

# The Freethinker

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ONE OF THE MOST CURIOUS AND FEARFUL of mental aberrations is to be found in the lurid annals of witchcraft and sorcery. From the now distant day when the Biblical Jehovah commanded Israel to extirpate witches without mercy, to the moment when Shakespeare played up—it is to be feared, deliberately?—to the witch-baiting mania of James I, by introducing Scottish witches in *Macbeth*, the fear of the occult hung over man — and particularly, woman—kind, like a dark cloud. It is only since the modern “age of reason” began some three centuries back that belief in demoniac-possession ceased to be a permanent and ubiquitous nightmare. It represented a delusion which was responsible for some of the worst atrocities in history.

## Witchcraft and Satanism

The annals of witchcraft can be traced back to, or even beyond the dawn of human civilisation, of which it later became one of the most dreadful scourges. It was certainly a belief held long prior to the appearance of Christianity but, as in so many other departments of human superstition, Christianity, so to speak, codified and organised the fight against witchcraft, in which, however, it firmly believed. Originally the Pagan gods were identified with the demons but, as the Church, by a formidable combination of adaptation and terrorism, gradually succeeded in eliminating, not only the cults but even the very memories of the Pagan gods, the cult of demons became organised round the Biblical figure of Satan, the Demon *par excellence*. Satan, either personally or through his innumerable infernal subordinates—the actual existence of whom is still an orthodox Christian dogma—set himself to ruin the souls of a host of male wizards and a still vaster female army of witches, who represented Satan’s legions upon earth. The existence and maleficent activities of this Satanic army was not only a matter of Church dogma for theological experts, but still more, throughout the Dark and Middle Ages, one of the most widely and firmly held beliefs of popular Christianity. Not only the supernatural world, but equally this terrestrial world, was the scene of an unending battle between Christ and his angels on the one hand, and Lucifer—Satan—on the other, for the collective and individual possession of the souls of men. And although it has always been Christian (unlike Manichean) dogma that Christ will *eventually* prevail, this was not so in individual cases. The Church, which exists primarily to frustrate the wiles of Satan and to ensure the ultimate salvation of all men, took the demoniac danger very seriously, and launched, not only an arsenal of theological curses against the Evil One and his angels, but backed up its spiritual curses by the perhaps more efficacious application of fire and sword against Satan’s human agents. The innumerable witches, wizards and warlocks whom the Inquisition ferreted out with a cunning that the Devil himself could not have surpassed and then proceeded to extirpate with a ferocious zeal, gave the shuddering spectators

a lifelike picture of the post-mortem tortures in Hell. Nor did this mania for destroying witches perish with the Middle Ages. One of the most curious and inexplicable paradoxes in human history is that the Reformation was characterised by an even more ferocious animus against “the sin of witchcraft” than the ages which preceded it. Luther threw his inkpot at the Devil in person, and the

Protestant Reformers vied with Catholic Inquisitors in sending witches, of both sexes, to the stake. In which infernal context, the Reformed (Calvinist) Presbyterian Church of Scotland probably surpassed all previous records in both the holy zeal in which it pur-

sued its human agents of Satan, and in the cold ferocity with which it exterminated them. James VI of Scotland and First of England was one of the greatest authorities on demonology, and his practice matched his theory!

## A French Classic

What the august voice of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* has saluted as the “most important work on medieval superstitions yet written,” the work of the famous French historian, Jules Michelet, has recently been reissued in English translation. Here, transcribed in an eloquent and lively (if at times long-winded) style, will be found a mass of learning, carried with an astonishing lightness which must arouse the envy of modern scholars. Here, too, will be found the outline of the grim medieval era in which Christ and Satan battled unceasingly for men’s souls. Michelet describes, with a wealth of learning and psychological intuition, the mental processes which attended the revival of sorcery in that age which, though so near in time, is incredibly remote from us in its mental beliefs and logic. Here also will be found, in the precise historic detail which one would expect from a major historian, the grisly details of what may appropriately be styled the “highlights” of the Thousand Years War carried on by the Christian Church against Satan. In particular, the famous (1481) Manual of the Dominican Inquisitors, *Malleus Maleficarum* (The Hammer of Evil-doers) with its detailed instructions for the detection of every conceivable (and inconceivable!) type of witch. As also the frightful assizes conducted by these self-same Inquisitors and their kind, to put to the practical test this highly-evolved “science” of “smelling out” witches with every refinement of that elaborate, deductive logic by which the Middle Ages set such great store. During the 15th and 16th centuries, Europe, in at least one important aspect, descended to the “Kaffir” level. The proceedings of both Catholic and Protestant judges (often men of learning and critical acumen in other secular fields) in witchcraft trials often resembled those of the Congo witch-doctors. No accurate computation exists of the total number of victims, but it probably ran into millions over the centuries. The mania was at its worst in ages of social transition, which are usually synonymous with ages of fear. The Reformation was such an age, and Michelet described its Satanic activities in some detail,

VIEWS and OPINIONS

## The Empire of Satan

By F. A. RIDLEY

culminating in the atrocious *cause célèbre* of Urban Grandier and the nuns of Loudon—a tale of subtle and sinister horror which has more recently attracted the macabre pen of Mr. Aldous Huxley, whose “Grey Eminence,” Father Joseph, played a sinister part in this malignant 17th century judicial murder. However, “the darkest hour precedes the dawn”; the self-same 17th century which witnessed the learned lucubrations of James I and the judicial murder of Grandier, also witnessed the beginning of the end of witchcraft and the hunts associated with it. The generation of Newton and Spinoza gradually emerged from the Medieval fog of superstition. Prosecutions for witchcraft were made illegal in France in 1672 and in England about the same time, yet it is still less than two centuries ago, since (in 1781) what appears to have been the last witch was judicially executed (in Spain by the Inquisition) on the awful

charge of “producing infernal eggs by unhallowed cohabitation with the Devil.”

#### A Freethought Classic

We welcome the reissue of this classic by the great French Freethinking historian. We hope that it will draw attention to a lurid and terrible, but now nearly forgotten, era. It is perhaps necessary to check some of this 19th-century scholar's interpretations in the light of more recent research such as that conducted by Dr. Margaret Murray and her school (which seems to indicate the persistence of a Pagan cult that the Church drove underground but could not suppress), but Michelet's great work still probably deserves its title of the greatest single book written upon Medieval superstition.

[*Satanism and Witchcraft*, by Jules Michelet, translated by A. R. Allinson, published by Arco Publications, London, 18s.]

## Reverent Rationalism

By DR. J. V. DUHIG (AUSTRALIA)

THE WORST DANGER to the only sane conception of society, the Atheist-Humanist idea, is the reverent Rationalist who knows, or should know, that organised religion is a fraud, who attends no church and supports no religion, but yet freely surrenders part of his mind to a legendary, mythical and demonstrably false view of Jesus, which is fundamental to a survival of the worst menace to the Atheist ideal of universal human peace and happiness, Christianity, especially Catholicism. The career of the late Pope, Pius XII, entangled in alliances with murdering Fascist tyrants, approving the planned, deliberate slaughter by Catholic priests of Serbs who resisted forcible conversion to Catholicism, etc., is typical of Christian-Catholic history, and history has a habit of repeating itself, as in Portugal now.

But Pope John, his successor, if he read the letters by a young German and his wife on page 29 of the November *Humanist*, would be very happy to have such devoted Rationalist support. The adulation of Jesus by the German wife is simply incredible in a responsible Rationalist journal: the lady shows a shocking ignorance of the true, unpleasant character of Jesus, who, says the lady, “proclaimed his message in a simple way . . . and the mass of beliefs about Jesus have nothing to do with essential Christianity.” But the support of Jesus for war (Matt. X, 34-38; Luke XII, 51-53), his malignant hatred for people who could not agree with him (Matt. XXV, 41), and the “simple way” in which Jesus told his hearers to “compel them to come in” (Matt. XXII, 8-13; Luke XIV, 23) which was the sole basis for the establishment of the Inquisition and of Catholic intolerance and compulsion, are all a part of the essential Jesus and the essentially cruel, anti-human Christianity is based on this essential Jesus, clearly and precisely. And the German husband gives away so much in adulation of the repellent Jesus that one wonders how and why Rationalists of this type are given space outside church newspapers.

Then, in the *Manchester Guardian Weekly* of 6/11/58, page 3, we read, in a despatch from Taya Zinkin of Bombay, that “Adib,” the *Times of India* literary critic, says “. . . They seem to have missed the whole of (Pasternak's) meaning, which is a reassertion of Christian values against hatred and violence.” Surely “Adib” has heard of the Christian vice of anti-Semitism, which for centuries has combined the most vicious hatred and most outrageous violence. Anti-Semitism is necessarily Christian in origin; it still persists in my country. Here is a small but typical

example: At my golf club Jews are not, by our articles (believe it or not in this 20th century), admitted to membership, the majority of which is, of course, Christian. If this is not hatred, what, in the name of Jehovah (who, on his record, should know) is hatred? Though the Russians no longer have Christian Orthodox Church-conducted pogroms, in which millions of Jews perished, the latter still, in the “Workers' Socialist Paradise,” are strongly discriminated against in the tradition left by the Christians. The Jews were flung out of England in 1290 by the Catholic King, Edward I; between 1480 and 1498 they suffered typically barbarous persecution at the hands of the most Holy Catholic Spanish and Portuguese authorities. In his article in *The New Scientist* of 6/11/58 on “Plague, Yesterday and Today,” Dr. J. L. Cloudsley-Thompson writes: “During the fourteenth century the Jews were often accused of spreading the pestilence by poisoning wells and were subjected to incredible torture and persecution. . . . So horrible tortures were imposed on scores of innocent victims. . . .” The torturers and persecutors were Christians. And so the foul record goes on down Christian history through the Lollards, the Albigenses, St. Bartholomew's massacre, right through Franco, Stepinac and Salazar, to the present moment. I do not know if “Adib” is addicted to any religion but, as he is a literary critic on an important paper, I presume he is an educated man and, as such, he should know something of the unrivalled Christian record in savagery.

As a result of these melancholy experiences all in one week, I propose that no article or letter be accepted for publication in any anti-religious, humanist, secularist, atheist or similar journal unless the contributors show some evidence of having read, at least, the New Testament with intelligence and sustained critical attention, and have their competence to talk intelligently and credibly about Jesus certified by the local Secretary of the N.S.S. As Jesus has, times out of number, been shown to be vain, silly, ignorant, unjust, hypocritical, menacing, arrogant and cruel (I have texts for all this), the world and our cause would benefit by a stern silence about him. He was, demonstrably, incompetent as a guide to decent conduct, and he did immense harm to human society. If Jesus did not invent Hell, he supported eternal torment with enthusiasm; the sooner he is discarded and forgotten the better. If reverent Rationalists want to keep on adoring Jesus, would they please do it where it belongs—in the religious papers? Elsewhere they are an offence.

# Is God a Criminal?

By DR. VITALI NEGRI

(Acting President of the Freethinkers of Southern California, U.S.A.)

(Concluded from page 31)

**A Priest's Declaration.** On the morning of December 2nd, 1958, my patience with man's persistent mental paralysis under the tutelage of religious and Biblical authority was again subjected to a nasty jolt. A TV news broadcast had just reported the shocking and heartrending holocaust which, in one fell swoop, had consumed eighty-seven children and three nuns at a parochial school in Chicago.

As a part of this broadcast, a slender, dark-haired, rather thin-faced priest was interviewed. His general expression was one of innocent sincerity and kindness, glazed over by a sort of dazed despair. He was asked by one of the reporters to comment on why such a disaster should have occurred, particularly to children.

To this inquiry, the priest, among other words, replied: "It was the Will of God."

Small wonder, indeed, that the lips of the priest closed over these words with grim compression or that his eyes flickered momentarily at the enormity of his statement! Who cannot understand what extreme faith must be drawn upon to allow one to continue to love and submit to a God whose Will and Authority had just demanded the burning alive of eighty-seven children and three of the Church's devoted servants?

Naturally, this young priest, earnest in his belief, had turned in his time of need to the Bible for his reply to a question which he, himself, by the effort of his present intellect, could not honestly answer; not because his whole being was not crying out against such a monstrous injustice, but because his intellect, rendered warped and impotent by its constant intake of religious myths and lies, could not reasonably cope with the experience. By the doctrine of his Faith, he had no choice but to accuse God, and yet kneel to the Accused!

If he was not to refute the Bible then he must continue to accept the Biblical assertion that the God of the Bible is omnipotent and that nothing is impossible to Him. Therefore, if God had desired to stop the fire or rescue the children and nuns by some miraculous means. He could have done so. The fact that He did not, leaves the priest, and all believers in the Bible's unassailability, with but one answer: The entire affair was the Will of God.

I am certain that this submissive assertion of the priest proved as repugnant to many other listeners and observers as it did to myself (although perhaps for different reasons), and must have raised to the surface many questions of doubt and uncertainty. On what grounds could any believer in this God expect mercy or continue to pay Him homage? By what qualities should this God be entitled to survive all other Gods? Surely He deserves their same fate? Is it not time for humanity to recognise this last God of our barbaric superstitious past for the Criminal that He is, and to condemn Him as such and execute Him forthwith?

**The Grave Where Gods Die.** The grave is ready. It awaits only upon the axe of the executioner—the reasoning ability of the human intellect; for only by execution within the human intellect can any God, or other concept of man, be destroyed. The intellect of man is the grave where Gods die.

Once the last of the Gods is killed and buried in the minds of humanity (from whence all Gods were born), mankind will then be free to recognise, or at least to

investigate and consider, the natural space-time source of universal phenomena and its dynamic impartial laws. For with the death of the Gods, mankind will then have declared its emancipation from the authority and dictatorship of the Church, which, in using humanity's awe and terror of the unknown as its whip, has ever been the strongest ally and promoter of magic and superstition.

Today, science has found and is finding the answers which disprove the ancient, puerile magico-religious ideas of heaven and hell, gods and goddesses, and the myths of Biblical folklore. The ghosts which have long haunted the murky narrow pathways of men's craven fears, and made a priesthood possible, are being dissipated, one by one. And although men of scientific philosophy, such as Spinoza, and men of science, such as Einstein and other sincere seekers of truth, often retain the name "God" as a synonym for the forces and action of Nature, they neither worship, pray to, supplicate, make promises to, or pay penance to universal phenomena, knowing that only as these are understood, so, proportionately, will man be able to influence his own destiny.

**Facing the Facts.** Neither the deism of Thomas Paine, which predicates the existence of a personal God outside the universal realm, nor the agnosticism of Ingersoll, which neither affirms nor denies the existence of a God but takes refuge in an eternal question-mark, should be included within the realm of scientific thinking. Nor should men be content to hide half-heartedly behind these "on the fence" conclusions.

We should, rather, face up to facts. The concept of God as an alternately benign or angry Father residing somewhere in the ether without form or body but possessing human emotions, human thoughts, and human weaknesses, and a cupidity that demands constant placation, must be destroyed. Such nonsense is not fit even for the kindergarten of men's minds. And once this hurdle has been knocked over and put out of the way, there is no reason at all for reconstructing it in the form of a smaller hurdle such as Paine would offer, or keeping it intact but pushed to one side as Ingersoll has chosen. Why not destroy it completely, once and for ever?

Allegorically, we may say that the progress of civilisation has ever marched over the graves of the Gods. So, today, is it not time for the last of the Gods to be uncovered for what He is and has been since His birth—the arch-criminal of man's own creation?

## Loving Father

His tender puff of life is ended now  
As Robin cold beneath the snow does lie,  
Yet by its eloquence tempestuous  
Blows out great volumes of Theology.

G.H.T.

—NEXT WEEK—

A CHRISTIAN PSYCHOLOGIST

By G. H. TAYLOR

## This Believing World

We note, not without a little amusement, that the famous film actress, Miss Anne Todd, has declared that she is a thorough believer in "ghosts and supernatural happenings." But surely there is nothing very unusual in this, not only with some of her fellow actors and actresses—for example, Mr. Alec Guinness and Miss Anne Shelton—but with all the well-known people who have gone bodily over to the Roman Catholic Church. None of these people would admit for a moment a belief in "spooks," a word they intensely dislike, but what else is an Angel or a Devil in the ultimate but a spook? If Miss Todd has not done so already, we advise her to go over to the Catholic Church, where she will find ghosts—the Holy Ghost among them—and the supernatural in such abundance that she need never go outside for the rest of her life.

★

Really, we must protest against "Psychic News" blaming us for the *Daily Telegraph's* refusal to accept an obituary notice with the words, "passed to the spirit world" in it. The *D.T.* refuses to have anything to do with "a spirit world"—and THE FREETHINKER is blamed for it! In truth, we stand for the free expression of opinion, otherwise we would not be THE FREETHINKER. The *D.T.* is, and always has been, a very respectable Christian paper—not for worlds would it offend its readers' religious susceptibilities, and without doubt it must believe in the "spirit world." Exactly like *Psychic News*, but not like THE FREETHINKER.

★

And still talking about ghosts, a *News Chronicle* correspondent insists that he has met two—one in his own home and one in the gardens of Versailles. Well, it is up to anyone to say he has known a few spooks—but the Versailles one surely is reminiscent of the book written by two champion liars, Miss Moberley and Miss Jourdain. It has hoodwinked thousands of people and no doubt will continue to do so. These kinds of lies, like Christian ones, are extremely hard to overtake once they are well in the running. Even if fully exposed they can still find believers. After all, no exposure has silenced the followers of poor Joanna Southcote!

★

Another book on witchcraft, *The Meaning of Witchcraft*, by G. B. Gardner, has just been published, and, of course, it confirms what is well known—that it was (and is, if practised now) a "hang-over" of a conglomeration of pagan and phallic rites. It was savagely persecuted by the Christian religion as a popular rival, though both religions actually had much in common. But while in the Middle Ages, a witch or sorcerer was one who had "a familiar spirit," nowadays they are called "mediums," who also have "familiar spirits" with funny names like Running Water or Red Cloud. There isn't a ha'porth of difference between a witch and a medium.

★

That well-known interviewer, Mr. Daniel Farson, had an encounter with a famous Jesuit, Father Christie, the other day on ITV. He himself, we are very pleased to note, admitted he belonged to no religious faith, and the interview was to find out, if possible, why the Roman Catholic Church was having such wonderful success with converts. But Father Christie was not to be drawn altogether; and Mr. Farson, who tried hard to get a straight answer to one question, notably failed. His smile showed, however, that he had quite understood the practice of Jesuitism.

★

The question which Father Christie never answered, in spite of repeated requests, was: did the Church teach that

in difficult cases of childbirth, where the R.C. doctor had to make a decision, the mother had always to be sacrificed—never the child? He said the rule was the doctor had to do his best and from that he never budged. We have an idea that this particular answer was not a conspicuous example of a "success" story.

## Czech and Double Czech

By D. SHIPPER

AN INTERESTING QUERY in the Czechoslovak fortnightly *Prague News Letter* (10/1/59) came from a reader in Manchester, who asked: "Since Communist dogma regards religion as a hindrance to achieving its ends—'opium of the people' is a phrase often used—it surely must follow that religion will not be encouraged by a Communist government. The question is: should it be tolerated? Various governments no doubt interpret Marx with varying degrees of liberty. I should like to know whether the Czech government believes in a policy of co-existence, that is, non-interference, or does the government actively discourage religion. . . .?"

Believing the question to be of general interest to their readers, the editors gave a lengthy and comprehensive reply. Yes, they said, Marx characterised religion as "the opium of the people" and he and other socialist thinkers exposed how the ruling classes have always utilised Church and religion to keep the proletariat subdued, justifying their own wealth and the people's poverty as God's Will, also showing how the Church has used its "tremendous secular power" for reactionary aims.

However, the editors (who may be regarded as government spokesmen) recognise that popular thinking cannot be forcibly changed and that religion has "very deep roots" which can only be destroyed by "patient conviction." They think that the way to combat religion is through "the widest possible scientific education" and they have many popular scientific societies, adult education programmes, lecture courses, etc. (in fact, everything *except* independent freethought associations.—D.S.). These do not urge people to relinquish their religion, but present the scientific, Marxist explanation for various phenomena.

In Czechoslovakia, religion is a private matter with the Constitution guaranteeing everyone religious freedom. The majority of religionists are R.C.s, but there are about 30 other churches and sects. Many have their own bookshops and publishing houses and the Catholic People's Party produces its own daily newspaper.

Under the Church Law of 1949 all Churches are given financial aid by the state. All faiths now receive financial aid, the state paying salaries of clergy, contributing to their social security, financially support religious seminaries and (optional) religious instruction in primary schools, and devoting "large sums" to the upkeep and restoration of churches. In view of this benevolence it comes as quite a shock when we are told that in 1948 a number of "high dignitaries" of the R.C. Church were punished for anti-state political activity and that a few priests have taken part in "political conspiracies supported by Western intelligence organisations." What despicable ingratitude! It is reassuring, however, to know that "the vast majority of the clergy have always worked in harmony with the secular authorities"—and well they might! If only the kindly "secularists" now wielding power in Czechoslovakia would allow a measure of this freedom—if not a share of the funds—to now-suppressed organisations such as the League of the Churchless, we might be more convinced of their genuine liberalism.

# THE FREETHINKER

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

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

## TO CORRESPONDENTS

D. WOOD.—A pocket-sized summary of A. D. White's *Warfare of Science with Theology* is C. T. Gorham's *Religion as a Bar to Progress* (Watts).

## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### OUTDOOR

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

London (Marble Arch).—Meetings every Sunday from 5 p.m.: Messrs. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER and C. E. WOOD.

London (Tower Hill).—Every Thursday, 12—2 p.m.: Messrs. J. W. BARKER and L. EBURY.

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

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

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY. Sunday, 6.30 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

### INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Midland Institute, Paradise Street).—Sunday, February 1st, 7 p.m.: GEORGE BRIDGEN, "Irish Catholicism—Religion Without Morality."

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, February 1st, 7 p.m.: A Lecture.

Central London Branch N.S.S. (The Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday February 1st, 7.15 p.m.: G. H. TAYLOR, "Science and Religion: The Position Today."

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, February 3rd, 7.15 p.m.: J. B. COATES, B.A., "A Humanist Ideal of Sex and Marriage."

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, February 1st, 6.30 p.m.: P. BRODETSKY, M.A., "Nationalism."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (N.C.S. Public Relations Hall, Broad Street).—Sunday, February 1st: Dr. WILLIAM NEIL, "The Bible in the Light of Modern Knowledge."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, February 1st, 11a.m.: Prof. T. H. PEAR, M.A., "Conflicting Loyalties in Modern Society."

Study Circle.—Friday, January 30th, at 7.30 p.m., N.S.S. Office, 41 Gray's Inn Road, W.C.1.: "Religion's Mark on History," a course of six talks by F. A. RIDLEY, with full discussion. Second: "The Rise of Cosmopolitan Religions." Fee 1/- per meeting. Non-members invited.

University of Nottingham, Union Debating Society (Portland Lecture Hall).—Tuesday, February 3rd, 4.30 and 8 p.m.: Debate—"This House believes that Agnosticism offers an opportunity for a positive solution to current problems, moral and political."

Guests: Prof. NOWELL-SMITH and JOHN WILSON.

## Notes and News

We have just received, direct from the U.S.S.R., the Second Report of the Museum of the History of Religion and Atheism in Leningrad. The report is in Russian and may be consulted at the office by students of that language. It is clearly an erudite and comprehensive work, and we thank the Director of the Museum for sending it to us.

## The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £49 10s.; J. W. M. Ward, 15s.; M. Byrn, 10s. 6d.; Miss L. Lloyd, £1; W.H.D., 2s. 6d.; J.T., 10s.; G. T. Bennett, 10s.; Anon, 10s.—Total to date, January 23rd, 1959, £53 8s.

So Protestantism isn't quite dead in the Church of England! In the January issue of his parish magazine, the Rev. E. J. Lewis, Vicar of Swanwick and Pentrich (Derbyshire), points out that Roman Catholic infiltration "has gone a long way in the BBC and in the Armed Forces." He resents the pride of place in BBC bulletins given to news of the late Pope's last illness "to the extent of displacing important news about Her Majesty the Queen," and he recalls "the clear statement of the 39 Articles... that the Church of Rome hath erred in matters of faith, and that the Bishop of Rome hath no jurisdiction in this realm of England." Rome, he adds, "is not anxious to preserve liberties which have been gained for us at great cost" and "is keen to get our country under its domination." We trust that Mr. Lewis sent copies of his magazine to Sir Ian Jacob and Dr. Fisher.



MR. COLLIN COATES, of 100 Acton Avenue, Rivervale, Western Australia, has been a keen reader of THE FREETHINKER and member of the National Secular Society for many years, and his newsy letters are much appreciated. Now, we are glad to note that he has been instrumental, with Mr. F. A. Law, in producing *The Westralian Secularist*, a neatly duplicated paper for private distribution. Two issues have appeared and a third is expected this month. Its continuance beyond then—says the editorial—"will depend upon how worthwhile it appears to be to those to whom it is addressed." To us, it seems most worthwhile, and we choose one small example of its worth. "The term *supernatural* religion is gaining currency," it says. "Its use suggests there are other forms, and it is to be suspected that some 'rationalists' are hopeful of finding one which will satisfy a 'hangover' craving for some sort of 'prop' until they can come to rely entirely on their own reason. What is it that they seek?" What indeed! And this reminds us that another Australian, Dr. J. V. Duhig, has something to say about "Reverent" Rationalists on page 35.



THERE is some consternation inside the Church of England about the decision of the Church of Sweden to admit women to the priesthood. Indeed, our established Church wants the Swedish bishops to reconsider their decision "in the interests of Christian unity." (*Manchester Guardian*, January 6th, 1959.) Notice that this unity is threatened by what is (within its particular framework) a progressive step, not a retrogressive one. The idea that English bishops should further unity by agreeing to the ordination of women is, of course, unthinkable. A Roman Catholic woman friend of ours tells us that "at one time" she thought it unfair that women could never become priests. Now, alas, she considers this quite "natural," and so, no doubt, do many Anglican women. One of the most notable—and disastrous achievements of Christianity has been to make people content with their lot, no matter how low. Great would be their reward in Heaven!



MR. W. H. FRANKLIN, of 43 East Close, Burbage, Hinckley, Leicestershire, would like to get in touch with other FREETHINKER readers in his vicinity. He is a member of Leicester Secular Society.

# Neurosis

By R. READER

NEUROSIS—the establishment of a private mental logic leading to certain forms of irrational behaviour—is a disease as old as humanity itself. In no other period, however, has it been so widespread as today. The hospitals and consulting rooms are overflowing, everywhere there are long waiting lists. Scores of thousands will never be able to obtain treatment. Hundreds of thousands of others are quite unaware that it is this disease which is making so much of their lives unhappy.

The unfortunate companions of a neurotic, however, are only too painfully conscious of his condition—although they may not always recognise it for what it is. A basic anxiety (often the result of a childhood experience) has caused the neurotic to construct all kinds of artificial mental defences and barriers against it, these mental reservations governing his entire range of action. The fortifications thus constructed are often extremely ingenious, but always they possess the one unavoidable defect: they exist only in the neurotic's mind, and therefore cannot be perceived in their entirety by the outside world. Common-place actions, remarks, and events are therefore seen by the neurotic as dangerous attacks on his private system of defence, to be countered immediately by reacting. To his associates, however, his reaction appears touchy, irritable and unpredictable. One such reaction, and a very common one, is that of trying, at all costs, to have the last word, even when all reason dictates the abandonment of the contention. The normal person shrugs his shoulders with the consolation that the whole thing is too trivial to jeopardise his innate confidence in his own stability; the neurotic, on the other hand, fears that any concession will prove a weakness that will bring the brittle edifice he has constructed crashing about his ears. Since that edifice is a connected chain in his own mind, he is constantly rushing hither and thither to prop up whichever element seems to be in danger. The net result of this is that the neurotic is impossible for normal people to get along with.

The havoc thus wrought in human happiness is incalculable; no precise figures are available but most psychiatrists are of the opinion that the percentage of neurotics in modern civilisations runs well into double figures. Furthermore, an unstable personality, after prolonged association with a neurotic, will begin to ape the latter's bizarre reactions, and, eventually, to construct the same faulty patterns of thinking. *Neurosis is a highly infectious disease.*

Neurosis has been studied for several decades, and although a certain difference of opinion still exists, the following are considered to be essential factors for its inception and growth:

- (a) A basic fear and anxiety.
- (b) The search for subjective power and security in preference to objective ideals.
- (c) Cultivation of the personal ego to the exclusion of other aims.
- (d) Ignorance, or disregard, of the value and necessity for social co-operation.
- (e) The isolation and restriction of external action to conform to private requirements.

All neurosis shows these factors, *and all these factors are being fostered, directly or indirectly, by overpopulation.* In fact:

1. Overpopulation, by producing material economic discord, paradox, booms, slumps, redundancy, unemployment, etc., creates the basic anxiety and fear of economic dispossession (loss of job, depreciation of securities, etc.).

thus establishing condition (a) for neurosis. (Of course, not every neurosis owes its inception to this cause.)

2. As swarming continues, the individual becomes ever more insignificant among the rest, and his objective ideals ever more difficult to realise. He or she is driven back relentlessly to pleasures obtained from phantasies of subjective power—this being conditions (b) and (c) for neurosis. (Again, not *all* such behaviour arises from this cause.)

3. Overpopulation and rising costs of living go hand in hand. As it becomes ever more difficult to exercise hospitality and charity, so people tend to consider their fellows merely as dangerous competitors. They tend to cling to their job, wife, children, and perhaps a few cronies, and to regard the rest of the world as a menace or an oyster to be opened. In other words, overpopulation reduces genuine social co-operation—conditions (d) and (e) for neurosis.

Overpopulation, although not the only cause of neurosis, thus considerably stimulates it, not only in the manner indicated above, but in scores of other directions. Commercial advertising, seeking to outdo business rivals, has recourse to snob-appeal and ego-inflation. Read the newspaper advertisements and try to visualise the mentality of the people to whom some of them are addressed—bearing in mind that such people *do* exist, otherwise the advertisements would not appear. Again, many large organisations, in order to neutralise instability and criticism, deliberately use psychological science to promote ego inflation among the employees, knowing full well that collective and individual neurosis can be relied upon to maintain complete ineffectiveness.

Under these conditions, is it surprising that the dreadful scourge of neurosis is spreading, and that human happiness, the only valid criterion of successful living, is on the downgrade today? Of course, overpopulation is not the only cause of neurosis, but it is spreading mental disorder as surely as it is producing economic dislocation. In fact, the doctors' waiting lists will not be reduced by more psychiatric couches, injections, hypnotic passes, confidential chats, or any other palliatives. They will disappear only when mankind itself controls the quality—and above all the quantity—of its reproduction.

Mention this to a practising psychiatrist, of course, and he will raise all kinds of doubts. Like the bankers, like the economists, like the traffic experts, like the politicians, he is concentrating on finding the Philosopher's Stone, that marvellous figment of the imagination, a treatment that can be applied to all the sufferers and cure them, *at the same time leaving all the fundamental patterns and errors of contemporary society quite unchanged.* He hasn't found it yet, of course, but he is quite undaunted and doing nicely, thank you.

## OBITUARY

LAURENCE J. STEVENS, who died in hospital on January 14th, was in his mid-eighties, and had been in bad health for some time. He spent his last year in Dene End Old People's Home, Highgate, London, where the Matron did all she could for his comfort, and where he was often visited by National Secular Society member Mr. W. J. McIlroy. The last letter we had from Mr. Stevens enclosed his 1959 subscription to the N.S.S., but his niece (his next of kin) gave him a Christian service at Golders Green Crematorium on January 17th. Mr. McIlroy, however, represented the Society, as well as Laurie Stevens's own views.

# On Irenaeus Again

By H. CUTNER

MY RECENT ARTICLE on this famous Church Father brought me the following letter:

Dear Sir,

Thank you for your letter of 18th November. I have now traced the passage in Irenaeus to which you refer, although you wrote Bk. IV, when I think you intended to write Bk. II, Chap. 22. Incidentally, *all* the quotations in your FREETHINKER article are from Bk. II, Chap. 22, Secs. 4-6; on page 392 you have incorrectly referred readers to Bk. IV.

Now for the passage itself. It is clear from Bk. II, Chap. 22, that Irenaeus believed that Jesus was nearly fifty when he died, and that he appealed both to Scripture and tradition in support of this opinion.

But in your article you go on to infer that Irenaeus "contemptuously rejects" the Gospel accounts of the Crucifixion, that "according to Irenaeus, Jesus was *not* crucified"; while previously, referring to the work "Against Heresies" you wrote "In all this account of Jesus, there is not a line about his crucifixion under Pontius Pilate."

I am enclosing a list of twenty extracts from "Against Heresies" which put the opinion of Irenaeus on this matter beyond all doubt.

You have seriously misled readers of THE FREETHINKER, and I trust that in due course you will allow a correction to appear.

Yours faithfully, ROGER GROVES.

This was followed by the 20 extracts, most of them referring either to Jesus Crucified, or fastened on the cross, or raised up by God; but, curiously enough, out of the whole 20, only two mention Pontius Pilate—which is rather strange, to say the least.

Evidently Mr. Groves thinks I have never seen these extracts, so I take leave to quote from my own book, *Jesus—God, Man, or Myth?* published in New York in 1950:

It is true that in the same work Irenaeus refers to Jesus as being crucified, but how can one reconcile the two statements? It surely is obvious that if Irenaeus had the four Gospels in front of him, he must have known that in them Jesus is shown as about thirty years of age when he began his "ministry," and all four declare that he was crucified by Pontius Pilate within three years. But if Jesus was an old man when he died in bed or by crucifixion, it could not have been under Pontius Pilate. Was there a Crucifixion at all? If there was not, how did the story come into circulation? In any case, when dealing with the Church Fathers or nearly any ancient document which has passed through Christian hands, we are never sure that the text has not been tampered with. It is quite impossible to imagine that a Christian forger would have deliberately inserted a statement to the effect that Jesus died an old man, presumably in bed, with the Divine authority of the Gospels *against* him. On the other hand, one can easily imagine that a forger, horrified at the statement of Irenaeus, thought it better served the Faith to add a sentence of his own, that Jesus *was* crucified by Pontius Pilate.

It seems to me, rereading this passage, that it sufficiently answers Mr. Groves, but I should like to add a more lengthy reply.

In the first place, where exactly have I "seriously misled" readers? I quoted Irenaeus *faithfully*, and Mr. Groves did not dare say anything to the contrary. I wasn't writing an essay on his book—I was showing what balderdash could be written by an eminent Church Father, "contemptuously" dismissing the plain statements of the Gospels. And remember it was Irenaeus who *first* mentions them by name—before this, that is to say before about 180 A.D., they were quite unknown as far as any documents can say which have come down to us.

Of course, the Christian Church has carefully and, in many cases, angrily denied this date, but has never answered it. If Mr. Groves or any other Christian can show me where in Christian literature the four Gospels are mentioned before about 180 A.D., I shall be only too pleased to look into his evidence.

Supposing I wrote a paragraph in which I claimed that God Almighty showed his "back parts" to Moses, would I "seriously mislead" readers of this journal? I am perfectly well aware that John says "No man hath seen God at any time," in flat contradiction to, for example, Amos, who declares that he *did* see God standing on the altar. But surely it is not for *me* to explain this discrepancy in the Precious Word. It was up to Mr. Groves to explain clearly and unequivocally why in one place Irenaeus said that Jesus died an old man, and in another, a young man under Pontius Pilate. He can't have both statements.

The second century (and later) was an age of sheer Christian fraud and forgery. Mosheim, the famous Protestant ecclesiastical historian, says:

Several histories of his (Christ's) life and doctrines, full of pious frauds and fabulous wonders, were composed by persons whose intentions perhaps were not bad, but whose writings discovered the greatest superstition and ignorance. Nor was this all; productions appeared which were imposed upon the world by fraudulent men, as the writings of the Holy Apostles.

(It may interest Mr. Groves that I look upon the four Canonical Gospels as also full of "pious frauds." They are no more to be trusted than those which the pious Mosheim so scathingly dismisses.)

Perhaps Mr. Groves now sees what I am trying to prove—in other words, an explanation of the contradictions which he was unable to account for in Irenaeus.

We have *not* got the original Greek written by him except for a few fragments. All we have is an anonymous Latin translation, the date of which is quite unknown. Is it not obvious that the translator was horrified (as I pointed out in my book) to find Jesus described as dying, not as represented in the four Gospels, but as an old man? Every time he saw Jesus mentioned in the original text therefore, he must have added such appropriate and well-known Christian words—"having suffered under Pontius Pilate," "redeemed us from apostasy with his own blood," "the crucified one," and so on. As we do not know what the original Greek text was—except for a few fragments—these pious additions were easy.

But there is still another point. Irenaeus carefully explains that he got the story of Jesus dying an old man (and presumably in bed and not on a cross) from people who knew the Apostles. Here are his words:

Those who were conversant in Asia with John, the disciple of the Lord [testify] that John conveyed to them that information. And he (John) remained among them to the time of Trajan. Some of them, moreover, saw not only John, but the other Apostles also, and heard the same account from them, and bear testimony to the statement.

That is to say, not only did Irenaeus do his best to prove by "logic" that Jesus died an old man—he appealed to the canonical Gospel of John to prove that Jesus must have been near fifty when discussing with Jews—but he also appealed to people who knew John and other Apostles, who fully agreed he was telling the truth. Now, in the 20 extracts given by Mr. Groves, not once did he appeal to the Apostles and their followers that he was right. The Latin additions are sheer fraud.

It may interest Mr. Groves and Christians like him (or not, as the case may be) that I personally do not believe a line about any Jesus Christ living at the date or dates given in our Bibles. I believe he is a myth like Osiris or Krishna. I do not believe either in the existence of John, Peter, Paul, or any of the blessed Apostles.

The period dealt with in the Book of Acts is also dealt with by the Jewish historian Josephus, and he knows

nothing whatever of the wonderful miracles in Acts—he knows nothing of Peter or Paul preaching to the Jews in their synagogues, nothing whatever of the huge number of converts made by the "Apostles." He never mentions the "martyrdom" of Stephen, or the "conversion" of Saul. Acts is almost pure fiction.

I do not suppose for a moment that this article will have the slightest effect on people like Mr. Groves. Anybody who can swallow the fairy stories in the Canonical Gospels will swallow anything. All we Freethinkers can do is to peg hopefully away, and trust that at least some people will see "the Light." That is, the Light of Freedom, and Hope, and, above all, Truth.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### ISLAM AND CREATION

Excuse me encroaching upon your valuable space once more. This is with reference to Mr. Ridley's comments on my letter in your last issue.

His statement that Islam accepts the Old Testament as divinely inspired is only partially true. The correct Islamic viewpoint is that, though originally inspired, the Old and New Testaments, as they have come down to us, are an admixture of the original texts of the revelations with a great deal of meddling therein by the succeeding generations of Jews and Christians. Should Mr. Ridley refer to the Quran, he will find it a definite charge repeatedly brought against the Jews that they corrupted the text of God's original revelation to Moses, by alterations or additions or suppressions of their own. Verses to this effect are too many to bother your readers with, such as 2: 42; 2: 75; 7: 79; 4: 46; 5: 15.

It is thus not fair to make Islam responsible for the Genesis story of creation. The fact is the Quranic approach to such big questions as the existence of God, the origin of creation, immortality, life-after-death is more in keeping with the standards of Freethought than the Old or New Testaments—that is to say, a strictly scientific approach. The only difference between Islam and Freethought is that while following identical tracks of rational thinking, they arrive at different conclusions—Islam at God's existence, Freethought at His denial. Rather than shake the Islamic conclusion, latest advances of science and technology in the direction of space and its unbounded mysteries, only go to reinforce the same.

MUHAMMAD YAKUB KHAN (Imam, The Mosque, Woking, Surrey). [Mr. Ridley writes: The above represents a more intelligent view of creation than the Christian and Jewish ones, but it does not seem to affect my contention that Islam accepts creation out of nothing.—Ed.]

### A FRENCH VIEW

When I was in England I used to attend religious services of all kinds to hear the preaching and to improve my pronunciation by singing in the congregation. The substance counted for nothing and I did not obtain any good education from high church, dissenters or Christian Scientists. But the only Church I left aside was the Roman Catholic, of which I had had plenty in my youngest teens.

It is rather unpleasant to see these people forcing their way in a country where everybody should be ready to show them the cold shoulder; every year, every month they have to become bigger hypocrites and, if they shout louder, it is to silence their feeling of inferiority, while instruction and common sense close the way before them and make them strangers in modern life. Let them shout and make a big show; it is not altogether useless that they advertise themselves and awake the suspicion of even the most sluggish of mankind.

But, you will say, what of your own country? Yes, the case is bad but not hopeless; we have few believers, but a few millionaires and many shopkeepers who are good fakers.

A happy New Year to THE FREETHINKER.

L. DOREAU.

## N.S.S. Executive Report

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 21ST, 7 P.M.—Present: Messrs. Ridley (Chair), Alexander, Arthur, Barker, Corstorphine, Ebury, Gordon, Hornibrook, Johnson, Moore, Taylor, Mrs. Trask, Mrs. Venton, and the Secretary. Apology from the Treasurer, Mr. Griffiths. New members were admitted to Bradford, Central London, Manchester, North London, Nottingham and West Ham Branches which, with Individual members, made 15 in all. It was agreed to send two delegates to the N.C.C.L. Conference on New Mental Health Bill (7/2/59), and to make donation of £2 2s. to same. Humanist Council, Society for Abolition of Blasphemy Laws and

Central Board for C.O.s reports were noted. Bradford Branch request for speaker and Manchester Branch request for allowance were approved. N.E. Area representation was deferred to Conference. Annual Dinner and Annual Conference arrangements were confirmed. Messrs. Ridley, Alexander and Mrs. Venton reported meetings held or to be held. Mr. Barker introduced discussion on Republicanism and various opinions were expressed. The next meeting was fixed for Wednesday February 11th, 1959.

## Lecture Reports

ON January 13th, West Ham and District Branch, National Secular Society, met at the home of Mrs. Hayhow, when a number of friends holding varying religious opinions were invited. Mrs. Venton, the President, briefly and ably outlined the Secularist position, and an interesting and, we hope, profitable evening ensued. All joined in the discussion. This was the third meeting of this kind held by the Branch and, thanks to Mrs. Hayhow's hospitality, it is hoped to hold further ones. F.G.W.

STANDING ROOM ONLY was the order at the Laurie Arms on Sunday, January 18th, when Avro Manhattan spoke on "Ants and Collectivism." The speaker drew comparison with the development of human societies and, while aware of the advantages of collectivist society, yet warned of its dangers, whether the political regime were Communism, Socialism or Capitalism. In any society the individual had quite ceased to exist as an individual. An excellent talk elicited an excellent discussion from the overcrowded gathering. G.H.T.

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