

# The Freethinker

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IN THE FREETHINKER recently Mr. G. H. Taylor described the devastating exposure of the Charles Darwin "conversion" myth in the columns of *The Scotsman*. That correspondence was really initiated by a letter from "Hugh MacDiarmid" (Dr. C. M. Grieve) whom most critics recognise as the greatest Scottish poet since Burns (some would even say of all time), in which he attacked compulsory religious education. MacDiarmid has always been an atheist, and has little patience with those who would claim that poets have access to some mysterious "higher truth," denied to mundane scientists and other empirical investigators. He is a man of tremendous moral courage who has never concealed his forthright sceptical views in his writings. As a result, this heretical genius exists on a small Government pension, while religious nonetities in the Church of Scotland have honours and wealth heaped upon them. Some day I hope to contribute an article on the life and works of this great man who has done so much for Scottish literature and freethought.

## Enter Hugh MacDiarmid

The religionists, having barely recovered from their ignominious defeat in the Darwin "battle," were subjected to another terrific onslaught from MacDiarmid in *The Scotsman* at the beginning of June. As recently reported in THE FREETHINKER, certain ministers of the Kirk had, at the General Assembly, criticised the management of the Church of Scotland's Gateway Theatre in Edinburgh, for staging plays which, they alleged, depicted "drunkenness, sordidness and immorality" (it is only fair to add that the Assembly overwhelmingly rejected the complaint). In his letter MacDiarmid pointed out that such characteristics have been a feature of the lives of many of the world's greatest poets and artists of all times.

"The greatest enemy of genius," he went on, "is respectability. Burns, from this point of view, was a disgraceful rascal, yet I think Scotland owes more to him than to the Church, and that his fame will outlast the beliefs the Church exists to uphold. In any case the association of the Church (any Church) with the arts is an impossible one. It is a fact (contrary to a widespread assumption) that in actual æsthetic products, materialist and sceptical writers have always considerably surpassed religious ones... Every Latin poet without exception was a materialist or sceptic... In Italy Dante was religious; but Petrarch, Politian Arioto Marchiavelli, Aretino and all the Renaissance poets were sceptical... In Germany, Schiller may have had a touch of religion, but Goethe was on the whole sceptical, and Lessing and Heine were the boldest of mockers. In France nearly all the writers since Voltaire (until quite recently) whether in prose or in verse, have been sceptics... I will not go through the long history of English literature, but I write only of the past century or two. Shelley, Fitzgerald and Swinburne were sceptical enough, and where are there three religious poets to match them in æsthetic power?... James Thomson and John Davidson were Rationalists too, and George Meredith and William Watson members of the R.P.A. All these are a cut above everything now produced by the religious reaction in our arts, and as to literary criticism, I think J. M. Robertson was a good few cuts above, say, Dr. Edwin Muir... The fact is that there has been an unbroken enmity between

religion and art... In Italy beauty was worshipped by the bad Popes but abhorred by the good ones. In the fifteenth century the good Pope Paul II tortured and imprisoned poets and next century the good Popes of the Counter-Reformation waged implacable war against poetry and art. In England the theatres were closed for many years, fiddlers were put in the stocks, and poets had a narrow escape. In France, Moliere could hardly get buried, and Lulli was refused absolution till he burnt an opera he had just composed. Even in the eighteenth century the actress Le Couvreur was refused Christian burial and had to be buried in a field for cattle.

...There is practically no form of art—neither music nor poetry nor dancing nor drama nor the novel—which has not been persecuted for ages by every religion."

## Pained Surprise

Not unnaturally, this fine letter provoked an outburst of pained protest from

the orthodox. Much was said of the alleged religious inspiration of the Renaissance painters and architects, though naturally no mention was made of the fact that the Church was practically the only market for the struggling artist and that such painters as Penturricchio Lippi and Giotto were far from religious in outlook. Moreover, of course, the whole Renaissance movement was a reaction from the philistinism of the Middle Ages to the artistic grandeur of pagan Greece and Rome.

In the sphere of music the most oft-quoted name to confute MacDiarmid's thesis was, of course, J. S. Bach. One correspondent wrote sardonically: "J. S. Bach seems in the main to have been a well-behaved sort of follow, with the result that his major efforts were works like the B Minor Mass and the St. Matthew Passion. It is tantalising to speculate on the nature of the superb masterpieces he might have bequeathed to posterity had he been a notorious evil-liver or habitual drunkard." To this there was an excellent reply by the famous actor, James Robertson Justice, who pointed out that Beethoven's greatest works were composed when he was suffering from almost total deafness induced by syphilis and that Berlioz, Brahms, Mascagni, Mozart and Schumann were all sceptics.

## Christianity versus Art

Finally MacDiarmid's main argument, which had become obscured somewhat in the fog of controversy, was restated admirably by Miss Honor Arundel:

"...The Church is in general interested in propaganda first and art only if it serves the 'correct' dogmas of the day. As soon as any artist, either wilfully or accidentally, finds himself in opposition to the Established Church of the time, the Church has not hesitated to ban or burn his books, to accuse him of heresy, blasphemy or obscenity and to make life as difficult for him as possible. Since early Christian fanatics destroyed the nine books of Sappho's Odes, there have been many examples of such artistic vandalism. In Scotland, George Buchanan was accused of heresy. Sir David Lindsay's works were publicly burnt, Allan Ramsay's theatre closed down—all on the orders of religious bodies. It can even be claimed that the whole break in the Scottish theatrical tradition was due to the zeal with which the Church, both Catholic and Reformed, campaigned against plays, playwrights, actors and theatregoers."

### — VIEWS and OPINIONS —

## Christianity versus Art

— By THE REV. J. L. BROOM, M.A. —



The Editor of *The Scotsman* is to be congratulated on the generous amount of space he has recently granted to statements of the freethought position. It is a pity that more humanists in Scotland have not taken advantage of such an opportunity. Both in the Darwin and the controversy just reported the voice of reason and commonsense was all too rarely heard.

## Catholics and Birth Control

By W. L. ARNSTEIN (U.S.A.)

PERHAPS from a practical point of view the most dangerous of the doctrines upheld by the Roman Catholic Church today is its steadfast opposition to birth control. The Roman Catholic Church is unwilling even to concede that a problem of over-population exists, and yet the evidence is plain enough to see for those willing to look. As a recent report by the United Nations Bureau of Social Affairs points out, the population of the earth today is approximately 2½ billion. Should it continue to increase at the rate it has been increasing in recent years, the total would be 4 billion by 1980 and over 6 billion by the year 2000, a year many of us may live to see. The U.N. Report continues: Should the population of the world increase at the same rate during the next 600 years at which it has grown during the past 600, then there will be by 2585 exactly one square meter (10.74 square feet) of land per person to live on, and that includes both the North and South Poles, deserts and mountain tops. Such an eventuality obviously will never take place. Something will happen to prevent it, and leaving aside such still fanciful possibilities as mass emigration to other planets, that something must be either the death of millions of persons as a result of war or famine, or else it must be a programme of (preferably voluntary) family limitation.

The Roman Catholic Church claims to know better, however. At a recent "National Catholic Family Life Conference" held in the United States, Joseph A. Burke, Bishop of Buffalo, N.Y., denounced all warnings of the over-population of the world as a hoax being perpetrated by fake scientists and "followers of the devil." "These pseudo scientists are trying to frighten humanity," declared the Bishop. "I think these worshippers at the shrine of Malthus will one day have to eat humble crow." He went on to picture the advocates of family planning as immoral monsters. "They see in children an obstacle to their unbridled sensuality. These erotic human beings need to learn a lesson, that it is better to have a cradle in the home than a coffin, better to have six children than one cancer, better to have 12 children than for a young mother to become psychotic or neurotic and to have to spend the rest of her days in an asylum for the insane."

Once one strips the inflammatory verbiage from the Bishop's arguments, one finds that there are no arguments. The Bishop, first of all, presents no statistics—no proof of any kind—to demonstrate that the population estimates made by the U.N. Bureau of Social Affairs or kindred organisations are fallacious. Then he goes on to make a number of assumptions that are patently absurd: that parents who prefer to plan their families desire to fill their homes with coffins rather than cradles (though presumably both are necessary so long as human beings are mortal); that women with six children are less likely to develop cancer than women with two children; that a mother of twelve is less likely to suffer from mental illness than a mother of two. In no instance does the Bishop support

these fascinating arguments with any evidence whatsoever.

In the long run, Bishop Burke relies upon the deity. "As far as we're concerned," he announces, "this cry [of over-population] falls on deaf ears. If we have faith in the goodness and providence of God, He will not punish those who follow His command to be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it." If the past is any guide to us at all, however, then the deity has often been strikingly careless in providing for the multiplying of the human race. Or has the good Bishop never heard of the Black Plague or the 19th century famine in Ireland, or of the millions upon millions of other human beings killed through the centuries by plagues or by sheer starvation? The Bishop is fortunate enough to live in a country in which the spectre of famine is a distant one, but he also lives in a world which includes over a billion Asians and Africans for whom that spectre is everpresent.

Perhaps one could understand the Bishop, if he were at least consistent—if he were, for example, to go along with those 19th century religious enthusiasts who opposed the use of anaesthetics in childbirth because of a comparable biblical command. If, in other words, he were willing to oppose "artificial" death control as he opposes "artificial" birth control. But the Bishop is *not* consistent, nor is the "National Catholic Family Life Conference." The same audience which applauded the Bishop had already passed a resolution calling upon the American Congress to consider a "family allowance system in America." Modern society, observed the Conference unctuously, imposes "an inequitable burden upon the parents of large families" in financing the rearing and education of their children. Apparently faith is not enough, after all; apparently the deity is not doing his proper job and the non-Catholic taxpayer is expected to take his place

[Readers should note that an American "billion" is 1,000 million.]

## Werewolf

THE PEOPLE'S BELIEF in the werewolf is very deeply rooted. For a man to become one it is sufficient that on the occasion of his Baptism the priest or one of the godparents makes a mistake in the pronunciation of one of the ritual words. The curse usually falls on a man between the ages of 20 and 30. The first sign is a loss of appetite and fits of brooding. The victim becomes cut off from the world all round him, acting as if his soul had been separated from his body; he grows thinner day by day; his eyes sink into his head; his hands tremble. Neither witch nor doctor can find a cure for him. Certain nights he gets up from his bed and runs through the fields till he finds the droppings of a four-footed animal, usually those of a wolf or mule. He proceeds to strip himself and to hide his clothes, then he rolls in the dung until he turns into the animal which has left it droppings. He now breaks into a mad gallop which lasts till break of day, as he must run through seven towns, then return to his starting place, again roll in the dung till he retakes his human shape. When this happens he resumes his life. He sinks more and more into himself, hiding away as a frightened animal. He fades away in a short time. There are two ways of breaking the evil spell: find where the werewolf has hidden his clothes and burn them before his return; or while he is still in his animal form, deal him a blow which will make the blood spout. If the clothes are not well burnt or the blow doesn't bring blood, the werewolf attacks and kills the person trying to save him. These remedies can only be tried by a blood relation of the victim, who must work alone.

[Beira Baissa, by Virginia de Castro. Translated from the Portuguese by Nan Flanagan.]



# Christianity in West Africa

By COLIN McCALL

THE JUNE ISSUE of the African illustrated magazine, *Drum*, devotes several pages to a "special" investigation of the influence of Christianity in West Africa, where it has been active for about a century. What has it done? Have its effects been good or bad? Are the new trends in West African society weakening faith? These are some of the questions asked, and the magazine informs us that both clergy and laymen gave their views "fully and candidly" with "no pulling of punches." Certainly some varied opinions are expressed, but far more space is devoted to the Christians than to their opponents and, though the latter may have given their views "fully and candidly," they are generally poorly presented here.

A Lagos business man, Mr. Pedro Dectiger, declares Christianity to be a "sham." Strong language, but never explained. If anyone talks Christianity to him, he says, he buttons up his pockets, which again could do with elucidation. Mr. Ablor Soigbe suggests, no doubt quite rightly, that some ministers preach one thing and then do another, but this is hardly confined to the Christian clergy. Mr. Kunle Alakija, of the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation, makes a better point when he says that long sermons have not stopped most of our people being "covetous and cruel."

It is hard, of course, to make a telling criticism in thirty or forty words—all that these men are allowed—which appear as captions under their portraits. Godfrey Lardner, B.Sc. (London) is the only anti-Christian who is allowed space to develop his ideas. And with one qualification, he does it well. He takes as his theme, humility, which teaching, he says, has had an effect on West Africa "more disastrous than the Black Death."

Europeans themselves have not displayed this much-vaunted Christian humility, says Mr. Lardner. They believe themselves to be the representatives of God on earth, and the basis of this belief is "naked arrogance, pride and conceit." But they have taught the African to be humble, and today "West Africans are content to sit cross-legged before every problem, waiting on their Christian God to solve it for them." "They are too humble to help themselves," declares Mr. Lardner, the precept of humility having turned many of them into "robots, children, nothings, chicken-hearts."

We can, I think, appreciate Mr. Lardner's feelings and sympathise with his indignation. He is surely right in this criticism of Christianity, which puts Mr. Soigbe's objection into concrete form. But instead of calling on his people to shake themselves free of religion—all religion—he concludes: "The God West Africans need is the Jehovah God of Israel—a conquering God, a God of ambition, of high idealism, to carry us, too, to the heights scaled by the Europeans." This, I suggest, is a fatal conclusion. Let the Africans by all means scale the heights, let them be filled with high idealism; let them conquer, if you like, but let it be nature that they conquer, not other men. The Old Testament Jehovah is a god of battles. Man has had too much of him and his sword-bringing son.

But Mr. Lardner's imputation of European arrogance is, oddly enough, confirmed by a Roman Catholic doctor-priest writing on the very same page. In stating "What Catholics Believe," the Rev. D. Slattery, M.D., is not only arrogant towards Africans but towards non-Catholic Christians of all colours. "Christianity"—he begins—"and by *Christianity I mean Catholicism*" (my italics) "has been a tremendous force for good all over West Africa." Culture, he says later, "where it is not pagan, is part of the

heritage of the Roman Catholic Church."

The Rev. S. G. Williamson, M.A., PH.D., of the University College of Ghana, who writes the longest article on the subject, is not so blatantly arrogant or sectarian as the Rev. Slattery, but his more subtle method is deceptive. It may even be self-deception: I don't know. He sets his scene: Christmas Day in a remote Ashanti village: the missionary due for morning service. Then comes the contrast: the Christian community, clean, well-dressed, sober and expectant, and "Heathenism," "sprawled in drunken sleep" after celebrating Christmas "in its own fashion," looking "more than ordinarily sordid this morning." The Christians sing their hymns, listen "attentively" to the Christmas story, and so on. It is common stuff.

In West Africa as a whole, Dr. Williamson tells us, "some five per cent. of the total population is in direct contact with the Christian Church," and in the highly-populated coastal regions it is stronger. "In one such area" (presumably the best from his standpoint) as many as 20 per cent "claim some sort of Church membership." Considering that "really effective evangelisation" dates back only about a hundred years, Dr. Williamson thinks that Christianity has made "great strides." Actually, considering the advantages it has enjoyed, the figures do not strike me as impressive. For example, he tells us that "The School" and "The Church" have become "words with almost the same meaning." Yet the highest percentage of some sort of Christians he can claim is 20 per cent. from one area—size not specified—and over the whole of West Africa a mere five per cent.

That West African society has "undergone a change" through the abolition of the slave trade, "amelioration if not banishment of indigenous forms of domestic servitude, and the ending of ritual human sacrifice" is, I should think, undeniable. And Dr. Williamson is wise enough not to give the whole credit to Christianity. Governments, "it might justly be claimed," have done "speedily through legislation what the Missions *could have done* only slowly by persuasion" (my italics). What he does claim is that "at the root of this social legislation lies Christian influence and conviction"—a vague statement that can be asserted or denied but hardly proved. Some Christians have fought against slavery; other Christians have practised it. That Christianity has had something to do with the amelioration of indigenous forms of domestic servitude and ending ritual human sacrifice is, no doubt true. By its very interference into African life some such influence was inevitable. But note: *indigenous* forms of domestic servitude. What about extraneous domestic servitude which has often supplanted it? Not a word from Dr. Williamson on that!

Finally, *Drum* asked Nigerian novelist Mr. Cyprian Ekwensi for a "cool and balanced" summary. In some ways he provided it; in others I feel he was a little off balance. He sees "some loss of ground by Christianity." "It is losing the sophisticated West African whom it helped so much to nurture," he says. Such a person cannot go back to fetish worship. True. But does he feel "the fundamental need for religion"? And when the country "settles down" will "the Christian values . . . once more come to the fore" as Mr. Ekwensi says? A Ghanaese member of the National Secular Society recently remarked to me that it would be a great thing for Ghana if Dr. Nkrumah (a nominal Christian) would throw his weight on the side of Freethought. That, I think, applies to the whole of West Africa. Then Mr. Lardner's heights might be scaled.



## This Believing World

If anybody still imagines that the Roman Church is, so to speak, a waning power (at least on small things), he should note the case of that glamorous and "sexy" film actress, Mdlle. Brigitte Bardot. Roman Catholics are forbidden in Lake Placid, New York, to enter any cinema for six months which shows her films. And, of course, the Catholic League of "Decency" has banned her films wherever possible in the U.S.A. If the R.C. Church had the power, it would ban her everywhere, for it has never really given up its extreme attacks on Woman as the sex who tempts Man—alas!—to "sin," upheld so long by the most famous Church Fathers. The women who have been made "saints" have, in nearly all cases, been "virgins." All the same, we expect that most sane people will go to see Mdlle. Bardot—including even Catholic men and women. *They* wouldn't miss the thrill either.

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It is interesting to note that for every letter attacking the Bible published by some of our more broadminded editors in provincial newspapers, there are generally ten defending it—in general, either with childish protestations of faith or downright lies. In a cutting we have received, a lady gives four outstanding "proofs" of the absolute integrity and inerrancy of the Bible. They are the findings of "archæology and other branches of research"; the works of secular historians like Josephus who give "external evidence for the resurrection of Christ and other incidents recorded in the New Testament"; the Old Testament as a record of "God's dealing with his chosen people Israel in preparation for the coming of Christ"; and, the Bible "makes us wise unto salvation through faith which is in Jesus."

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It is difficult to deal with the particular kind of divine imbecility which can dictate such drivel. "Israel" has, for example, always denied "faith in Jesus" in general, and "salvation" in particular. Not a single archæological find has ever discovered anything whatever about any of the Bible heroes—Moses, Abraham, Noah, David, Solomon, Jesus, Peter, Paul, John, or anybody else except a "king" or two mentioned in Kings or Chronicles. Josephus never mentions Jesus at all except in passages forged by Christians inserted into his text; and he never mentions any incidents dealing with the "Acts" of the Apostles which had they taken place, he could not possibly have omitted.

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But wherever they can, Christians deluge editors with "proofs" of the truth of the Bible which must make most Bishops ashamed even if they are—which is very doubtful—Fundamentalists. Yet we hope that editors will continue to insert letters like the one referred to above. Giving their writers such a free hand will obviously do Christianity more harm than even Freethought.

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Some months ago an attempt was made for parsons to be allowed to give a five- or ten-minute sermon at Sunday cinemas, and we wonder how far this piece of typical Christian impudence has progressed? It was at a God-forgotten place called Sedgley in Staffordshire that its council insisted on such sermons—if not, Sunday cinemas would not be allowed there. That there are people weak enough to be cowed by such a council we are all aware, but are Sedgley citizens among them? All the same, what could even a poor parson say between a "horror" film like *Dracula* and a film like *The Vikings*, in which almost every moment produces tortures and massacres, and perhaps

more "blood and thunder" than has ever before been produced in a film? Gentle Jesus meek and mild . . .!

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But though preaching sermons this way would produce only very poor results, desperate efforts are always being made to bring people to Christ in many other and more ingenious ways. There is, for example, Mr. Skip Tillett, who regularly holds "hot gospel" meetings by playing religious records with a "visual programme." One of these records begins with Jane Russell, the famous film star, singing "If you don't wear the Cross then you can't wear the Crown"—a song guaranteed to bring even the most hard-headed infidel to Christ at a bound. At least, that is what Mr. Tillett no doubt thinks. As for the "visual" side, he produces large cut-out letters painted red and makes them spell "DEVIL"—and by taking away the D, he further horrifies his audience with the word "EVIL." The four letters can also be made to spell "VILE." Now what can we poor infidels do with a brilliant genius like Mr. Tillett?

## Moaning Methodists

By H. IRVING

THE NEWSPAPER REPORT of the proceedings of the Methodist Conference at Newcastle showed how Christian leaders are being compelled to travel along the paths laid down by scientific freethought.

Fifty years ago the speeches of Dr. Leslie Weatherhead and Dr. E. W. Sangster would have caused quite a sensation in Christian circles, followed perhaps by a demand for the resignation of these two estimable ministers.

Dr. Weatherhead had no patience with the age-long Christian teaching that disease was the will of God. He said: "I do not know how anyone can look upon the tortured body of a polio victim and say: 'This is the will of God.'"

In the treatment of such dreaded diseases as polio, cancer and disseminated sclerosis, Dr. Weatherhead obviously preferred the healing methods of medical science to the healing methods of Jesus.

"For one thing," he said, "we are not Jesus Christ, and for another the mental attitude is entirely altered." Jesus performed his miraculous cures in a "mental atmosphere of credulity; it is now a mental atmosphere of science."

Priestcraft and credulity are the cornerstones of the Christian structure. Dr. E. W. Sangster said: "Agnosticism is having a revival in Britain."

Dr. Sangster must be well aware that agnosticism or preferably atheism is not having a mere revival; it has been permeating all intellectual activities with ever increasing speed since the war.

His subsequent remarks bear this out. He said: "At one time they felt that even if their numbers in the churches were smaller they could count on the total conviction of the people who came. We no longer believe that. We do not believe either that a new evangelical technique such as the cinema, the tape recorder, broadcasting or television would win the nation back to God."

This is a doleful story, which must have damped the ardour of the Methodists attending the conference.

—NEXT WEEK—

IS CHRISTIANITY MORAL?

By ERNEST BUSENBARK



# 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. JONES.—We hope to have an article on freemasonry fairly soon.

Dr. J. V. DUHIG, G.E.P., P. VARNEY.—Letters next week.

## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Midland Institute, Paradise Street).—Sunday, August 17th, 7 p.m.: C. H. SMITH, "Dark Ages Still Strong in England and Wales."

### OUTDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park).—Every Sunday, 7.30 p.m.: Messrs. DAY and CORINA.

Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (The Mound).—Every Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. CRONAN, MURRAY and SLEMEN.

Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Every Sunday, 8 p.m.: Messrs. F. HAMILTON, E. MILLS and J. W. BARKER.

London, March Arch.—Meetings every Sunday from 5 p.m.: Messrs. L. EBURY and A. ARTHUR.

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.

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Pierhead).—Every Wednesday, 1 p.m.; every Sunday, 7.30 p.m.: Various speakers.

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.

## Notes and News

APPROPOS the recent discussion on Roman Catholic criminality, instituted by Dr. J. V. Duhig, who was brought up a Catholic and is the nephew of R.C. Archbishop Duhig of Brisbane, readers may care to turn up their copy of *Tristram Shandy*. On page 95 of the Everyman edition, they may read Sterne's sermon through the mouth of Yorick. Here is part of it:

"See the bare-faced villain, how he cheats, lies, perjures, robs, murders!—Horrid! But indeed much better was not to be expected, in the present case—the poor man was in the dark!—his priest had got the keeping of his conscience;—and all he would let him know of it, was, that he must believe in the Pope; go to Mass;—cross himself;—tell his beads; be a good Catholic; and that this, in all conscience, was enough to carry him to heaven. What;—if he perjures;—Why;—he had a mental reservation in it:—But if he is so wicked and abandoned a wretch as you represent him;—if he robs,—if he stabs, will not conscience, on every such act, receive a wound itself?—Aye, but the man has carried it to confession;—the wound digests there and will do well enough, and in a short time be quite healed up by absolution. O Popery! what hast thou to answer for?—When, not content with the too many natural and fatal ways, thro' which the heart of man is every day thus treacherous to itself above all things;—thou hast wilfully set open the wide

gate of deceit before the face of this unwary traveller, too apt, God knows, to go astray of himself; and confidently speak peace to himself, when there is no peace."

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THE August issue of *The Age of Reason* (U.S.A.) gives details of a \$500,000 libel suit filed by the magazine's proprietors, the Freethinkers of America, against evangelist A. A. Allen and A. A. Allen Revivals, Inc., who distribute the *Miracle Magazine*. In March 1958 *Miracle Magazine* published an article containing the following: "It is the purpose of Communism to destroy not only one religious group or teacher, but to destroy all the religious groups. The methods being used by the 'Free Thinkers' of America coincide perfectly with the methods taught by the psychopolitical teaching of the Communists. While they call themselves the 'Free Thinkers' of America, it seems their objective is to silence anybody who doesn't think as they do. What is the connection between Communism and the 'Free Thinkers' of America?" The plaintiff, the Freethinkers of America (President, Joseph Lewis) denies any connection or association at any time with the Communist Party.

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FROM the *News of the World* (27/7/58) we learned of the noble resistance of nearly a million nuns to all attempts to modernise their clothes. "In 1952, after several Papal directives had produced no results," the Pope carefully explained his views to 1,100 Mothers Superior, who had been summoned to Rome. "The religious habit must always express consecration to Christ," he said, but it should also be "convenient and in accordance with the demands of hygiene." His words seem to have had little effect. Only the Sisters of Nazareth responded, calling in Italian dress designer, Schubert, who has made clothes for Gina Lollobrigida among others, but presumably restrained himself a little on this occasion. He produced, in the Pope's words, a "new habit, smart, sensible and dignified." One of the Sisters remarked with some truth, "We teach little children. Imagine what a frightening aspect we must have presented to them before." But other orders felt differently. They prefer to go on their ridiculous, unhygienic, frightening way.

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MR. ADRIAN PIGOTT, author of that devastating exposure of the Roman Catholic Church, *Freedom's Foe: the Vatican*, wrote a letter to the *News Chronicle* (10/7/58) insisting that the Church was losing members in many countries, "although clever Vatican propaganda usually manages to obscure the fact." He referred to a report in *The Universe* (18/11/55) that over half the Romanists in Holland had "lapsed." Asked to name any V.I.P. who had renounced Rome for Anglicanism, Mr. Pigott gave Bishop Pike, who is attending the Lambeth Conference. He spent two years training as a Jesuit, "then he realised the errors involved."

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MR. GORDON CAULFEILD, Cabana City, Fort Myers, Florida, U.S.A., whose book *To-morrow We'll all be Geniuses* was recently reviewed in these columns (February 28th), writes: "Because I feel that these observations can have truly revolutionary and staggering and exceedingly exciting possibilities for a happier life for every one of us, I ask that your readers consider them for themselves. To stimulate and encourage pro and con discussion, I'm happy to offer with my compliments an autographed copy of my book to the ten of your readers who send me the most interesting letters concerning the idea that 'Tomorrow We'll all be Geniuses.'" Mr. Caulfeild informs us that he has had many appreciative remarks from recipients of his book.



## Three Proofs of Religion

By F. A. RIDLEY

I RECENTLY HAPPENED to come across an old pamphlet written by the late Joseph McCabe immediately after his dramatic rupture with the Church of Rome at the beginning of 1896 and explaining, while the experience was still fresh in his mind, the reasons which had impelled him to take this drastic step. I may add that I have always regarded *Why I left the Church*, McCabe's initial critique of Rome and Revelation, as one of the best things which that fine scholar and prolific author ever wrote. Apart from his masterly biography of Peter Abelard, which I have always considered his best, though not his best-known, book, I think that his little prologue to a lifetime devoted to Rationalistic propaganda was perhaps the best thing he wrote.

Ex-Father Anthony added the sub-title to his pamphlet, *From Rome to Rationalism*. However, this ex-professor of Catholic philosophy understood the nature of the system which he had been actually teaching during his twelve years in a monastery—which he took as the title of his later monastic autobiography—much too well to make any sharp and absolute contrast between human reason and the current theological system of the Roman Catholic Church. As McCabe was careful to demonstrate, and as he amplified in more detail in later and larger books, the Church of Rome does not consider itself officially opposed to human reason. Quite the contrary. Far from taking up such an obscurantist attitude, Rome, in McCabe's own words, "prides herself on her intellectual credentials and thinks that time is sure to bring about their universal acceptance". Not only is this so but, in fact, ever since the Vatican Council of 1870 laid it down in a solemn decree, it is actually a Roman dogma—"an article of Faith"—that the fundamental dogmas of religion *can* and *must* be proved by human reason without any recourse to Revelation or to the authority of the Church. Natural Theology, as it is technically known, is considered competent to prove the basic dogmas of religion by the light of human reason. As McCabe later pointed out in his book on Abelard, the self-same Church which condemned Abelard as a Rationalist in his lifetime, has now accepted the fundamental dictum of the 11th century French theologian that "Reason must precede Faith", while the older view that, contrarily, "Faith must precede Reason" was officially condemned by the Vatican Council under the technical designation of *Fideism*. As has been noted before, the "Infallible" Church of Rome owes a great deal to its heretics.

The professedly rationalistic attitude now officially endorsed by Rome is, in general, that nowadays taken by all the higher religions, that is, by those religions which still entertain the hope—or delusion!—of eventually coming to terms with their current civilisation based on a secular approach to the current problems presented by human reason. Proofs of the existence of God, the Divinity of Christ, and the reality of Immortality, are nowadays two a penny! There is ecclesiastical distinction for anyone who can invent what now appears to be a new one. (Any offers from readers of THE FREETHINKER?) Only Rome among the Christian churches, made cautious by hard knocks in the past, still continues to distrust modern "proofs" of medieval dogmas, and still stands grimly behind St. Thomas Aquinas and his famous "Five Proofs". To be sure they are still perhaps the

best, as they are certainly the most elaborate "proofs" of the existence and omnipotence of a personal Creator of the Universe. The "proofs" of Aquinas were based ultimately on Greek logic and philosophy, on Plato and Aristotle in particular, but similar "proofs" have also been advanced by Muslim theologians, such as Al Ghazali, "The Proof of Islam", and by Hindu philosophers. However, though a rationalist theological system now predominates in most religious organisations, it is not the oldest means of proving the truth of religion. There are, actually, three lines of approach to the religious problem of which the current rationalistic example is only one. Broadly speaking, one can "prove" the truth of religion (either of religion in general, or of a particular religion) along one of these three entirely distinct lines: by authority, by experiment, or by reason. As we have already noted the last and most important one, I now propose to turn my attention to the remaining two.

This is, of course, by far the oldest and the originally universal human attitude towards religion and its god. *Thus saith the Lord!* God either spoke directly from Sinai (and elsewhere) in the most primitive religious cults: or he was believed to have established an infallible oracle somewhere on earth, in which, through the mouths of men (or, more occasionally, women) His commands were made accessible either to some chosen race in particular, or to mankind in general. This infallible authority could be and was of many kinds, but whether it was the Pythian priestess who announced the will of Apollo at Delphi, the voice of Jehovah speaking in thunder to his chosen people from Sinai, or the voice of Allah dictating to Muhammed the verbally inspired pages of the Koran, religion was founded upon authority; upon the direct commandment of God which could only be received with trembling awe by his worshippers here below. God was an omnipotent, celestial sultan, who deigned to give orders to his slaves: "their's not to reason why, their's not to make reply, their's but to do and die" if the inscrutable will of God were to demand human sacrifice—as it so frequently did in primitive religions. Here, we have the oldest and, in its earliest phase, the universal religious type, into which not a glimmering of reason, pseudo or otherwise, ever entered. God spoke through an unerring mouthpiece and mankind trembled—and obeyed. The only thing that varied in this formerly universal type of religion was the precise nature of the authority, whether a book, an oracle or a priesthood. But the duty to obey was peremptory and beyond criticism. Such was primitive religion in the days of the Pharaohs, and of the earliest Books of the Old Testament. Such it remained, unchanged in the primitive cults founded traditionally by Jesus and Muhammed. Today, however, this formerly universal type of religion is universal no longer. In point of fact, despite Billy Graham and other contemporary Fundamentalist throw-backs to the primitive, there does not appear to be much future for this nowadays archaic type of religion. Or at least, and despite T.V. and B.B.C. revivalists, I should surmise. It is only in such extremely primitive sects, mostly of American origin as Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventists and the like that one finds such primitive attitudes still extant. A religion relying solely on authority would not last long in the modern world, at any rate in the more advanced countries of the modern world. Even in "Darkest"



Africa primitive Ju-Ju cults appear to be giving way to more advanced or at least, more sophisticated, religious cults. The truth is that, just as civilisation has, willy nilly, compelled the Churches to conform to some extent with its elementary canons of knowledge and behaviour, so the Churches—both Christian and non-Christian—which wished to survive among higher levels of the population than the *Lumpen-proletariat* have been forced to adapt themselves to modern standards as their only method of survival. The Church of Rome which is nothing if not a worldly-wise institution, led the way by bowing to necessity and by officially recognising the supremacy of reason in religious matters. But the tendency represents a general one. Even Billy Graham pays lip-service to human reason in his public appearances on the radio. I have, in fact, often thought that if Jesus and the early Christians were to return, they would probably regard Jehovah's Witnesses as about the only genuine modern Christians!

## Ask at your Library

By G. H. TAYLOR

(Concluded from page 254)

"Many other subjects," says Forsyth\*, "might be taken to illustrate the contradictions between science and religion, and the same conclusion of irreconcilability reached. It is not true to say there is no conflict—Not only does a conflict exist, but it is an antagonism amounting to incompatibility. Modern civilization has no alternative but to make choice between them. It must plan either for the cultivation of religion at the expense of science, or for developing science at the cost of religion. At the present day only a fraction of the total of human energy that is available for social enterprise is being utilized in the service of science; very much of it is still running to waste in the interests of religion. All these many centuries religion has been accepted as mankind's comfort—but it is plainly decaying all around us, and religious faith has grown cold" (*ib*). The relations between religion and science support the analogy of a healthy minded adolescent outgrowing the credulity of childhood and replacing blind obedience to parental desires by a scientific scepticism. "As this proceeds," writes Forsyth, "any idea of dependence on a heavenly father is outgrown also, and the stage of atheism is naturally reached."

Thus a disproof of God, he says, can come from psychology, for "the scientific study of the functioning of the mind has shown beyond any reasonable doubt that God is a figment of the imagination, with no existence outside the fantasies of the mind—no less delusory than any primitive spirit." Speaking of those who halt at Agnosticism he asks, "Does not the new evidence require them to hold back no longer from the position of atheism?" Since the Christian is already atheistic towards the gods of other cults why should he wish to retain his own? All Gods spring from the same traceable sources. Of a thousand gods the Christian rejects nine hundred and ninety nine, the atheist also the extra one. "In freeing himself from his dependence on God man must look to himself for help. Instead of striving for the salvation of his soul in a future heavenly life he must plan his welfare here below" (*ib*). He can, and does, do without the puerile conceptions of Heaven and Hell, resting on a quite childish estimation of values. To such ideas science comes as a rebellious adolescent. "With the

gradual extension of scientific knowledge one religious explanation after another has been supplanted by a scientific explanation, until now psychology has proved the illusory nature of the entire religious interpretation of life. The psychic truth that religion represents is an infantile endowment, while the objective truth of science appears later and develops only slowly as the personality matures through adolescence into adulthood. Materialism is never found in the childish temperament, and shows itself only as a concomitant of adult development" (*ib*).

The recourse to Vitalism and such creeds is also, psychologically, a survival of religion, he opines. Vitalism is the theory that natural changes are performed at the behest of a Life Force or some other kind of non-materialistic intervening or directive agency. It was at one time applied even to planetary motion (Cf. Kepler's *genii*), but "as science gradually accepted the materialistic explanation of them, invoking, however, a directive force for phenomena which were still beyond scientific explanation. All the while, therefore, vitalists have been concerned with an ever narrowing range of possibilities, and each generation of them has accepted the mechanistic interpretation of phenomena which were mysterious to their predecessors" (*ib*). It rather appears that vitalists are mechanists where explanations are known, and vitalists where problems are as yet unsolved. That is, they have become mechanists regarding, for example, the structure and functioning of the ear and of the eye (a favourite stand-by for a long time), and the physico-chemical basis of metabolism, digestion, muscle contraction, heat production, etc. But with regard to tissue repair and certain features in embryology they remain vitalist.

Paralysed by fear of the unknown the mental powers fail in the savage, the child and the religionist. They run for protection to a superior power, to the parent or to God. Similarly the vitalist appeals to his Vital Force. The temptation to do this applies even to such a pioneer as Harvey, for whom the task of understanding the heart was, he lamented, "so truly arduous, so full of difficulty" that he thought it "was only to be comprehended by God." In the end, of course, he himself comprehended—*without* the God hypothesis.

Forsyth's conclusion is that "in every state where religion has been subordinated to secular power it has also become a political force that helps the few to rule the many."

\**Psychology and Religion* by Dr. David Forsyth.

## The Rising Generation

XXXIV (2)—ICE AGES

STRICTLY SPEAKING, though scientists have records of five Ice Ages, it would not be wrong to call them just one Ice Age with long periods of warmth between. But however we call them, there is no doubt that the last period of ice covering a great part of the world, and which ended sometime about 30,000 years ago, coincided with the rise of Man as a social being. Some kind of animal which perhaps was a sort of common ancestor of man and apes probably came into being long before, during periods lasting many millions of years—though how he survived some of the Ice Ages in which he roamed about can only be guessed at.

What is fairly certain is that a kind of "ape-like wanderer" (as Joseph McCabe called him) was in Europe a million years ago, and therefore *man* himself was in Europe before the end of that period; and so he must have survived the various cold climates which for thou-



sands of years covered so much of the land on the earth. There is no evidence that man—ape-man or man-ape—was a *social* animal, but as he had to fight the increasing cold climate to survive, it is possible that the then small communities came together, especially if the art of fire-making was discovered, and particularly if living in the shelter of caves was found to help them to fight the ice, snow and blizzards.

The last Ice Age perhaps helped to make him also a hunter not only so that he could eat the animals killed, but so that he could clothe himself in their skins. In other words, his environment *stimulated* whatever brain he possessed to further efforts, and we know from cave drawings left in caves and executed over 30,000 years ago how well he hunted.

When the cold in Europe began to be too intense, the various communities wandered south and settled perhaps in Africa or Mesopotamia. And there is little doubt that about this time man discovered what we call "agriculture," and from that he came to "civilisation."

All this is the barest outline of some of the most fascinating periods of the earth's history which you should study in works giving precise details of the many events leading to them. But you will notice how one thing stands out—and that is, there is nothing whatever about Ice Ages in the Bible. There is nothing whatever about man's evolution from an ape-like animal to the intelligent human being as we know him today. He is "created" in the wink of an eye (so to speak), ready-made, speaking perfect Hebrew, even to "Almighty God"—though unlike modern man, living to be hundreds of years old. (Adam in fact lived to be 930 years old.) The story of "Creation" as given in Genesis is repudiated by every scientist in the world—in the name of Science. H.C.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### THE SOURCE OF THE "LOURDES WATER"

Dr. Valot maintains that the "Lourdes Water" (*i.e.* the water which supplies the fountain in front of the grotto and the piscines where the sick are bathed, and which pilgrims carry away in bottles) really does come from the grotto. Dr. Duhig just as stoutly maintains that it comes from the river, and if, as he says, the Lourdes authorities openly admitted this, then Dr. Valot is at fault in not being aware of it.

But what exactly did M. Théas and his friends say in their protest? Dr. Duhig gives neither their actual words nor the date when this took place, so one is forced to guess, and a possibility suggests itself which would, if true, explain the discrepancy.

The "Domaine," the part of Lourdes owned by the R.C. Church, includes not only the grotto and baths but also the Hospital of Our Lady of Lourdes, the Medical Bureau, and quarters for the hospital workers and stretcher-bearers—all an integral part of the "miracle factory," which could not function as such without them. And naturally they need plenty of water, mostly for cooking and washing. Could it be *their* water supply which was threatened by the proposal to weir off the river? If this is not so, perhaps Dr. Duhig is right after all.

JOHN M. CROWLEY.

### SPIRITUALISM

Whatever be our view, it will be generally admitted that there is much self-deception among mediums, especially in connection with *trance* operations, along with automatic writing, and spirit healing. The mediums may be quite sincere and honest, not pretending to be what they know they are not. They are self-hypnotised, and unaware of what they are saying and doing. When back to normal, after a manifestation, they will ask what has happened, and when told, will recall the proceedings, much as they might remember a dream. They, when *controlled*, are in much the same mental state as one is when hypnotised in the ordinary way.

Such mediums, at the outset, believed in spirit control. They were willing, often very anxious to be so controlled. It was an

honour, a spiritual gift. Auto-suggestion ensues, imagination becomes active, and they become "spirit-guided," for the time being losing their own normal personality, becoming a subject, influenced and manipulated by a spirit. *So they think.* They are as deluded as the subject of a hypnotist. Having met with many mediums, including my late dear wife, and a close friend who was an automatic writer, I have attended scores of seances, and seen strange happenings by trance mediums, when "possessed by" spirits, and am convinced that the self-hypnosis assumption fits them all. For several years I was a spiritualist. Then doubts arose. I made enquiries and arranged tests, but they all failed to verify my belief in spirit agency. One incident is typical. My friend was supposed to be controlled in his automatic writing by an Indian spirit named Agangene. My wife, in trance condition, was controlled by the same spirit. At different times I put the same list of questions to Agangene, to my wife and to my friend. They were personal questions about his age, place of birth, profession, etc. Neither of the mediums knew I was testing. When answers came, they all differed. With reference to other phenomena, such as materialisations, spirit-photography, poltergeists, apparitions, etc., the evidence adduced appears inconclusive. As trance medium activities are apparently due to purely natural causes, it may be that other phases of psychic disclosures will, when the causes have been discovered, leave little, or no room for spirit agencies. C. E. RATCLIFFE.

### SECULARISM AND NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

In deploring N.S.S. support for nuclear disarmament, Mr. W. E. Huxley says that it "has nothing whatever to do with secularism." On the contrary, I as a secularist declare that it has very much to do with secularism.

I consider that Mr. Huxley's use of the term "secularism" is not only peculiarly restrictive but even illegitimate. Those whose only interest is propagating atheism may by narrow definition be freethinkers; they are certainly not secularists whose dominant desire is that this world shall be made a better place for all good men and women to live in. For my part, I am altogether behind the N.S.S. in any action in any field towards the realisation of that end.

In this particular matter of nuclear armament, I detest the attitude, boosted by the wretched press of this country, that favours its continuance in the name of "deterrence." From the outset I have fought that attitude and shall continue to fight it for the colossal and lunatic evil it is—and I, Mr. Huxley, have no political party associations whatsoever! G. I. BENNETT.

### FOR YOUR LIBRARY

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