

# The Freethinker

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RECENT ECCLESIASTICAL PRONOUNCEMENTS, notably one of His Grace of Canterbury, Chairman of the Lambeth Conference, on the subject of nuclear annihilation in some future world conflict, have been given a good deal of publicity. From the point of view which THE FREETHINKER has advocated consistently since its foundation, this publicity is all to the good, since such pronouncements—with a few honourable exceptions—usually bring out into the open the irrelevance of Christianity to the solution of social problems of modern times. Or, in the case of the Archbishop, its downright malevolent attitude when confronted with such problems.

## Hell, 1958 Style

The substance of His Grace's observation was that the proximate annihilation of the species in some atomic war was quite possible and, indeed, quite in line with the inspired predictions of Holy Scripture; which, as "Cantuar" stated, appears to give no indication that mankind will exist for ever, and many indications that it will not. For any student of the self-styled "Higher Criticism" of the Bible, it is abundantly clear that many, perhaps most, of the "inspired" writers of the Old and New Testaments wrote in the belief that a violent end was near for this terrestrial globe and for its sinful inhabitants. John the Baptist—from the little that we are told of that shadowy figure—appears to have made the end of the world his main subject of discourse and so, as Albert Schweitzer has argued very plausibly, did the earliest Christians, including the Jesus of "History"—if any. The torrid eloquence of the Apocalypse culminates in the violent overthrow of the Roman Empire and social order by celestial intervention. Presumably the bomb will eventually come from the same direction. One New Testament writer even "chances his arm" in an inspired guess. The world, declared Second Peter, will eventually be consumed by fire! If and when an atomic catastrophe transpires, some Christian survivor may point to this as proof that the Biblical writer could accurately foretell the future. "God forbid!" a Christian reader may exclaim but, according to the Archbishop it is not at all certain that God will do so. He may by this time be getting tired of his human experiment, and who can blame him?

## The Churches and Atomic War

A lot of water has flowed down the Jordan valley since John the Baptist announced the end. The Christian Churches have been compelled by its stubborn non-appearance to put the end of the world (and the second coming of the Lord) into cold—or rather, hot—storage. The vast majority of churchmen treat the world as a going concern, and approach its secular problems on secular lines. As my colleague, Mr. H. Cutner, once aptly phrased it, the Churches have been compelled to civilise Christianity, at least to the limited extent necessary to survival. They find it necessary to take up some sort of *positive* attitude to the problems created by the progress and, in some cases, by the prostitution of science. Among these

the fearful problems posited by nuclear armaments stand out conspicuously.

## The Churches and Human Survival

To equate the abolition of nuclear warfare with actual human survival may be technical overstatement. Some remote communities, whether in Tibet or Tristan da Cunha, might conceivably survive. But in view of the ever-augmenting terrors inherent in atomic destruction, the paragraph heading seems reasonably accurate. Very little of value would be likely to survive. In the writer's opinion the National Secular Society never did a more secularly-inspired thing than it did when it decided to support the campaign for total

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

## The Churches and Atomic War

— By F. A. RIDLEY —

nuclear disarmament. One has, after all, to survive before one can hope to see any secular society in the larger sense. And the same seems to apply to Christians as long as they wish to continue in this "vale of tears." Actually, if one takes them at their theological face value, the Churches ought to find no difficulty in disposing of the nuclear—or any other—problem. The Secularists are equipped only with a fumbling human brain inherited from a tree-dwelling ape; the Churches have infallibility constantly on tap! The Protestant Churches have their infallible Bible, whilst the Vatican has its decree of Papal Infallibility. Nothing should be easier. Despite which, they are all making heavy weather of the nuclear problem, and speak with discordant, even contradictory voices. For example, Canterbury seems to think that the bomb might present a divine visitation, while his Methodist and Modernist colleague, Dr. Donald Soper, actually marched to Aldermaston to resist the Will of Heaven. It is all very confusing. Though Dr. Soper's attitude, if worse theology, seems to make better sense, based, as it was, presumably, on the old Pelagian heresy of free will, empirically expressed as "God helps those who help themselves" ("God help them if they don't!" might be a non-theological addendum). However, the infallible book does not throw much light upon the literally burning questions of nuclear war and human survival.

## The Vatican and the Bomb

What about the infallible Church? The decree of Papal Infallibility in Faith and Morals passed on July 18th, 1870, seems made for such thorny problems. Whilst His Holiness Pius Pacelli loses few chances of expressing his opinion on a multitude of problems from Genesis to sartorial reform in convents—a "new look" for nuns!—he has so far said very little about nuclear war, and hasn't turned on the tap at all. What—as *The Humanist* recently and relevantly asked—is the use (earthly or heavenly) of possessing divine infallibility if one doesn't make use of it in dealing with the most important problem of all—the future existence of human society? Does Pacelli agree with Dr. Fisher or with Dr. Soper? Does he think that man deserves to perish by divine decree, or will he infallibly warn us against collective suicide which, like individual suicide, is displeasing to

God? Surely, if the present Pope could send the Virgin Mary up to Heaven he could stop the bombs coming down?

### Science and Society

The fact, of course, is that the new problems of the mid-20th century are entirely outside the scope of theology. Neither the Protestant Bible nor the Catholic Church;

neither the Pope nor the Lambeth Conference have got anything original to say about them. They arise from the modern scientific revolution and in some cases its prostitution by still primitive human beings and motives. Their ultimate solution can only be found by, and in, the social control of both science and politics in a more evolved and secularised society.

## The Great Templar Mystery

By PETER F. MOORE

OF ALL THE SINISTER MYSTERIES of the Middle Ages none has had such a lasting effect on myth and legend as the rise and fall of the Knights Templar. The wicked Templar of *Ivanhoe*, and a host of ghost stories has shrouded the Knights in a mist of evil. Alleged secret teachings of the Order have become one of the cornerstones of Western occult thought; Rosicrucians, Freemasons and many now forgotten secret societies derive from them.

The Order was founded in 1118 by Hugh de Paynes, to defend the temple of Jerusalem, which had just been recovered from the Moslems. Exactly *which* temple is still a matter of some dispute. Occultists hold it is the mystic temple of the Qahakalha, but the reasonable explanation seems to be that it was the actual city. The strict Benedictine rule was adopted, which placed the Knights under the direct control of the Pope; but they were in Palestine and Syria, so it meant in practice that they were a law unto themselves.

With complete exemption from taxation, the Order soon became the richest Frankish section in Outremer and, under a series of astute Grand Masters and Priors, the great banking power of the Levant. Even in the West their prestige was enormous. In battle, their ferocious courage made them feared as unnatural. In wars where ransom was the object, their habit of fighting to the death aroused a superstitious horror. This, plus the unhealthy climate in which they lived, made for a large turnover of manpower. On several occasions the Order was nearly wiped out.

All might have been well but for the battle of Hattin in 1187, which broke the back of the Latin East and annihilated the cream of the Templars. From then on the Christians fought a losing battle and in 1291 Acre finally fell. The Knights had lost credit throughout the West, when even their huge castles about Lebanon and Syria could not save them; castles which to this day the Syrian peasant regards as the work of devils and evil unbelievers.

After their expulsion by the Moslems the Templars moved to Cyprus. It was from there that rumours reached Europe that the head of a former Prior was being worshipped. An even more important factor was the vast land holdings especially in France. As has been stated, only the Pope could control the Order, and the Pope's position at the time was, to put it mildly, awkward. Owing to the doings of Boniface VIII, the papal curia had been compelled to go to Avignon. Having despoiled the Jews and Florentines, Philip le Bel, King of France, began to apply pressure to Clement V to proceed against the Templars on the grounds of sacrilege and blasphemy, with sodomy and sorcery thrown in as makeweights.

On October 20th, 1307, all the Templars in France, about 2,000, were arrested and examined under torture. A number of confessions were obtained. The principle canon appeared to be a rejection of the Church's teachings, which were replaced by doctrines suspiciously like the dualist heresy of the Cathars. It has been generally thought that the corruption came from the Assassins of Syria, but the other military orders also had equal oppor-

tunities and were not suspected of being influenced by the sect. Even if the charges were well founded, the rot seems to have started in the West.

At the Council of Vienne in 1311 the spiritual arm found against the Order and authorised its suppression. In 1315 Jean de Monly, the last Grand Master, was burned at the stake along with some of his companions.

What is the balance of probability in the matter? In favour of the idea of a "frame-up" is the immense wealth of the Knights, which naturally aroused the jealousy of their contemporaries, plus the loss of Palestine which removed their *raison d'être*. The Papacy, being in very sore straits, was in no position to defend the Templars even if it had wanted to. And it is obvious from his other actions that King Philip was unscrupulous to the nth degree. In the Holy Roman Empire the Templars were absorbed by the Teutonic Order and enabled a push to be made against the North German pagans. In Spain and Portugal the name was just simply changed. Edward II of England was a peculiar character and he solved the problem of the Templars in a typically eccentric manner by formally reducing the Knights and then reknighting them himself. As for Italy, professional soldiers found no shortage of employment there.

For all this, however, there is a strong body of circumstantial evidence against the Templars. Their churches were unique in form, being octagonal in shape so that the congregation sat in a circle. But the most damning thing that can be stated, with recourse to official Church sources, had been noted long before when they were at the height of their powers. This was the secrecy of Templar ceremonies. The chapel or church was surrounded by armed men who would kill any intruder. But this practice could have been officially sanctioned. Such spiritual arrogance is unique in the Middle Ages, and could only have been engendered by a body of doctrine considered superior to the one current among the orthodox. As to the details of this doctrine—if indeed there ever was one—nobody can be certain, but a Cathar teaching would fit excellently.

But the case of the Templars (whichever way it is looked at) makes one of the most damning indictments of the Catholic Church. If the Knights were "framed," then it is a classic case of Church and State working together and religion being used as a weapon of exploitation; if, on the other hand, they were guilty, it shows a grievous weakness in structure of the Catholic idea. For there must have been a powerful and permanently valid body of doctrine taught within the octagonal chapels.

The general opinion of modern historians is that the Templars were suppressed because they became too powerful (a Church within the Church) and wealthy and probably very corrupt. The more grotesque charges (spitting on the name of Christ, worshipping a cat's head, etc.) were almost certainly false.

"Bibles at Exeter Cathedral are being chained and monuments railed off in a bid to stop thefts by souvenir hunters."

—The Star (25/7/1958).

## Where Wisdom Lies

By G. I. BENNETT

IN A MOST INTERESTING ARTICLE, "Dr. Hepburn and Paradox" (published in THE FREETHINKER, 25/4/58), Mr. Colin McCall discusses the book of an author who describes himself as "a reluctant sceptic" with "a naturally religious mind," whose life is "a continuing pilgrimage" after a satisfying religious creed.

I have not read Dr. R. W. Hepburn's book, *Christianity and Paradox*, nor do I think I shall read it. The search for a personal religion by critically examining and academically rejecting one after another of the old arguments presented in new clothes does not greatly commend itself to me. I know as well as Mr. McCall that a satisfying religion is not thus found, and I suspect that Dr. Hepburn knows it, too. In essence, faith is not to be come by as a result of highly intellectual processes. Faith is usually an intuitive grasp—or supposed intuitive grasp—of the meaning of the drama of living and being. Learned argument and academic inquisition mostly deliver the death-blow to faith. Rationalism is not to be applied to religion (I refer, of course, to supernatural religion)—unless one's desire is to show that such religion has no substantive or demonstrable reality. Those thinkers who imagine that somehow, given the necessary perseverance, their rationalism will light upon a new meaning in an old creed, or an old meaning in a new creed, seem to me to have embarked upon a rather hopeless quest. I think of Amiel, a rationalist *par excellence*. No one was better equipped than he to discover a religion that the intellectual man could believe in, if such a religion were there to be discovered. But nothing is more apparent from his *Journal Intime* than that this sensitive soul, with a fine mind and a fine nature, failed dismally in his endeavour continued through the whole span of his mature life. And *he* had a religious temperament if any man had! As I have previously pointed out in writing on Amiel, he was a freethinker against his will. If the heart had not had the intellect to reckon with, I think he would have yielded to the claims of Christianity, by the moral force of which he was somehow strongly attracted. But to want to believe when you cannot—that was his unhappy position. It is all very well, argues John Middleton Murry in his book, *Countries of the Mind*, for Amiel to say that the one thing necessary is "L'abandon à Dieu"; but what could God be for him? It was a word that emptily reverberated through the closing pages of the *Journal*. "... He declared to the last that he believed in God; but it was an assertion of the desire to believe, not of belief."

No, one does not become a believer through rationalism; its critical intellectual discipline gives one no encouragement for hoping to find a satisfying personal faith in a divine dispensation. Speaking for myself, I at least know that no act of will on my part, no course of academic study, no amount of mental effort or meditative exercise, would or could make religious faith real for me. If I came to believe at all, all my experience of life tells me again and again, it would be because my mind had capitulated to the romantic softness of my heart. And while I am of sound sense, valuing as I do at their proper worth, the things of the mind, that will not happen. A man of my thinking who does capitulate to the suasions of revealed religion is indeed to be pitied, because it must betoken a condition of cerebral degeneration.

One or two points in Mr. McCall's quotations from Dr. Hepburn's book seem to me to merit further discussion. For instance, there is Dr. Hepburn's statement that his

scepticism "takes the form of a genuine suspension of judgment rather than a hostile dogmatism." Mr. McCall queries the words "hostile dogmatism"—why not simply "rejection of belief"? But no, that would not do. For clearly Mr. McCall's author tilts his sword here against militant freethinkers who, in breaking with evident relish the idols of God-fearing men, may be a little too certain that they themselves know all the answers. Doubtless Dr. Hepburn, with his religious leanings, is trying to be perfectly fair to theology; but it would seem that he is *more* than fair and consequently less a friend of truth than he aims to be. He appears to me (if I may judge from Mr. McCall's extracts) to be one of those people whose intellectual culture no less than their reason tells them that all theology is epistemologically wrong, or at best leads into blind alleys quite unprofitable to explore, but who are somehow unwilling to admit it. He cannot believe, but neither will he disbelieve outright.

No one asks that Dr. Hepburn be crudely or dogmatically know-all in denying that theology rests on valid foundations; but one has a right to expect him to have enough positiveness of conviction to say that he at least cannot accept the proposition that theology has any valid foundations. It is not "hostile dogmatism" to assert that all attempts to probe the *raison d'être* of the universe (if it has any *raison d'être*) have ended in futility; and that, therefore, the only wise course is for one to accept on its own terms that which one cannot understand (or can only very imperfectly understand) and make the best of what life here and now has to offer. This "genuine suspension of judgment" is surely a form of intellectual timidity. Every man in the recesses of his being must make some kind of judgment, if he is at all virile in his thinking, and he injures truth if, out of deference to the beliefs of others or because of the unpopular nature of his own views, he hesitates to give full expression to what he really thinks.

Near the close of his article Mr. McCall quotes Dr. Hepburn as saying that he is able to "attach something rather like good sense to the notion of a Ground for the world's existence that is not strictly its cause or its designer... especially when the vision of such a being is expressed through the medium of great poetry." What exactly does this mean? I confess I do not know; but perhaps it is a little unfair to expect a sentence divorced from its context to be necessarily quite clear in meaning. However, it is the point about "great poetry" that invites examination, and concerning which Mr. McCall makes the pertinent comment (though in other words): What has great poetry to do with a logical criticism (Dr. Hepburn's criticism, in this case) of theology?

I would agree that clinical research takes us only so far and no farther. I would similarly agree that science has only so much to tell us, and is not able—and, in the nature of things, perhaps never will be able—to tell us all we should like to know. But while it is true there are certain human questions that science cannot answer, certain cosmic speculations on which, as Winwood Reade in his *Martyrdom of Man* puts it, "theology is garrulous but science is dumb"—that is no reason for saying that science is ultimately unsatisfactory as an instrument of knowledge, and we must therefore search for other paths to fundamental truth. They do not exist.

Great poetry has a particular meaning for you and me. Let us give it its full due. It vocalises our innermost  
(Concluded on next page)

## This Believing World

One expects a good deal of drivel coming from Spiritualists, but sometimes, when they are dealing with the Bible, it is extra special drivel. It appears from an account in *Psychic News* that a Baroness von Kovatch had quoted a verse from memory from the Bible—"Woe is him that giveth his neighbour drink, that putteth the bottle to him, and maketh him drunken also, that thou mayest look on their nakedness!" Except that the second word should be "unto," the quotation is correct. But friends and relatives all denied that this passage was in the Bible. Even a "brilliant scholar" with a "University education" denied it, and the Baroness "pored over books of quotations" and "Cruden's Concordance" and couldn't find it.

★

Then "a spirit hand," withered with age, turned up and, "like a great spider," got hold of the Bible, and opened it for the Baroness, and there was the passage—in Habbakuk, 2, 15, and the hand vanished. Obviously, without such aid from a spook hand the Baroness would never have found it. Yet it is clearly and unequivocally shown in Cruden over which she had "pored." Why was the passage so difficult to find? Because, we are confidently told, Habbakuk has only three chapters!

★

Very little publicity has been given to the weighty discussions at the Lambeth Conference, which, after five weeks of sittings, has now closed. But one of the most important if not the most important, was the problem of "unity." The Christian Church (or Churches) has found this question so far utterly insoluble. Even in its earliest days, if any reliance can be placed on Christian history, the various Apostles were always squabbling—for example, Holy Writ tells us that "the contention was so sharp between" Paul and Barnabas that Paul preferred to take Silas with him through Syria. And ever since there has always been "squabbling"—and it looks as if there always will be.

★

Will the Church of Scotland ever have any Bishops? Will the Methodists? The very idea nearly broke up the Conference. Then last March, the Free Church Federal Council decided that the time is not yet ripe for even the Free Churches to unite. Besides, look at the Church of South India in which many sects have "united," much to the disgust of other true Christians. However, most, if not all, the Bishops are determined on one aspect of "unity," and that is the sole authority of the Bible and the Deity of Christ.

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The "News Chronicle" reporter thinks that "there are storms ahead" for all this "unity" business, and he is right. All the other Churches have yet to reckon with the Roman Church, which stands like a Rock of Gibraltar against any unity whatever except on its own terms, which do not mean unity at all, but absorption or extinction of all the other Churches. And that can never happen.

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Our Belgian contemporary, "La Pensee," gives an instance of the complete inconsistency of believers. Many Catholics instinctively raise their hats when passing a church—but if God is "everywhere" why don't they raise their hats when passing a confectioner's? Isn't God there as well as in a church?

★

So at long last a book on Mithras (*Mithras*, by Esmé Wynne-Tyson) has appeared, in which it is argued that the "intolerant note" which is so conspicuous in Christianity,

really came from Mithraism, so long its rival, and parts of which were duly absorbed by Christianity, just as it absorbed Judaism and Paganism. Actually not much is known of Mithraism, partly because it was a "mystery" religion, and partly because as much of it as was possible was destroyed by Christians. But of one thing we are certain—both Mithraism and Christianity really sprang from the same stock—the worship of the Sun. No amount of doctoring the Gospels has hidden that fact.

### Attention! Mr. Legerton

MR. LEGERTON'S atavistic exhortations remind me of a little anecdote:

When Voltaire was on his deathbed, the Archbishop of Paris entered the room, announcing himself: "My son, I have come in the name of God."

"Show me your credentials," was the reply.

By what authority do the members of the Lord's Day Observance Society terrorise the whole country?

Perhaps this is the argument they may be able to grasp: Saturday—Hebrew Sabbath—the Seventh Day—in the mind of Bronze Age man stood under the influence of Saturn (Hebrew: The Seventh Planet) and therefore was a day of gloom, too dangerous to do work of any sort. Sunday, as the day of the Sun (liturgically every Sunday is an Easter feast in miniature) has been a day of rejoicing. The idea (or suggestion) that rest is tantamount to gloom could only generate in an unhealthy mind less concerned with Man than with a God in whose name they pretend to speak, yet unable to prove that the Bible must be accepted as their letter of authority.

P.G.R.

### WHERE WISDOM LIES

(Concluded from page 267)

thoughts and hopes. It recalls exquisite emotions. It voices delights that we hardly suspected other besides ourselves really knew. It catches at beauty and splendour. It expresses our ecstasies and despairs, our joys and sufferings. It refines our feelings; it spiritualises our longings. It sweeps us above the mean and petty. It kindles anew the idealism of our better days and moods. It invites us to partake of the splendid and untrammelled vision afforded by pure poetry before the pedestrian world with its pedestrian ways crowds in on us again.

But what applies to great poetry applies also in larger or smaller degree to great music, great literature, great pictorial and sculptural art. Poetry is in essence highly subjective and personal in its evocations. The meaning it has for you is not exactly the meaning it has for me. Like other great art forms, however, it may interpret us to ourselves, and while we are under its spell do all manner of sublime things to us. But when the enchantment has gone, we have to admit that it tells us nothing about any other life than the life we know, or any other world than the world we live in. It adds not a tittle to our knowledge of the great universe we are privileged for a few brief years to be conscious, thinking, feeling, breathing beings of.

But are we to complain that this is not enough? Are we to set our thoughts on the unimaginable, or dream after impossible things? No! Wisdom lies, as it always did, in accepting this world as we find it, with all its goodness and ugliness, in all its immediate tangibility and its ultimate incomprehensibility, and living as bravely, cheerfully, and usefully as we can. Without doubt, our philosophy must be one of acceptance; but whether that philosophy is basically stoical or epicurean, or a delicate blend of both elements, is entirely a matter of personal experience and temperament.

# THE FREETHINKER

41 GRAY'S INN ROAD, LONDON, W.C.1.

TELEPHONE: HOLBORN 2601.

Hon. Managing Editor: W. GRIFFITHS.

Hon. Editorial Committee:

F. A. HORNIBROOK, COLIN MCCALL and G. H. TAYLOR.

All articles and correspondence should be addressed to THE EDITOR at the above address and not to individuals.

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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

MOHAMMED KHAN.—You assert that Islam will outlast Christianity and become the one true religion of all mankind. To print your article would be to say this same thing in 1,400 words. But can you prove it?

J. W. T. ANDERSON.—Too long for a letter. As an article it presents too easy a case for your opponents to answer. We will write personally, asking you to strengthen your assertions.

MARK CAMPBELL.—The N.S.S. Principles have declared against war for the best part of a century. Lambeth is merely catching up with us. Why should we line up behind the Churches!

## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### 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.

Orpington Humanist Group.—Sunday, August 24th: Ramble, Brasted to Sevenoaks. Assemble Orpington Station, 10.30 a.m.

## Notes and News

READERS in the Tunbridge Wells (Kent) area may like to know of the activities of the local Humanist Group which usually meets at 3 Eden Road. Under the Hon. Secretaryship of Mrs. Joyce Johnson, of 5 Murray Road, Tunbridge Wells, the Group manages a varied and interesting syllabus of a general cultural nature. On July 27th, Dr. Clifford Pearce spoke on "The Quaker Approach to Problems facing Humanists"; on August 31st there will be readings of selected passages by members; and on September 28th, Mr. Frank Field will speak on the United Nations Organisation. Meetings start at 7.30 p.m. and visitors are welcome.

A MIDLANDS reader tells us that recently a member of his City Engineer's Department had his workshop invaded,

## The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £344 12s. 5d.; W. E. Huxley, 5s.; Mrs. Goldsmith, 5s.; A.E., 10s.; H. Pollard, 10s.; A. Fleming, 5s.; J.W.A., 10s.; W. Adams (Canada), £1; A. G. Mills, 1s. 6d.; S. Clowes, 5s.—Total to date, August 15th, 1958, £348 3s. 11d.

during his absence, by the local priest. The latter decided that the wall decorations—photos of well-proportioned young women commonly known as "cheesecake"—were immoral, especially as somebody had been playing darts in idle moments with these vital statistics as targets. An apprentice, a member of the cult, being the only person present, was bawled out and told that such pictures only appealed to people with low minds. And the priest, to demonstrate that he could deal with evil spirits, went round ripping the lot off the walls, and telling the apprentice that if he wanted some decent pictures, he (the priest) could supply them.

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FOLLOWING the Pope's example, we have lately referred to the suggested new fashions for nuns. The Roman Catholic *Universe* (8/8/58) showed a similar interest and asked its readers if they approved of the new habits. Some nuns and some of the older pupils "felt rather sad" about such modernisation as has taken place, it informed us. But, to give it is due, the *Universe* believes in moving with the times—at least in some things! It is no longer unusual, it points out, "to see a habit behind the wheel of a car" and there is even a report of "an American nun who is to pilot a jet aeroplane!" As if that isn't sufficiently up-to-date, the *Universe* looks beyond even the jet-age for nuns and wonders "which order will first establish a convent on the moon?"

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DID you know there was a Society for United Prayer for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals? If not, you shared our ignorance. However, this body has induced the British Federation of Animal Welfare Societies, of London (whose existence we were aware of) to ask the Liturgical Commission to include a prayer for animals in the revised Book of Common Prayer. "We feel sure that most people who follow the Liturgy of the Church would welcome some form of intercession for those creatures who share the Creative Life of God with us, and who are such patient and humble servants of humanity, and who are still cruelly ill-treated by man," wrote Mrs. Yvonne Scott, Secretary of the Federation, in a letter to the Commission at Lambeth Palace. The intention, we do not doubt, is admirable, but does Mrs. Scott think this will lessen animal suffering in any way? Actions speak louder than words, even words addressed to a God.

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IN *The Scouter* December 1957 issue there was an article by "Vigilant," which told of a Scout Troop in camp that had worshipped together "not as Catholic, nor Protestant, nor Free Church Scouts, but simply as Christian Scouts. Here we have found a simple unity." In *The Scouter* March 1958 issue the Committee of the Council points out that this is contrary to P.O.R. 10 (5), which states: "Where it is not permissible under a rule of the religion of any Scout to attend religious observances other than those of his own form of religion, the Scouters of the Group must see that such a rule is strictly observed while the Scout is under their control." The writer of the offending article apologised that it was an "imaginative," not an actual, account!

# Vitalism and Spooks

By H. CUTNER

HAD I KNOWN that Mr. Anderson was a Vitalist and a confirmed believer in spooks, I think I would have left him severely alone. I prefer, for exactly the same kind of reasons, not to enter into long discussions with Mormons or Christadelphians.

However, Mr. Anderson did his best to "shock" me when he referred "to *serious* psychical research," and I must admit he astonished me when he added that "Mr. Cutner would never condescend to study the S.P.R. *Proceedings*"—and this after unblushingly claiming that he had read "all his articles" in THE FREETHINKER for four years. If I had not read at least some of the *Proceedings*, as well as some of the most widely circulated books on Spiritualism—for example, those by Sir A. Conan Doyle and Mr. A. Findlay—why should the Editor of *Two Worlds* have devoted five numbers to "demolish" a lecture I gave before the Marylebone Spiritualist Association? Did Mr. Anderson not read my reply?

Let me therefore put it as plainly as I can to Mr. Anderson and his fellow believers—I claim that neither the S.P.R. nor any of the numerous writers on Spiritualism have produced any proof whatever that we can communicate with the dead. The mediums who say they can, either deceive themselves or are blatant frauds. No one has yet produced a genuine "spirit" photograph or an "apport" or "ectoplasm." No one has ever produced a "materialised" spook, while the stories of "haunted" houses have almost always dissolved into ludicrous nonsense—like Borley Rectory—when thoroughly examined. Spiritualism is based on the absurd babblings of mostly ignorant mediums.

One of the illusions of the late Harry Houdini was "walking" through a brick wall—and that brilliant novelist, Conan Doyle, actually refused to believe Houdini when he said it was pure "conjuring." Doyle said it was due to Houdini "dematerialising" himself, going through the wall as a "spirit," and then "materialising" himself back again. Even Alfred Russel Wallace, who also was a convinced Spiritualist, refused to believe that a well-known conjuror of his day, S. J. Davey, performed his "slate writing" tricks as ordinary conjuring. He insisted that they must have been done by spooks from "the other world." The reader can see why I prefer to leave the Andersons alone, just as I hate to waste time with a Mormon. Anybody who can believe in the illiterate nonsense of poor Joseph Smith (I use the word "poor" because he was brutally butchered by true Christians) must be so fogged in his thinking that it is a sheer waste of time to discuss anything with him.

I tried to make what I wrote on "intelligence" as clear as words can be, but I am not surprised that Mr. Anderson now claims he was "referring to evidence of purpose which one can study in embryology." As it happens, I *have* studied this, but I can see no more evidence of "intelligence" (with or without a capital "I") than I can see in a potato. All Nature, the good and the bad, tapeworms and cancer, as well as oranges and apples, manifest the same kind of "intelligence." We call it "Nature," but the "why" or the "how" eludes us. Whether a man believes in spooks or in an "intelligence," or even if he has read Bergson, Smuts, etc., or not, he cannot explain, that is, fundamentally explain, anything whatever in Nature. We may *describe* things but that is all.

As for *my* Materialism and my "interpretation" of Evolution—allow me to make it plain to all the Andersons that these depend on my reading and on my reason. I

have, of course, read Haeckel but I have also read many books published during the past ten years. And everything that I have read *confirms* my Materialism, and my belief in Evolution.

There is no need for me to add—which would be quite easy—any silly personal attacks on Mr. Anderson, the sort of thing he is sure is "biting" criticism of me. I don't know Mr. Anderson, and I am quite unconcerned about his opinion of me. Neither Spiritualism nor Vitalism appears, however, to have taught him good manners.

## Is Christianity Moral?

By ERNEST BUSENBARK (U.S.A.)

IT IS A LONG ESTABLISHED PRINCIPLE in all enlightened countries that moral obligations cannot be paid except by the one who owes them; they cannot be paid by others. In the courts, every possible safeguard is placed about defendants in order to avoid the possibility that an innocent person may be convicted for the misdeeds of another. They may not be convicted without a fair trial and may not be forced to testify against themselves. If there is any reasonable doubt about a defendant's guilt, he must be declared innocent. One person may not voluntarily accept punishment that rightly belongs to another, nor is it lawful to punish, or hold as hostages, friends or relatives of an escaped criminal or political prisoner to insure his return, as has been the recent practice in countries governed by dictatorships.

But, the very heart of the Christian religion is based upon the claim that God, being disappointed with the way of life on earth, sent his son, Jesus, to save the world and the life of Jesus was forfeited to redeem the souls of all people on earth. This is an immoral doctrine because it is unjust; it is untrue because a just God could not be guilty of an unjust act. If the doctrine were true, it would mean that there is one standard of justice on earth and another, lower standard for Divine justice, which obviously is impossible. Without this doctrine, however, Christianity must collapse and cease to be a living force.

But the evil of Christianity is compounded upon a second injustice: In order to give plausibility to the claim that Jesus redeemed the world, the author of the Epistles invented the doctrine of Original Sin, which asserts that every person that has ever walked upon the earth bears, or has borne, the stigma of guilt because of the transgressions of Adam and Eve, and that the blood of Jesus alone can save them. Although this doctrine is contrary to all enlightened standards of justice and morals, it is preached in thousands of churches and is implicitly believed by three-quarters of a billion unthinking churchgoers, scattered all over the world.

Inasmuch as each person must pay his own moral debts, fees paid to churches for prayers and masses for the dead are useless. Churches which obtain huge revenue by giving Absolutions, Dispensations and Masses to speed the souls of the dead through Purgatory, are obtaining money for services which they cannot perform and are obtaining it under false pretences.

If these facts were understood by Christians, they would no longer be able to have faith in the Jesus myth. The facts are brief, simple and unanswerable.

—NEXT WEEK—

E.S.P. AND HUMBUG

By COLIN McCALL

# Religious Laws in the U.S.A

By D. SHIPPER

ARTICLE 1 of the Amendments to the U.S.A. Constitution states clearly: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

In spite of the fact that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion" and Church and State are constitutionally separated, a mass of legislation appertaining to religious matters exists and there are many anomalies created by the differing laws of various States.

Rabbi Abraham Burstein, in his *Laws Concerning Religion in the United States* (Legal Almanac Series; \$1 paper, \$2 cloth), informs us that: "Although some State constitutions are silent concerning tax-exemption for Church property, and others delegate such powers to the Legislature as the case may arise, in the main such property pays no assessments."

A Church-owned house used as a home by a preacher is tax-exempt in Michigan, Rhode Island, S. Carolina, Washington, W. Virginia and Wisconsin. Colorado and New York exempt a residence up to \$3,000 value; Massachusetts and New Jersey up to \$5,000; and Maine up to \$6,000. On the other hand, there is no exemption in Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, or Texas. Most States prohibit the establishment of a "liquor-store" within a specified distance from a church or synagogue. However, religious groups needing wines for religious purposes have sought, and been granted, exemption from prohibition laws in federal and state statutes.

All state constitutions disallow control of public schools by any denomination. According to Burstein: "There have been recent legislation and decisions which have to some extent broken down the complete cleavage between public education and religion."

Efforts made by Legislatures in Oregon and other States to prohibit all sectarian schools and compel the children to attend public schools were blocked by the U.S. Supreme Court (who found that as long as ordinary requirements for education were complied with, parents could choose for themselves). In Champaign, Ill., the local Council of Religious Education inaugurated religious instruction in the school buildings and children were released "for a specific time" to attend these classes. The famous McCollum case resulted and after Vashti McCollum's protest was rejected by the Illinois Supreme Court, the U.S. Supreme Court gave a historic decision. "This is beyond all question a utilisation of the tax-established and tax-supported public-school system to aid religious groups to spread their faith. It falls squarely under the ban of the First Amendment. The State also affords sectarian groups an invaluable aid in that it helps to provide pupils for their religious classes through use of the State's compulsory public school machinery. This is not separation of Church and State."

This pronouncement caused natural jubilation in the rationalist camp and gloom in the religious ones. Religious protests at this "misinterpretation" of the First Amendment have been of no avail, and Judge Felix Frankfurter and Vashti McCollum stepped into the annals of American freethought history. A 1922 New York decision forbade textbooks, etc., bought with public money being given to parochial or private schools. In 1941 the Louisiana Supreme Court stated the law was that *children*,

and not *schools*, be provided with text-books. If the books were similar, the type of school was immaterial and no constitutional prohibition was involved. The U.S. Supreme Court agreed, also because the books were "lent," not "given"! Since then other States have exploited this loophole. Some controversy has arisen over free transportation to sectarian schools and the wearing of religious garb by public-school teachers in certain States. The following law will interest evolutionists: "It shall be unlawful for any teacher in any of the universities, teachers' colleges, normal schools, or other public schools of the State which are supported, in whole or in part, by the public school funds of the state, to teach any theory that denies the story of the divine creation of man as taught in the Bible, and to teach instead that man descended from a lower order of animals." (Code of Tennessee, 1932, Sec. 2344.) Note also: "It shall be unlawful for any teacher or other instructor in any university, college, public school, or other institution of the State . . . to teach that mankind ascended or descended from a lower order of animals, etc. . . ." (Mississippi Code, 1927, Sec. 9493.)

In 1927 the Scopes case in Tennessee resulted in the court's decision that "forbidding teaching in the public schools of the theory that man has descended from a lower animal" did not "violate a constitutional provision that no preferences shall be given to any religious establishment or mode of worship." In 1921 Utah proclaimed it was illegal to teach "any atheistic, infidel, sectarian, religious, or denominational doctrine" in schools. In 1923 Florida forbade public-school teaching of "atheism or agnosticism, or to teach as true Darwinism, or any other hypothesis that links man in blood relationship to any other form of life." Arkansas also has an anti-evolution statute.

(To be concluded)

## Christian Lie Nailed

DURING HIS LATEST CONTROVERSY in the *Barnsley Chronicle* Mr. Henry Irving, our veteran reader and occasional contributor, was met with that old, old story of an Atheist who was supposed to have recanted when he was dying. This is a very old form of Christian lie and naturally Mr. Irving did not fall for it.

However, the next issue of the *Chronicle* contained the following from Mr. K. Miller, son of the Atheist in question; it was headed "Spare a thought for my family."

With reference to Mr. Frank Beasley's comments about my father, I would point out that George Miller did not think any differently just before he died. He never retrenched one jot. To the end he remained true to the principles he had carried for many years.

It is significant to note, however, that he did say that people would soon be ready to try and use him when he had gone.

Mr. Beasley, you shame the religion you profess by your hypocrisy! Did you spare a thought for my family? Did it worry you that you might disturb memories for those whom George Miller loved?

Compassion for others went by the board. You were too concerned in scoring a point for a lost cause. Congratulations, Mr. Miller! It is not always possible to track down these lies. There must be quite a few that go undetected.

G.H.T.

## IRREVERENCE

SAND SPRINGS, OKLAHOMA.—A court granted the Rev. Gertie May Holt a divorce from the Rev. Homer Levi Holt when she testified that he had not received the call, awarded the family Bible to her and the family guitar to him.

## The Reactionary Priest

THE REACTIONARY PRIEST, eternally trailing his cassock, walks about with short, discreet steps, eyes cast down, a false smile as of sugar mixed with vinegar on his pale flabby face, his hands white and sweaty; something sinister about his whole appearance. The confessional is for him a vocation; it constitutes his real pleasure, where he can exercise his art. He usually furnishes it with little luxuries—a sofa, easy chairs, a cupboard full of such dainties as sponge cake and jellies. It is there that he listens with half-closed eyes and hands crossed over his breast, to the women's tales of their relations with their husbands, to hidden vices and crimes, to the young girls blushing reciting tales of the perturbations of the flesh, to the scruples of the mystics. He orders all to be repeated, asks probing questions, takes the confession point by point, disfibres it muscle by muscle, nerve by nerve, artery by artery; afterwards he reconstructs it and sets it up complete before the eyes of the penitent, then moralises on the enormity of the offence against God. The sin, resuscitated with caustic, cunning touches, confronts the sinner, coils round him as a serpent, reduces him to a terrified, hysterical state. When in this crisis, the priest reprehends him, admonishes him, coldly criticises him, then absolves or condemns him in the name of the Creator. The sinner is reduced to such a condition that he sinks in humility at the feet of his confessor. The reactionary priest is a cog in the great wheel of the Church. He neither thinks nor discusses; he follows obediently the course marked out for him. Legacies are left to him, he mounts up money given to him for masses, sells Fatima and Lourdes water, faithfully pays the prescribed percentage of all his takings to Rome, lives in luxury in spite of the poverty all round him and leaves his family a considerable fortune when he dies.

[Kamalho Ortigao. Translated from the Portuguese by Nan Flanagan.]

## CORRESPONDENCE

### LOURDES

My authorities for my statement that Lourdes water is river water are:

1. A medical friend and colleague of unimpeachable integrity who worked in a hospital in Lourdes and would be expected to have a sound knowledge of what goes on there. He stated unequivocally that the water came from the river.

2. My own observations and those of others. I watched many priests and laymen filling bottles and utensils from taps near the grotto: I cannot imagine a hilltop spring providing anything near as much water as I saw taken in about an hour and a half. Nowadays, men come from all over France with two-gallon bidons slung over their shoulders, fill them with water from these taps and return "au patelin" and sell the "eau miraculeuse" at 100% profit to the credulous "copains." No spring could stand that strain.

3. In an issue of *Paris-Match* some years ago—I cannot be more precise than saying it might be between 1950 and 1954—under the rubric *Télégrammes*, there was a news despatch from Lourdes concerning a protest from the Bishop of Tarbes and Lourdes, Mgr. Théas (soon to be displaced by a nominee of Cdl. Gerlier, to get control of the profits for the Vatican) against a proposal by *Electricité de France* to weir off the Gave de Pau. The item implied that this would reduce the amount available to the pilgrims seeking the curative effects of the "eaux miraculeuses." As no protest by the municipal authority, the local *Député* or the Senator of the Hautes Pyrénées was reported, I concluded there was no risk to the town supply but specifically to that to the "piscine" and the taps near the grotto, a big drain on the supply. I am satisfied that the power and light company would not willingly or without consultation imperil the town supply, and I felt some special ecclesiastical interest was at stake, and came to what, I think on previous evidence in my possession, was a natural conclusion reinforced by my lifelong experience of Catholic chicanery. The main, indeed the only, industry of the town (apart from the scenic funicular) is the miracle factory, and a failure of the water supply, which only a miracle

could avert—and miracles are mighty scarce at Lourdes—would be disastrous. To the Church, money and power are all that matter, and they get both in abundance from the sordid miracle factory.

4. If river water supplies other Church activities, why not run it into the factory? Why not, indeed?

I greatly enjoyed Mr. Ridley's article on the subject; it is absolutely convincing. (Dr.) J. V. DUHIG.

### A FAMOUS COIN COLLECTOR

On the last visit of the late General William Booth to America, he addressed (with great financial success) huge audiences. This great coin collector, being a psychologist as well as a purveyor of the blood of the lamb, instead of engaging collectors to rake in the coin after his orations, invited the audience to queue up, and hand their offerings to him personally. British evangelists should learn a lesson here, for with collecting boxes sent around, instead of real cash buttons and other odds and ends are often thrown in, but the personal offering is the thing, for there can be no dodging, and the amount given personally is much greater.

At one of his meetings, his biographer reports, the General was sitting at the table with his big black bag, which he was rapidly filling up with the offerings as the queue passed by, when a most ferocious looking brute with tears rolling down his cheeks, and muttering to himself, "Let me get hold of one of those blasted yids," handed the General a wad of greasy and dirty dollar notes. As he was placing the wad into his bag, the chairman grasped his arm and said, "General. Do not take those notes, they are tainted." The General tugged loose from the grip of the chairman, and replied whilst dropping the wad into the bag: "Never mind; we will cleanse them with the blood of Jesus."

The brute's remark about yids had been generated by the sermon of the General, for he had given a most vivid description of the execution of Jesus by the Jews and the crowning with a crown of thorns, and no doubt, if the brute had met a Jew after the meeting, the Jew would have had a rough time indeed. There is no doubt that this Papa of the Salvation Army had his head screwed on from a business standpoint, a big business, from Royalty downwards, recognised him as the greatest organiser of non-return tickets for heaven that Britain has ever produced.

PAUL VARNEY.

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