Sunday in that town. What I saw shocked me to the core. At that time I could (and still do to some extent) speak, understand, read, write and think French as fluently as my native language, English. I had no need for interpreters and could speak to the people not only in French but with all the frills of local ways of speech: after all, I successfully practised medicine amongst them. I feel, therefore, competent to have an opinion, based on local belief and personal observation and a knowledge of the psychology of the "habitants du pays."

For the purpose of this article, we may divide the people of the countryside into four groups: the "croyants," the believers in the Catholic version of the Christian mythology; the Protestant "béarnais," mostly Huguenots of whom there are considerably large groups in Béarn, the old province to the west of Lourdes towards the Biscay coast; the anti-clerical, mostly atheistic, intellectuals, also a fairly large group; and, lastly, the fluid mass of merchants, cafétiers, shopkeepers selling "objets de dévotion," hôteliers, etc., all cashing in to the fullest possible extent on the poor dupes who come to Lourdes for miracles.

**Lourdes**  
These people are as cynical as possible, and that means something in France, where a low standard of living makes working gainfully an occupation out of which the maximum squeeze is to be obtained. What a Glasgow Catholic pays for a rosary in Lourdes would keep him for a week at home. It was this cruel cynicism which so shocked me apart from the horrible ecclesiastical racketeering on top. That is, particularly, what I found so revolting, this flip-pant dishonesty seeping down from Cardinals, Bishops, Doctors, etc., to the lowest levels, that is, the whole of a local society completely corrupted. The pilgrims bring prosperity to shops, hotels, transport authorities—buses, railways, the funicular on the hill over Lourdes, etc.—all attracted to the fake miracle factory which has never yet produced a miracle and never will. How did it start?

This is the story freely told over the countryside. The "croyants" are grimly silent on the subject, of course, but reliable good Huguenots and intellectuals relate it freely with the attitude of take it or leave it while the racketeers "s'en fichent,"—they don't give too hoots as long as they can sell rosaries and accommodation at 1,000% profit.

Obviously the most reliable groups are the Protestant and intellectual; they cannot be hypnotised by money and "faith."

## Madonna in Underclothes

At the time Bernadette was tending sheep around Lourdes, so the local story goes, Tarbes, about 30 km.

from Lourdes and the chief town of the Department in which the miracle factory lies, was an important garrison town, quartering a regiment of cavalry. Readers of Jane Austen know how insufferably dull garrison life can be for our brave defenders without agreeable female company. So it is not surprising that a young and handsome officer of the Tarbes garrison should have desired and attracted a young matron of the town. Conscious of the probing eyes and captious tongues of the pious bourgeois of Tarbes, the lovers sought their ultimate satisfactions in a field remote as practicable from the home-town: the grottoes in the hilly mounds above the Gave de Pau, the river that runs through Lourdes. Here the Arms Amandi, of immemorial provenance, was practised by the lovers in serene peace until, late one afternoon, in the rushes and arbutus below the grotto favoured by the lovers, they heard steps and movement. Peering out, they saw a shepherd girl and her sister, herding sheep. The girl saw the lady and cried out and the lady, clothed, naturally enough, in her long white underclothes, stood up and called to the child, Bernadette, who stood in wonder at the sight of this white apparition. The lady, knowing that, in local folklore, every Pyrenean valley had its miraculous madonna, naturally told Bernadette that she, too, was the Virgin come to the valley of the Gave de Pau, and, by a remarkable piece of intuition, announced herself as in some way associated with sex relations with which priests and other spinsters of both sexes are obsessed, in this case Conception which can result only from such relations, the Holy Ghost's mythical effort to the contrary.

Anyway, the little Soubirous girl, thrilled to have discovered at last a local madonna to rival those of other valleys (there are dozens of them as McCabe has shown), rushed off to the Curé. With all the peasant shrewdness of these fellows, he refused to believe her. Naturally when he went out to the grotto the lovers lay low; hence the continued local scepticism. Bernadette kept on seeing what she had already seen but, of course, nobody else could. It must also have been boring and banal for children to be rushing into presbyteries as they did all along the Pyrenees and, of course, at Fatima, always poor, ignorant, illiterate kids, announcing another apparition of the Virgin in one of her many aliases. It became a sort of parlour game with the kids. Still, on the word of these rather moronic chil-

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

## Lourdes

### As I Know It

—By DR. J. V. DUHIG—

dren there has grown the wickedest swindle of modern times: there has never been one authentic miracle at Lourdes. Dr. D. J. West's investigation shows how disingenuous and occasionally dishonest are the announcements of cures; by dishonesty I mean the kind of scientific dishonesty by which evidence is slanted, of which there is undoubted evidence.

### Holy H<sub>2</sub>O

One example of this kind of chicanery concerns the origin of the miraculous water. Until recent years, the poor "faithful" assumed this came from the grotto. I looked at this long and often and I estimate it would take a day to fill two petrol cans with water from the grotto drippings. In actual fact, every citizen of any intelligence (and that excludes most Catholics) in Lourdes knows that the water in the "piscine" or tank into which the ailing seeking cures are pitched, comes from the Gave de Pau, the river which rises in the Cirque de Gavarnie up in the Pyrenees and flows down through Lourdes and Pau to join the Adour River flowing into the Bay of Biscay north of Bayonne. I knew that in 1936, but it was never generally known; the idea of grotto water was too precious to waste. Actually along the open space in front of the grotto and its horrible, tasteless statue, there are taps from which the poor dupes of Catholics can fill containers with genuine "Lourdes Water." I now know from medical experience what a heartless swindle this is. A few years ago, "Electricité de France," a power and light company, wanted to weir off the gave (Basque word for river), above Lourdes, to enable the company to enlarge the scope of supply to the people. At long last the world learned the truth: the Bishop, the Cardinal Archbishop of Paris, local politicians, thinking

only of votes, influenced by depression of the Pilgrim Trade, finally admitted that the miraculous water came from the Gave de Pau and demanded that the plan be stopped. It is, admittedly, terribly hard to make the Catholic Church honest, but it did happen this time. Now we know.

Moreover, when a priest of the Basilica staff falls sick he consults a doctor; he does not jump into the piscine, the water of which, incidentally, if miraculous at Lourdes, should be equally so at Gavarnie, St. Pé, Pau, Orthey and Bayonne.

### Miracle Factory

In conclusion, it should be known that after the first flush of hysteria accompanying the establishment of Lourdes as a miracle factory centre, Bernadette was banished to a distant convent, far gone with consumption. It might have been thought that poor little sick Bernadette, who had brought such wealth to the region and to the Church, might have been allowed to try the healing waters in the old home town. But, no, she was kept away from her native region and died without benefit of Lourdes Water right on the spot where she saw the beautiful lady; a callous job. But the economic interest of the Church was paramount; Bernadette might have talked too much, or at least, that is the way the local sceptics see it. The story of the priests seemed good enough and a truthful girl might possibly have spoilt it.

I have seen what happens at Lourdes (and I could say heaps more to the discredit of the clergy and their fake miraculous set-up) and I repeat that the Lourdes Miracle Factory is the lousiest and cruellest swindle of modern times; Al Capone, one of the Church's favourite sons, was a simple lisping baby in comparison.

## Ethics of the Anglican Church

By A. R. WILLIAMS

MENTION MORALITY to a clergyman, whether he be bishop, priest or deacon, and he will think of sex. His utterances aloud may be concerned with care of illegitimate children, rehabilitation of unmarried mothers, prevention of prostitution, cure of homosexuality, suppression of adultery, eliminating bigamy and fair treatment of the two women involved, but he considers morals almost entirely in terms of sex.

Divorce is an obsession with clerics. They will discuss it at endless length; have obviously a sneaking desire to abolish the Divorce Laws altogether; failing that, do all they can to make conditions as unpleasant as possible for divorced people, with much talk of punishment and guilty partners.

"Punishment" and "guilty partners"; what themes for those who profess to practise Christian charity!

It is becoming increasingly difficult to get a cleric to regard any form of morality or immorality outside sexual actions. Yet the world is full of great problems compared with which the private sex actions of individuals are of small importance or effect upon others. On these larger ethical issues facing communities the Anglican Church speaks not at all or with such uncertain voices as to be negligible.

This is not new. It has gone on for centuries, ever since the Anglican Church became the State Church. Characteristic of this is its attitude to war. Emphasising in its Prayer Book the afflictions of plague, pestilence and famine, the Church omits a ghastlier one: war.

As long as British arms won victories the world over

and Britannia ruled the waves, the Church was content to condone war, pray to its tribal God for successes, and to hang up the flags of historic regiments in its cathedrals. Coming of modern large-scale warfare found the Anglican Church floundering out of its depths.

War no longer means access of wealth, frankly plunder and exploitable territory for the victor. Smaller nations and non-Christian races have revolted against being victims of colonialism. Britain is painfully adjusting its policies to such, with hankerings after former dominance. But not a word of lead from the Anglican Church toward the world of peace and equality which must come.

To complete the discomfiture of the Church, even as it has disturbed politicians, though not enough, comes the atom bomb. Had the Church any interest in morality and ability to speak with authoritative voice on such, it would have condemned the atom and hydrogen bombs wholeheartedly, also the release into the atmosphere of poisonous matter which threatens the future of humanity.

If such issues are too great and urgent for consideration by the National Church, there are others which merit its attention. Humane treatment of animals, broadening of education, care of the aged, relations between capital and labour, grossly excessive profitmaking which disfigures commerce; these and many more might be thought worthy of pronouncements by a Church concerned with morality.

But no! More important is it to discuss at length the weighty problem whether divorced persons shall be admitted to Communion or not!

## My Years as a Monk

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

(Continued from page 139)

AFTER THE EARLY MASS came the first meal, which was nothing but a piece of bread with coffee or tea. There followed an interval for making beds and tidying rooms, before the principal Mass, which was sung in Gregorian chant. On Sundays and festivals there would be a High Mass, with priest, deacon and sub-deacon, incense and the big candles lit, and a more complicated ritual. The other parts of the Office were sandwiched between the Masses, recited before lunch, after lunch, and before and after supper. There was usually time in the afternoon for a compulsory walk or manual labour, which was intended to be as hard or dull as possible, although I don't think many novices found it burdensome. It took the form of chopping wood, shifting coal, hoeing the garden, or working in the laundry. Most of us found manual labour a relief. Neither was it always dull. One afternoon a brother who had been gathering fuel was seen careering along in the monastery pony-cart, being chased by a bull. He was kneeling, behind a rampart of logs, praying to the Virgin (and his prayer was answered, because somebody had the intelligence to open the gate).

Meals were eaten in silence. At lunch and supper a novice would be appointed to read aloud from a pulpit at one end of the refectory. There would be a sung ritual grace and hand-washing before the principal meal, and another ritual grace at the end. The same happened at supper during part of the year. On Friday evenings, after the chapter, where minor faults against the rule had been confessed, two or three monks might be kneeling in the middle of the refectory, one with arms outstretched in the form of a cross, another making a number of inclinations. These were penances. If the reader mispronounced a word, he too would come down from the pulpit after the meal and make a *venia*, which involved prostration before the prior. If he were corrected in the course of the reading he would lift the edge of his scapular—the blessed apron of the monk—and kiss it, in acknowledgment of the fault. Innumerable small errors made in public, for example during the Office in church, were acknowledged in the same manner. Brethren who wished to be scrupulously "perfect" tended to perform the action a surprising number of times in a day: the "perfect" religious, according to Catholic theology, is immediately conveyed to glory after death, without associating either with imperfect monks in purgatory or, needless to add, with the unbaptised children in limbo.

Religious life involves many additional exercises similar to the ones already described. We had a second "liturgy" called the Lady Office, to be recited daily. The rosary, or bead-prayer, was recited daily. There were the angelus, litanies, processions and prayers for the dead. Numbers of private devotional practices were also carried out by individual monks. They included Stations of the Cross, Jesus Psalters, devotions to particular saints, to the Sacred Heart and the Virgin. There were visits to the Sacrament, flagellations, and vigils in the middle of the night associated with some of the great festivals.

"Religion," wrote Freud in *The Future of an Illusion*, "is the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity." But, before picking up the thread of our references to Freud and depth psychology, a word or two must be said about the studies.

Studies in the Dominican Order began after the first year, during which no regular work in philosophy or theo-

logy was done. Simple vows for three years followed the novitiate, and we were assigned to another priory called the house of philosophy. At the end of three years the students take the solemn vows, which are perpetual, and go to a third priory called the house of theology. The English house of philosophy was in Staffordshire, the house of theology at Oxford. The religious life in both was virtually identical with life in the novitiate, except that compulsory manual labour was abolished and the classes eliminated some of the minor devotions.

There were three years of philosophy and four of theology, which included courses in Scripture, apologetics, Church history, Canon Law, and subsidiary classes which ran simultaneously. We also had scholastic disputations in Latin, of the kind that have been broadcast in recent years by the BBC. The philosophy course was divided into two concurrent three-year programmes, one in Aristotelian and medieval philosophy, the other in the history of philosophy. The four-year dogmatic and moral theology courses which followed were chiefly commentaries on the *Summa Theologica* of Thomas Aquinas, whom I have already mentioned.

The curricula were reasonably full as far as they went, and discussions in class were generally as complete as the information allowed: within the confines of Catholic philosophy the more capable Dominican teachers have usually had a better grasp of the system than other theologians, including the Jesuits. On the other hand, some of the Oxford Jesuits had a fuller understanding of modern philosophy and science than our own lecturers. That twentieth century discoveries would raise new problems with which the apparatus of medieval thought and language was incapable of dealing, did not occur to many of them. There was further a gap in the course; it may have been filled by now, but at that time nothing serious was attempted after Hegel. An impression was given to students who had no preliminary knowledge of science and philosophy, that the arguments of people like Mach, Bradley, William James, or Bergson, were trifling. Some students confined their interest to text-books by obscure Italian apologists, where such names were mentioned and their arguments dismissed in a paragraph. Students of this kind were looked on as the reliable, "sound" ones. Perhaps they were.

In the courses, books that were being discussed currently in the universities were virtually ignored. The authors included Russell, Whitehead, Alexander, Lloyd Morgan and Santayana. I do not remember having heard the terms "logical atomism" or "logical positivism" used in class. Nor, incidentally, were Marx and Engels referred to. It was never suggested that they made a contribution to philosophy at all.

(To be continued)

Have you ever talked with monks and nuns? You may admit that some of these good souls may be saints, but their conversation, even on spiritual subjects, very soon becomes arid and stereotyped, always revolving round a few dulcet incorrigible maxims.—GEORGE SANTAYANA.

NEXT WEEK

HOYLE INTERPRETS HISTORY

By G. H. TAYLOR

## This Believing World

The Lord's Day Observance Society has just won an astounding victory backed as it was by both parties in the House of Commons. In 1953, the Sunday Observance Bill for revising the Sunday laws was defeated there by 281 members to 57, and no doubt the figures would have been bigger for Sunday if all the members had voted. And recently, when once again an effort was made by a few members to bring some sanity into our priest-ridden and ridiculous Sunday laws, fewer than a hundred members turned up, and the debate was adjourned. But from what was said then, Parliament would once again have kicked out any effort to amend these antiquated laws based on sheer superstition and on an outdated Oriental religion.

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It is interesting to note, however, that the emphasis is laid these days on Sunday being "the Lord's Day" and not so much on it being the "Sabbath" day. Sunday is in fact a heritage from Sun worship, and was taken over bodily by the followers of Jesus who (as he called himself) was "The Light of the World"—that is, the Sun. But now and then even our hidebound bishops feel it is time to kick against the ignorance, stupidity, and credulity, fostered by a body of religious cranks like the Lord's Day Observance Society. It used to be run by a gentleman known as "Misery" Martin, and his admirers have done their best to keep the word "misery" untouched in all their doings.

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The Bishop of Coventry, who wanted to introduce some music and gaiety for the opening of his Cathedral, has had to give in to the outcry about "desecrating" the Lord's Day; and he now deplores the bigotry and intolerance of so many true Christians. Freethinkers have fought for a "rest" day once a week free from religious inhibitions ever since they began criticising the Bible, with very little success—most of our Bishops agreeing with the humbug of their own Puritans. Even Charles Dickens, as a young writer, attacked the impudent Sunday laws we suffer from, but his admirers prefer to forget his efforts in this direction. Perhaps the outcry by the Bishop of Coventry now will at last bring some sanity, not only into our Sunday laws, but into the whole question of compulsory religion in our schools.

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Some of our magistrates and judges are horrified at the increase in crime among our young people who are so often called "juvenile delinquents"—but they say very little about them being brought up in a Christian country and forced to have religion taught to them in our schools. If Christianity is really a deterrent to crime, why is there still so much hooliganism among Christian youths? Why should all the blame be put on them being born during the war years? Is not the plain fact the utter failure of Christianity to prevent crime?

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The Bishop of Bangor has got into trouble with those Spiritualists who go in for "spiritual" healing—he has refused to allow them to use the local St. Mary's Hall for this purpose and they are very angry. This is the case because their methods, they claim, are "closer to those of Jesus and the Apostles than the present ministry of the Church." There is, of course, no evidence whatever that Jesus ever healed anybody either with or without "spiritual" methods; but if his story is true, then his healings were "miracles" performed by a God, and we doubt if even the most rabid Spiritualist healer ever claims that he is a God or that he performs miracles. Moreover, cures by Spiritualists are "physical," and are no more extraordinary

than cures by patent medicines, herbs, bonesetters, or old country remedies. There isn't a Spiritualist healer in the world who can "cure" a headache quicker than a simple aspirin. Why?

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We had another exhibition of "soap-box" Christianity on ITV the other Sunday—this time not by a silly, credulous, and ignorant woman utterly unable to answer questions except by incoherent appeals to her "faith," but by the very experienced Dr. Donald Soper, one of Tower Hill's veterans. Most of the questions fired at him came from puzzled *believers* who couldn't quite understand why the Churches, backed up by "our Lord," have so far been unable to prevent wars, crimes, etc.; and Dr. Soper found it an easy task to point out how very, very few people followed Jesus as they ought to. Once *everybody* accepted "our Lord," there would be no more crime or war—the lion, in fact, would lie down with the lamb. It was all so simple as that. But where were the *unbelievers*? Alas, they were completely conspicuous by their absence.

## Evolution on T.V.

AT THE MOMENT OF WRITING two of the series of six TV programmes on Evolution have appeared and if the remainder are of the same quality the BBC will merit our congratulations for a truly excellent and timely piece of work. The series is to commemorate the centenary of Darwin's theory, for it was in 1858 that the famous paper by Darwin and Wallace was read to a body of scientists in London. In July there will be a meeting of world scientists at the International Congress of Zoology in London to do honour to the pioneers of the evolution theory—a theory which in all its essentials has stood the test of time.

So far, none of the scientists has attempted to give a religious twist to his explanations. The final programme, however, will be concerned with the impact of evolution on religion, and if the BBC runs true to form it is not difficult to anticipate what is to come. Even at that, the educational value of the first five programmes could easily outweigh the sixth.

Nevertheless, it may be as well to write to the BBC *immediately* with the request, couched as politely as possible, that if religious apologists are to have the opportunity to "interpret" evolution, *equal time* should in all fairness be given to the other side. The N.S.S. has not, as yet, obtained a foothold in this important sphere of propaganda, but there are, fortunately, some established speakers in this medium who are eminently capable of correcting religious misrepresentations—Dr. J. Bronowski, Margaret Knight and Barbara Wootton, to mention only three. It might be well to mention names in writing, for we cannot again be fobbed off with futilities as so often in the past.

G. H. TAYLOR.

## Rescuing Souls from Purgatory

A 17TH CENTURY traveller tells of the Duke of Villa Medina who seems to have been something of a character. Once, when he entered a church, he was offered the plate upon which to deposit money to rescue souls from Purgatory. When he had asked how much was necessary to get one out, and the priest had given him the required information, he put two pistoles on the plate and asked at once whether the souls were now safely out of Purgatory. When the priest assured him that they were now safely out, he took two coins off the plate and said that as the souls were now safely out, he would keep the money safely in his purse until they went back there again.

[Defense de l'Homme. Translated by F.A.R.]

# 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

R. WARDLE.—Re the dog which on TV recently "counted" 5 and 4 by giving nine barks, the famous historical case was that of the Eberfeld horses, which "counted" by nodding. The animal can be trained to react to very slight repetitive motions. It is thus the owner who does the counting.

WM. BIRTLES.—If, as you say, matter is unreal, why bother to eat and drink? If, as you say, disease is a false belief, then the man who unknowingly swallows a lethal poison, does not believe he is in danger, and on your theory should therefore not die.

HERBERT MAY.—It is, of course, possible that Mohammed was an epileptic: he tells how he was sometimes grievously afflicted in his visions.

G. LOUDEN.—*The Making of Moo* is currently being played at a new Broadway theatre. Incidentally, it was recently performed by the students of Melbourne.

A. BROCKLEHURST.—Individual character is not heredity *plus* environment, but heredity *times* environment. In other words, if one of the factors is nought, the result is nought.

VERNON WRIGHT.—It was the mathematician A. N. Whitehead who defined religion as "solitariness." Hardly a profitable definition for the Churches!

A. WARREN.—The behaviorist Dr. J. B. Watson found only two causes of fear in the human babe: loss of support and a loud noise. Untutored babes, he found, evinced no fear of burning paper, live snakes, masks and other unfamiliar things.

F. HARRIS.—If God is but another name for existence it is easy enough to grant his being. But your opponent is merely foisting an arbitrary meaning into the discussion.

W. STELFOX.—We cannot waste articles on the type of fundamentalist you mention. A good deal of verbal propaganda would be necessary before they could be brought to read a freethought article.

E. WELSH.—It is quite possible that the proton and neutron are not simple components, as has been supposed, but complicated structures of some as yet unspecified component.

## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Room 4, 83 Suffolk Street).—Sunday, May 11th, 7 p.m.: OWEN MANNS, "Health; from Cruelty to Drugs?"

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, May 11th, 11 a.m.: A. ROBERTSON, M.A., "The Use and Abuse of the Open Mind."

### 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.: Messrs. J. W. BARKER and L. EBURY.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every weekday, 1 p.m.: G. WOODCOCK. Sunday, 8 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, MILLS and WOOD.

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Every Sunday, noon: Messrs. L. EBURY and A. ARTHUR.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY. Sunday, 11.30 a.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

Wales and Western Branch N.S.S. (The Downs, Bristol).—Every Sunday, 6.30 p.m.: D. SHIPPER.

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

LAMBETH Borough is opening a new Crematorium at the Cemetery in Tooting, London, SW.17, on Saturday, May 10th, at 3 p.m. The General Secretary of the National Secular Society has accepted an invitation to be present at the ceremony.

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OXFORD University Humanist Group held a successful opening meeting on Tuesday, April 28th, when Mr. H. J. Blackham, Secretary of the Ethical Union, spoke on "Humanism in Practice." On Monday, May 5th, Mr. Archibald Robertson spoke on "Jesus: Myth or History?" and next Monday, Mr. Colin McCall will talk on "Christianity and Freethought." Other speakers are: Tuesday, May 20th, Mr. O. C. Drewitt; and Tuesday, June 3rd, Professor H. Levy. Details are obtainable from Mr. Anthony Brierley, Lincoln College, Oxford.

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ON holiday in New Zealand, Roman Catholic book publisher, Mr. Frank Sheed, is reported to have said that "God is deep in the heart of every atheist." He based this fatuous remark on an experience when speaking in London. "An atheist"—he said—"once heckled me severely" until "a burly American took him to task." The American explained to the "shivering little atheist" that "in New York we would beat you up for talking like that." "Thank God I'm not in New York," said the atheist. Therefore, God must have been in his heart. We wonder, incidentally, what the U.S. Government would think of this not altogether flattering picture of the American way of life.

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MR. VINER HALL, of The Institute, Weston-super-Mare, Somerset, has been moved to protest against a Russian radio broadcast in January which had been timed to coincide with the Russian Orthodox Church's Christmas celebrations. Mr. Hall urges the Director of Russian Broadcasting to distinguish between "true religion" and "the fabulous beliefs and unchristian practices of an Apostate Church—by which she has deceived, corrupted, and misled individuals and nations for centuries." We hardly think his letter and accompanying "demonstrations" of the "existence, personality and righteousness of God" will have much influence in the Director's office in Moscow. The broadcast had ridiculed the "Tsar God" whose paradise the Russian airmen and sputniks had failed to encounter in the heavens, and had referred to religion as fables about "gods, spirits, a heavenly kingdom, paradise, hell, devils and other bilge"—not perhaps BBC language, but effective in its way.

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ON Sunday, October 5th, at 6.30 p.m., Leicester Secular Society will be showing the Czechoslovakian film, *Jan Hus*, which has been so highly praised in these columns and elsewhere. Midland readers who wish to take advantage of the chance to see this superb re-creation of history should write to Mr. C. H. Hammersley, Secretary of the Society, at the Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester, at once. The event is a long way off, but seating is limited in the hall, and there will be one showing only. Admission is free, there being the usual collection as at ordinary meetings of the Society. The film runs for two hours and is in Agfa colour.

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.

REVIEW

# The Recovery of Unity

By F. A. RIDLEY

THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION seems to have originated as a revivalist sect on the fringe of Judaism in a frontier district of the Roman Empire. It came mainly from the more or less illiterate peasants and fisher folk of Galilee, who were preoccupied with the second advent of their Messiah, Jesus, the Christ, or Chosen One. As it made its way throughout the Empire, however, it began to attract, along with a multitude of ignorant devotees, an educated minority—as can be seen from the prologue to St. Luke's Gospel. For the benefit of this minority, which greatly increased in and after the 4th century when Christianity became the State religion, the Church evolved the pseudo-science of theology. This may be defined as a logical development of pre-scientific ideas in a superficially scientific and logical manner.

In the hands of the "Fathers" and their medieval scholastic successors, the theology of the Catholic Church assumed monumental proportions, and even the Protestant Reformation modified, rather than substantially altered, its character. Christianity has been essentially a theologically-minded religion. As an ancient creed explicitly declares: "whoso *thinketh* not thus of the Trinity, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly." (My italics; *n.b.*, the Trinity is a theological formula never mentioned in the Gospels.)

In his new book, *The Recovery of Unity*, Anglican author the Rev. Dr. E. L. Mascall gives us theology of the purest vintage, of a kind seldom found in these sceptical days. I seem to recall that someone once described Dr. Mascall as the only contemporary Anglican theologian of the classic, or rather medieval, stamp; one whom the great theologians of the Ages of Faith would have recognised as an authentic successor. Be that as it may, one has to recognise in this book all the qualities of past theology: great learning and a remarkable analytic ability, coupled with an absolute lack of any critical approach to the *foundations* of the system with which he deals so ingeniously. In the whole book, I recall only one critical observation on Christian origins: quite casually the author remarks that we actually know very little of the earthly life of Christ. True enough! But having admitted this, he calmly goes on to assume the truth of the entire orthodox creed. Who was it once noted that theology gains in certainty as it gets away from its sources? Astrology and flat-earth geography have identical characteristics: they seem to distinguish every pseudo-science.

The fact that the stupendous structure of Catholic theology reposes on a very slender factual basis does not reduce its best exponents to the level of Billy Graham and the Salvation Army. Dr. Mascall, like his master, Thomas Aquinas, is a very able writer; he handles his chosen theme well; and some of his criticism—particularly of medieval "nominalist" theology which he holds responsible for the errors of both the Reformers and modern Romanism, and of the Papal claims to infallibility and dictatorship over the whole Christian Church—are masterly.

No Rationalist could criticise Papal infallibility more concisely—or more rationally! And, whilst assuming without much apparent proof, the initial truth of Christianity, Dr. Mascall becomes more royalist than the king; more rationalist than the rationalists; when he deals with what he considers to be the erroneous deductions made in recent times by rival theological schools. One is reminded of Joseph McCabe's masterly summary of the place of reason in Roman theology in the closing chapters of his monastic autobiography.

However, though his general method is more reminiscent of Roman than of Anglican theology, Dr. Mascall is a High Church Anglican, and his theme of reunion in Christendom is envisaged from the standpoint of the *via media*—the "rejoicing third." He does it ably but, as far as an outsider can judge—and here, too, perhaps the onlooker sees most of the game?—the prospects don't seem to be very bright. The two strongest forces in Western Christianity are Roman Catholicism and Protestant Modernism, and Dr. Mascall's arguments will, we fear, cut very little ice with either. He makes absolutely no concessions to Modernism; indeed, he specifically refers to the "degeneration of Liberalism." Throughout he is strictly orthodox in his approach, and makes no reference to Biblical criticism. And, whilst Roman theology will certainly find it heavy going to reply to his brilliant critique of Papal infallibility, I cannot see how the Papacy is likely to abate its exclusive claims as a testimonial to Dr. Mascall's striking logic and knowledge of Church-history.

He evidently regards the Eastern Orthodox Church as the purest form of Christianity. It is certainly the most conservative; but since 1917 it is more or less a spent force, and it will be lucky to survive, much less become the effective starting point of a new and vital Christian development as its Anglican admirer obviously hopes. It seems very doubtful whether Dr. Mascall's own Church can survive its now almost certain eventual disestablishment. Will he land in Rome with other High Anglicans?

I have never held the much over-simplified view that all theologians are dupes or knaves, but I will pay Dr. Mascall the deserved compliment that, had I done so, his book would have effectively changed my opinion. Its author may not relish this parting—and perhaps Parthian—shot, but I cannot help feeling that, if he were to turn his remarkable critical power on to the subject of Christian origins with the same penetration as he disposes of, say, William of Occam or Pope Pius XII, he would soon be among the leading writers, not of the Anglican Church but of English Rationalism. But that is not the kind of Recovery of Unity that Dr. Mascall has in mind.

[*The Recovery of Unity* by Rev. Dr. E. L. Mascall, D.D. Longmans, Green and Co. 25s.]

## The Passing Show

VATICAN CITY:

*Osservatore Romano* threatened the Italian film star, Sophia Loren, with excommunication because she committed the sin of getting married, by proxy, to a man already married before.

Pius XII, the "Holy Father," in a public utterance, asked of Catholic widows not to get remarried; if one partner is no longer alive, the other too has to forgo all pleasures of life.

The Pope also published his opinion on film, radio and television, requesting the issue of regular comments on new films so that true believers were able to know what to see and what to proscribe. "Prior to shooting or at least in the course of this process producers and directors are advised to get the advice of a Catholic expert" whether or not the film and script conform with Christian morals.

There is some disagreement between the Pope and the 34,000 fathers of the Jesuit Order (Society of Jesus), the strongest congregation holding 1,200 bases in 70 Provinces

all over the world. Their biggest contingent is in the U.S.A., with 9,000 padres, next come the Spanish Orders, the Germans and Italians (in this order). When last year the Pope in all seriousness maintained that during his illness Jesus had appeared to him in a day vision, the American padres were rather shocked and started discussing the problem whether a Pope could be dethroned. During the S.J. Congress in Rome the Holy Father gave them, thereupon, a stern warning: "He who breaks our discipline through the propagation of error will be punished. May there be no room among you for the arrogance of free thought, the hallmark of unorthodox thinking."

#### "HOLY LAND":

Religiously-mixed marriages are prohibited in Israel and the Nuremberg Laws have been revived in reverse. When a boy of 5, Aharon Steinberg, the son of a Jew and a Gentile, died, the Tel-Aviv Rabbinate refused his interment in a Jewish cemetery; the little corpse had to be disposed of, out of bounds, in an ordinary wheat field!

No rabbi would marry a Jew whose name is Cohen, Kohn or the like, to a woman who became a widow or was divorced, for such a woman has already proved to be calamitous to her husband; and this would be doubly fatal as the mentioned name is taken to signify that its bearer was a member of the *Cohanim*, the priestly caste.

There is a Communist majority in the City Council of Nazareth.

#### AUSTRIA:

There are no compensation or rehabilitation payments to surviving victims of Nazi persecution; as good Catholics the Austrians are more concerned with assistance to rabid Nazis, and measures extending the amnesty of 1956 on the forfeiture of ex-Nazi assets were adopted by the Cabinet recently. Herr Raab, the Austrian Federal Chancellor, has also had an audience with the Pope to settle the dispute whether or not the Concordat, concluded between Vienna and the Vatican in 1933 and revoked by Hitler after the Anschluss, 1938, still existed. The Social Democrats refused to recognise its validity, yet agreed to accept the viewpoint of their bedfellows on condition certain changes in Austrian law since 1933 were recognised by the Vatican. The Concordat, *inter alia*, forbade divorce of both religious and civil marriages—as is the case in "modern" Italy—and on this point the "Holy See" is now understood to have made a concession. For the little concession that the Church has no say in the matter of non-religious marriages in Austria, the Austrian Opium Eaters are liable to deliver the School and Education into the insatiable fangs of the Church.

#### U.S.A.:

It has been decided to pay the "Holy See"—the richest institution in the world—one million dollars for war damages sustained by Vatican buildings. Ex-Brigadier D. Herbert C. Holdridge wrote *apropos*, it would be "more appropriate" to string up his Holiness alongside other war criminals." Holdridge who, so far unsuccessfully, had tried to rally progressive Americans in his front against the reactionary mammet parties of so-called Democrats and Republicans, demands: The Roman priests be deprived of U.S. citizenship, being rabble rousers in foreign pay and legally in the same position as Communists; all public servants have strictly to obey the civil laws of the U.S.A. code: if they follow any contradictory rules given out from Rome (or Moscow), they play foul and are to be dismissed at once.

P. G. ROY.

## T.V. Stars and Spiritualism

THE *TV Mirror* recently—it is undated—contained an article on "The Stars and Spiritualism" by a Mr. C. Gretton, with pictures of some of the "big" names who are Spiritualists. Miss Diana Dors is one, so is Miss Vanessa Lee. So are Jerry Desmonde, Sonia Dresdel, and even Bransby Williams. And there are others.

But surely this is not surprising. Quite a number of actors and authors have gone over to the Roman Catholic Church. Mr. Gilbert Harding, for example, that sturdy exponent of "common sense," has not the slightest difficulty in believing in Angels, Devils, Relics, Miracles, and the other marvellous things which are so prominent in his Church. Winifred Atwell is another devout believer—and, of course, there are converts like Graham Greene. When it comes to believing what they believe, we should not be surprised to find others believing in spooks of all kinds.

Moreover, once emotional people have "seen" something at a seance it is almost, if not quite impossible, to make them believe that they were bamboozled. You and I might be, quite easily—but what *they* saw and heard is quite a different matter. Now they know. And it is useless arguing with them.

In the same number are reproduced some "spirit" photographs taken by a Dr. Glen Hamilton and, says Mr. M. Barbanell, "they were taken under rigid scientific conditions." All the mediums this gentleman sees with all their materialisations and apports, etc., are always "under rigid scientific conditions." This is his favourite "aphorism," but the truth is, I doubt if he knows a *single* rigid scientific condition imposed by Dr. Hamilton—whose "photos," taken many years ago in Canada, are about the biggest frauds ever foisted on to the public.

There are no bigger frauds in the Spiritualist movement than "spirit" photographs and whenever they are taken under *genuine* tests, nothing ever happens. But few of the general public know this. What a huge fraud it all is!

H.C.

## From Ghana

THIS being Sunday evening in Ghana, a bedlam of voices and music foment the air and, given a few more hours, quite a number will become emotionally drunk. Almost every branch of heavenly insurance is represented here, as you might well imagine. At the moment we have no Salvation Army, this being entirely due to one of their soldiers stealing the band instruments and disappearing with the proceeds. Actually, this man should be honoured by all music lovers. I have a sneaking feeling he was a music lover himself. At least he has earned my undying gratitude. Now I have only to suffer the chant of Latin, the yelling and bawling of Seventh Day Adventists, Baptists, Methodists, and a series of other denominations which make up what I assume is the third division of their heavenly league. Mingled with all this is the music of the native drums, which at least has the saving grace of being understood by the natives, and this despite the fact that only the family of the drummers can play them. Should you wish at any time to print any of my letter, I would ask that my name and town not be mentioned, my reason being that Ghana is by no means living up to its motto of Freedom and Justice. The Minister of the Interior invites people to send in names to him of any undesirables, and the men dressed ready for bed—this being our term for R.C. fathers, cloaked in their white (?) nightshirts—would dearly like to have an Atheist deported, this event being calculated to increase their shareholdings by another ten per cent.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### SCIENCE FICTION

Mr. Cutner's article "Chosen Question" brought to my mind the first (and last!) time I visited a Theosophical Temple, some twenty-five years ago.

It was a friendly little gathering, and opened with the singing of popular hymns. After a few words from a gentleman whose speciality was apparently a mixture of spiritualism and Buddhism, the guest speaker was introduced, a lady of indeterminate age, who began by telling us of the guiding spirits of the world and then treated us to a history of the lost lands of Atlantis and Lemuria. Without vouchsafing any information regarding the source of her knowledge, she told us of the wonderful civilisation of these ancient countries, read a list of the chief dynasties, and then—wonder of wonders—announced that the Atlanteans and Lemurians were fully conversant with the science of space travel and that they frequently received visits from the inhabitants of Mars and Venus, who brought with them much learning and traded in precious stones.

She was serious and in great earnest, as were the listeners. No one questioned the truth of her statements, and no one seemed at all surprised, but I did not go again. I prefer my science fiction from the local library.

H. A. ROGERSON.

### THIS UNBELIEVABLE WORLD

The compiler of "This Believing World" asserts that putting the Bible into modern idiom completely destroys its "reverent" atmosphere. May I respectfully suggest that he is (not for the first time, also) talking through his hat? Only people who have a very hazy notion of what the Bible is supposed to be have ever imagined that there is something mystical and magical that sets the King James translation apart from all others.

Educated believers who regard the Bible as "the unique and precious Word of God" will continue to regard it thus whether it is in sixteenth century English or modern colloquial English or, for that matter, in Swahili.

Educated non-believers who see no unique significance in the Bible will continue to see none, whatever linguistic medium is employed. The appeal of archaic English is purely æsthetic and literary and has no bearing on the doctrinal value of the subject matter. I am aware that I sound somewhat pedantic, but this severe reasoning is a necessary antidote to the boisterous, careless rapture of the crude Bible-smasher who imagines (poor chap!) that the ancient walls of the Church will ignominiously collapse at a few derisive toots from his toy trumpet.

S. W. BROOKS.

### MIND

I am in agreement with Mr. Cutner except perhaps when he says of Mind, "The 'why' and the 'how' still elude us." Quite true re "why," but we do know something about the "how." We know that we inherit tendencies, instinctively. We also know that experience is a causative factor, as we thereby receive impressions which develop into thoughts. Thus our Minds are largely, if not entirely, due to these agencies.

C. E. RATCLIFFE.

### TO THE BBC

I have written to the BBC thus: "Permit me to protest against the use of the phrase 'Our Lord' when your announcer referred this morning to the cycle of plays on Jesus Christ.

"This is an offence against those many listeners who do not accept Jesus Christ as their 'Lord,' and is inappropriate in a public broadcast, which should be unsectarian and non-political."

PETER STODDARD.

### "BE NOT AFRAID, HIT HIS EYE!"

In an interview with Hogan Bassey, the Sunday press reports that before his fight with Moreno, he prayed to the good Lord in the dressing room to let him bash the Mexican into unconsciousness, and it seems that the good Lord obeyed. However, Moreno is also very devout, and was let down by the good Lord. The latter has always been fond of fighting (his book proves that!) but he should not take sides.

PAUL VARNEY.

### A "SOUPER"

A correspondent writes: Not everyone outside of Ireland knows what a "souper" is. "Soupers were people who, having established "soup-kitchens" in almost every part of Ireland, went about endeavouring to get the poor, half-starved people to:

"Sell their souls for penny rowles [rolls] and soup and hairy bacon."

It was one way of trying to make converts to Protestantism. It had not any marked success.

Dr. Douglas Hyde, Ireland's President, in a way, reaped the harvest of the "soupers" when he was recording the "Love Songs of Connacht." When he went about among the people of the West of Ireland, speaking their language and singing their songs, they, with a long memory for the bad old days, shunned him and closed their doors on him, for they thought he was a "souper"

trying again—as was tried before—to beguile them from the Faith of their Fathers.

The same tactics were employed in India and China, where the nickname was applied to those who were apparently converted "Rice Christians."

W.D.K.

### APPRECIATION

I would like to commend the excellent quality of THE FREETHINKER. I congratulate you on the superb English and faultless grammar of the articles, particularly noticeable in comparison with the poor English, American slang and faulty grammar one sees daily in some newspapers.

Though born into the R.C. religion, in peasant Eire, in the Blacksood Bay district of Maya, I have long since discarded every vestige of religion, or superstition, and feel much better for having become a firm atheist. I am pleased to report that I have recently persuaded the local library to take *The Dollar and the Vatican*. With best wishes for the continued success of THE FREETHINKER.

MARTIN MCCALPIN.

### THE HOLY PREPUCE

Perhaps this adjunct to the human male frame might aptly be described as Phallic Worship, so venerated as a symbol that it was carried in solemn procession in Bacchic orgies in ancient Greece. In the early part of this century there was a successful prosecution in this country in a *cause célèbre*, to wit, Theo and Swami. They had a large following of women.

Another peculiar body with abnormal propensities known as the Cult of the Clitoris, also became another *cause célèbre* before the late Mr. Justice Darling.

JOSEPH F. BROADHURST.

### DOOMSDAY BLUES

ACCORDING to the *News Chronicle* three thousand people filled a Harlem church and 20,000 gathered outside at the funeral of W. C. Handy, composer of "St. Louis Blues."

The Negro pastor, the Rev. Adam Clayton Powell, said: "Gabriel now has an understudy, and when the last trumpet sounds Handy will blow the last blues. He has gone to join others we have funeralised here before... what a jam session in Heaven today!"

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