

The Freethinker

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Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

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IN CONTROVERSY WITH METHODISTS one of our readers at Mansfield has been referred by them to a book* which is claimed as "an unanswerable case" against atheism by a psychologist. This awakened some interest for me, so I read the book in question and, as I expected, it is nothing of the kind. In fact, I doubt if the author himself, Dr. Sargent, would be so immodest as to make such a claim on the basis of the five pages he devotes to the matter out of a book of 156 pages. For 150 interesting pages the book proceeds much like any other introduction to human psychology. Dr. Sargent gives an account of the history, methods and schools of psychology, and the only criticisms one might pass are in respect of selection and emphasis, though in a short treatise some licence must be allowed, and I have no important quarrel with him previous to his last five pages. It is here that, as a Bachelor of Divinity, he attempts to bring psychology as a buttress for religious belief.

To do this he becomes inconsistent and illogical. He posits the question, What has psychology to do with religion? and tells us

psychology seeks to understand the whole of man, and religion is as much a part of his nature as any other.

Thus he stands at the gates of the realm and says "Enter!" So far, so good. But what if the atheist psychologist should get in! That would never do! Suppose he were to explain away all religious yearnings and beliefs! This must not be. And so, having declared psychology a proper sphere in which to study religion, Dr. Sargent now puts up the sign, "Atheist Trespassers will be prosecuted." He says:

Any psychologist who argues that religion is only an illusion based on wishful thinking and projection, is trespassing outside the legitimate field of his science.

In other words, if you think as Dr. Sargent thinks, then you may come in. If you don't, you are in the wrong field.

"Divine Purpose"

So much for his inconsistency. Next, he completely breaks the law of parsimony in introducing controversial terms and using them as subjects on which to hang predicates without bothering to establish their validity. A phrase such as "the Divine purpose that lies at the back of all things" is slipped in quite gratuitously. And if you won't grant such a phrase any sensible meaning, then you are "an untrained thinker." He says:

Now there are heavy arguments put forth against religion which have every semblance of being soundly logical, and for the untrained thinker even convincing.

In that case we must assume that Bertrand Russell, A. J. Ayer, Julian Huxley and Dr. J. Bronowski are untrained thinkers! Dr. Sargent, Billy Graham and the Salvation Army lassies then become the trained thinkers. How stupid can Christian argument get! And where could they ever hope to find four thinkers to compare with those mentioned?

Dr. Sargent makes much use of the name of the religious psychologist Dr. W. Brown. The italics are mine in the

following quotation:

For scientific reasons *he* (Dr. Brown) went through an analysis on his own mind, and one of the results was a richer Christian experience. So, instead of trying to explain religion away in terms of an illusion, wishful thinking and projection, *psychology* is able to explain...

Is this sort of argument really honest? It is some special brand of Christian ethics which considers it right subtly to replace "Dr. Brown" by "psychology" as though what Dr. Brown says is what psychology says?

If the Mansfield Methodists *really* want to know what psychologists think about the belief in God they should consult the only scientifically devised questionnaire ever conducted on the subject, that undertaken

by Prof. J. H. Leuba in U.S.A., working on a comparison of similar standard questionnaires at about 13-year intervals in the present century. Of his "Greater Psychologists" only 2 per cent. believed in God. The full figures have been reproduced in these columns as in many other.

"Need" or Belief?

It is not man at his highest, his most learned, his best informed, who needs God, but man at his lowest—who can think of no other way of accounting for the world about him than by investing it with superpersonal agencies. Here is the birth of the gods, here in ignorance, primitive awe and fear. And here the psychologist must go to the anthropologist for his information.

Man's need for that something we call God has manifested itself throughout human history, writes Dr. Sargent.

Not at all. What has manifested itself is the *belief* in God, not the "need." The *need* is for an explanation of the universe so that man can get on terms with his environment, orientate himself towards the vast forces around him. All the god-beliefs that have been manifest have been attempts, made in the dark, to meet that need. It is quite unscientific for our author to assume that the mistakes are the right answers simply because he happens to be fond of them.

He informs us that

man's need for religion is as fundamental as the need for food. Analogy is at best suspect, but this one is fantastic. If religion is food, how do non-religious people manage to exist? How do they manage to leave practically all the crime to Christians? Why are they, in proportion to numbers, the least criminal section of the population, not only here but in every country where figures are available (*vide* Joseph McCabe, *Crime and Religion*)?

However, let us take Dr. Sargent on his own ground—Analogy. If religion is food for man because man has had religion, we must suppose paper is food for goats because goats eat it, though there is not a scrap of nutriment in it.

**Teach Yourself Psychology*, by W. E. Sargent, M.A., B.D., PH.D.; Hodder and Stoughton for English Universities Press; 1st Ed. 1944; 156 pages.

Dr. Sargent's final absurdity is the assertion that psychology is able to reveal the emotional basis for religious unbelief. What appear as intellectual reasons for atheism and agnosticism are fundamentally emotional, and are rationalisations for some emotional conflict.

To the anthropologist this would be absurd. It would entail the proposition that the difference between Community A, which has a god, and Community B, which has no god, has nothing to do with climatic conditions, food supply, disposal of the dead, etc., etc., but is simply that by a peculiar coincidence all the individuals in Community A happen to be emotionally stable, while all those in B are unstable.

Let us see, however, what evidence Dr. Sargent adduces. It is the following:

A young woman falls in love with her friend before she goes on to the university. There she meets someone who appeals to her much more, but how to break off the old relationship without losing face she does not know. Returning home for a vacation, she is told that her friend has decided to study for the Christian ministry. Here, then, is a way of escape. She can no longer promise to be his wife because her university training has destroyed her belief in God. To support this defence she produces argument after argument and finally

builds up an edifice of atheism which deceives even herself. When the emotional basis of the belief was revealed the edifice collapsed.

During its long experience THE FREETHINKER has had many such cases brought to its notice, and the Christian starts with the advantage that they can rarely be investigated. They are offered for hearsay, not for investigation. Ten minutes' examination of the lady concerned—by any representative atheist—would reveal whether she had ever understood what atheism implied. A few questions on anthropology and in logic would be very revealing. Meanwhile, our experience tells us we are dealing with a case of introspection, which is notoriously unreliable as Dr. Sargent admits. Moreover, I have the strong suspicion that the "analyst" who examined her did some introspecting on his own account! It is rather a pathetic argument to claim as a true atheist one whose attitude was: "I'll pretend to be an atheist till I've got rid of him." The search was for freedom, not for truth.

Dr. Sargent's book is just another example of what happens when you try to mix Christianity with science.

Review

By H. CUTNER

Is Spiritualism True? by C. E. Ratcliffe. The Strickland Press, George Street, Glasgow.

THAT indefatigable writer (whom age cannot wither, and whose verse with its cheery message of good-will and tolerance to all men must be known to most of our readers), Mr. C. E. Ratcliffe, has produced in this excellent pamphlet his views on Spiritualism, for and against, based on many years of personal experience. He has not bothered with the great mediums—Home, Piper, and the rest—but he was concerned to find out if there was any truth in the Spiritualist claim that we can communicate with the dead. And so, in lively fashion, he details how he began first to be interested in Spiritualism, how he and his wife went to various meetings and studied the many reports on ghosts and apparitions and poltergeists and materialisations appearing in many journals, and what were his own reactions.

It did not take him long, of course, to discover that "recent cases of fraud", and the unsatisfactory "evidence", did not help much to inspire belief; but in spite of this, Mr. Ratcliffe was inclined to accept the Spiritualist theory at first, though "later doubts crept in".

His wife had the "gift" of seeing sometimes flames coming out of the tips of people's fingers—unseen, of course, by anybody else. She was a Spiritualist "without knowing it", and no doubt influenced her husband for many years to believe that there was "something in it".

Unfortunately, Mr. Ratcliffe was not only worried by doubts, but had first-class evidence that in at least a few cases, he and his mediums were hoaxed. That is, he came to the conclusion that they more or less hypnotised themselves, and sometimes they were deliberately frauding. He was not able to discover what exactly was a "spirit", or what the word "spirituality" really meant. And it is interesting to note that, in discussing the subject with the late Miss Edith Vance (so long the Secretary of the National Secular Society) he said, "If Spiritualism isn't true, it ought to be. It is a nice idea to know that your departed loved ones are with you and can communicate with you; helping and guiding in time of trial and difficulty". To which Miss Vance replied, "It is not a nice

idea to me. Supposing my dear old mother could see me now. I'm blind, semi-paralysed, in constant pain . . . it would be hell for her, wherever she was. No, I prefer to think she is *at rest, in peace*". And all Mr. Ratcliffe can say is "This aspect had escaped my notice".

But all readers who are interested in Spiritualism should forthwith get this clearly written little work, weighing the "pros and cons" of a much discussed subject. If there really is "something in it," Mr. Ratcliffe has found that whatever it was or is, it almost always eluded him; and his present position would be, I imagine, an "agnostic" one.

As readers are aware, I have no doubts whatever. I do not believe for a moment that the dead are "alive", and can communicate with us. Mr. Ratcliffe quotes psychic journals, but the quotations are for me thoroughly unconvincing. However, the problem does not depend on me—it is one which must be investigated for and by oneself. That is what I did—and I am more than ever a convinced unbeliever. Neither on this question nor on religion am I content to be "agnostic".

You can obtain a copy of *Is Spiritualism True?* for 1/-, postage 2d., and Mr. Ratcliffe most generously donates all the amounts received to THE FREETHINKER SUSTENTATION Fund. We hope all readers will take advantage of this generous offer.

FORWARD MANKIND!

Man must go forward, not retire
To dark myths around the tribal fire.
Forward mankind! March to the light!
Have done with ancient fear and fright!
For man, supreme o'er all things stands;
Our destiny's in our own hands.

ALBERT BUTTERWORTH.

ALLOTMENT HOLDER

As a carpenter in a small town, Jesus would almost certainly have cultivated a small plot of land as well.

—London *Evening News* (10/1/59).

With green fingers?

Christianity in the Market Place

By D. JOSEPH

There is good reason for believing that the fear of adverse publicity in the Anglo-Saxon world is the greatest factor for ensuring some measure of tolerance for non-Roman Catholicism in Southern Ireland. It seems a pity therefore that a recent incident involving a brutal assault on three evangelists, together with the extraordinary sequel in court, should have been ignored by the national press of this country, with the exception of the *Manchester Guardian*.

The incident first came to the attention of the Irish public as the result of a prosecution at Killaloe court, Co. Clare, on 15th September last. Three local men pleaded guilty to a charge of unlawfully assaulting three evangelists from a neighbouring county on 26th June. The defending solicitor pleaded that his clients "were offered great provocation". They were respectable farmers who had been attending a fair in Killaloe, when they were confronted by three young men "vending Christianity". The position had been aggravated by the fact that leaflets had been left in the confessional of their local church, and the parish priest had called for more vigilance from his parishioners. There was no wish to associate the complainants with the circulating of these leaflets, because it had not been proved, but it was not the first time pseudo-evangelists had visited the area. "It was fantastic", he concluded, "for these young men from Limerick to come into Clare, vending the Bible and Christianity to a people steeped in it." He had earlier described the evangelists as "canting humbugs."

According to the police inspector who prosecuted, the evangelists came into Killaloe to hold a religious meeting "on the steps of the Catholic church". After conversation with the police, the meeting was discontinued, and the evangelists went towards their car, but were intercepted by defendants who got round by another street, and attacked them with fists and sticks. In the fracas, one of the evangelists fell from a blow on the forehead, losing two teeth. He was unconscious for twenty minutes. There were no serious injuries (according to the inspector), but the evangelist had concussion for some time.

District Justice Gordon Hurley applied the Probation Act—a conviction was recorded, but no penalty imposed. He justified his action by reference to his own decision in a previous case involving Jehovah's Witnesses, and delivered this dictum:—"Religion is above the courts, the main business of which is to preserve peace. When men come into an Irish village and provoke the people by foisting their views on them, they are abusing whatever rights they have under the constitution which guarantees freedom of religious worship; such action is bound to draw down the rod of the people whose hospitality they have received". No costs were allowed.

Needless to say, the reaction of the Protestant population both North and South was vigorous. A long correspondence followed in the *Irish Times*. There were many condemnations, including some from Catholics, and a few feeble attempts at justification of the pious thuggery and its legal approbation.

One of the evangelists involved wrote a letter giving in detail the actual speech he delivered, and it is worth reproducing, to show just what can cause "great provocation" to an Irish Roman Catholic.

"Friends, . . . in standing here, we count it a great joy and privilege to take you back to the Message of Holy

Scriptures—a message which so many today, living lives filled with fear and defeat, with failure and despair, so sorely need."

At this point, a copy of the Catholic version of God's Precious Word was knocked out of the speaker's hand, and kicked down the street.

The most penetrating letter was from O. Sheehy Skeffington, the well-known Irish Socialist and Senator. It is too long to quote at length, but the main point of his thesis is that such attacks arise from "the fear and inner insecurity of many well-meaning 'devout' Irish Catholics, whose faith crumples, and who are consequently prone to panic, at the slightest touch of critical examination, or even at the mere quotation of the Bible . . . The fundamental shakiness of the faith of many Irish Catholics who are theoretically 'steeped in Christianity' is the real, though unadmitted, reason for such outbursts of frightened violence as occurred in Killaloe. . . ."

"Futhermore, in the present instance not only has a man been beaten unconscious, and the Bible publicly trampled under Irish boots, but the law too, has had a few teeth broken and been kicked down the street by an Irish judge."

Finally, the Anglican Bishop of Limerick, Dr. E. C. Hodges, delivered a charge to his clergy entitled "This Freedom", in which he analyses the trial and its implications, on principles acceptable to most civilised and mature people whatever their views. One quotation must suffice.

"Many members of the community will agree that street preaching is undesirable. Many will question the adequacy and accuracy of the preaching proposed. These are side issues. The main question is: Can the citizen of Ireland depend upon the protection of the law to preserve him from bodily harm if he expresses what are thought to be views unacceptable to the religious loyalties of the persons who happen to be present in the public street when the words are used? Apparently not. He can be mobbed and battered with impunity by anyone who is 'provoked' by the words used. Such at least is the ruling of the District Judge involved."

Freethinkers may be inclined to dismiss the incident as just another example of the brutalising effect of Roman Catholic intolerance—just another verification of Voltaire's dictum that as long as men believe absurdities, they will commit atrocities. This view is, of course, valid. However, the incident could easily be misunderstood. It does show the church's stranglehold on the minds of the people, but such a hold is essentially unstable, underneath the outward show of conformity there is a lot of seething discontent especially among the younger generation. Emigration has provided a temporary safety-valve. Even in Ireland people cannot endlessly blind themselves to the overbearing arrogance, greed, neurotic obsessional hypocrisy and complete indifference or even hostility to social betterment manifested by the priests, and their "lordships", the bishops. It used to be possible to blame the British for the country's misfortunes, but this ecclesiastical alibi has disappeared. Sooner or later, people are bound to see who are the true enemies of their prosperity and self-respect, and when this happens, the pent-up venom directed at imaginary enemies will be unleashed against their true enemies, as it has been in so many countries long blessed with the True Faith in all its power and glory.

This Believing World

In the "Home Magazine" (put out by the Burslem Co-operative Society) that well-known journalist, Mr. Raymond Postgate, was asked to say something about Christmas, and we were interested to note that, though he proclaimed himself an Agnostic, he did not accept December 25th as "Christ's" birthday, but January 6th, following the *Golden Bough*. But the *Golden Bough* merely says that January 6th was kept by Egyptian Christians, and was later given up for December 25th. In any case, does Mr. Postgate really believe in "Christ," that is, the Messiah? Do all Agnostics?

★

Horrorstricken Churchmen all over the world are aghast at the idea of bringing women into "the ministry" though, if women make good doctors and nurses, why should they not make good "ministers"? To understand the situation, it is only necessary to recall that Jesus himself had no women apostles. The Apostles, called to duty by him, were *men*, and what was good enough for Jesus should surely be good enough for all sincere Churchpeople. Moreover, women themselves don't want women ministers. The influence anyway of Paul, who despised women so much that he told them to shut up in church, is still strong enough against women priests, and is a formidable barrier. But will women get over it? Of course they will—one day.

★

Following the great publicity always given to the Roman Church, ITV's "About Religion" the other Sunday paid a tribute to the late Cardinal Griffin. As far as one could judge, the "tribute" was a huge flop, for all it showed was a very pedestrian parish priest who did his best to carry out his duties, but nothing else. Other cardinals have shown some quality, some outstanding characteristics, but what did poor Griffin ever show? This tribute was *not* a huge "success" story.

★

On the other hand, Mr. Dan Farson, interviewing the "well-known" spirit healer, Mr. Harry Edwards, was given a "success" story almost incredible in size. Not thousands, but hundreds of thousands of absolutely cured cases of incurable diseases proved incontestably how the spirits, working with Jesus Christ, can remove the most terrible ailments in the wink of an eye. When asked for proof, Mr. Edwards chuckled and said he "had their letters." No names were given, not even of those enthusiastic doctors who went to Mr. Edwards for help; we had his *word* for it all, so what else mattered?

★

All this was in striking contrast to the first TV appearance of Mr. Edwards when interviewed by two doctors. He put up one of the rottenest shows TV has so far produced. He was unable to give clear references to any cures; and when asked if he followed up his own cures, he bluntly told the doctors to follow them up themselves. But of course Mr. Edwards has had cures—so have patent medicines and herbal remedies, and, even admittedly, "quack" concoctions.

★

What Mr. Farson should have done was to ask Mr. Edwards to accompany him to one of the homes for blind, spastic or polio children, and empty it of all patients. That would have proved "spirits cure" far better than any mere talks. But as far as we have followed the healing spirits, no born blind children, or those in iron lungs, have ever been cured by them, whether conjured up by Mr. Edwards or by any of our other many "spirit" healers.

Sacerdotal Celibacy in France

By DR. J. V. DUHIG

THE STANDARD OF EARNING, culture and influence of the Catholic priesthood in France generally, and especially in the eastern and south-eastern departments, is low. In these parts peasant boys go into the priesthood to escape the heavy work at the plough and in the midden. Stendhal, in *Le Rouge et le Noir*, has given us a glimpse of life in a seminary in Toulouse, and Peyrefitte, and especially Chevallier, have given us close-up portraits of the rural clergy. I have lived much in France and though I met many curés who were admirable men, for the most part, the French clergy was like that in Eire; ignorant, complacent and often contemptuous of the class from which they came. I once had a talk with a young man who had been in a seminary where boys were prepared for the monastic life. He was above average in intelligence, and the routine nearly drove him mad. He left and has been a good atheist ever since, I suppose; that was the way he was tending. Like myself, he felt he had been grossly cheated by his parents and teachers. His contempt was complete.

In a recent FREETHINKER, reference was made to the sly habit of many French priests of making a pilgrimage to Lourdes an excuse or occasion for taking their sweethearts on the trip, which afforded an excellent façade of piety behind which to conduct erotic experiments. Of such was the infamous Abbé Desnoyers of Uruffe, Eastern France. The last of his mistresses, you will remember, he murdered in particularly atrocious circumstances. He, like so many French priests, used the Confessional to recruit female material for his seductions. I know two Queensland priests who did the same. When his last conquest told him one night in a lonely place that she was pregnant, he made her make a confession to him of her sin and then, having given her absolution, he murdered her. He then ripped open her body, took out the unborn child—his child—baptised it, and strangled it. For this he was committed to a monastery, he was given the *trappe*. At least, it was argued, he had done his duty nobly as a priest. The two souls of the murdered girl and foetus would escape Hell and possibly Purgatory, the latter unlikely, as there are liberation fees to be collected from the dead girl's people.

Here is another illuminating story. It comes from *Le Canard Enchaîné* of November 12th, 1958:

LOST: ONE PARISH PRIEST

There is a lot of gossip going round the cottages in Mailly-le-Château, Trucy-sur-Yonne and as far as Clamecy in the Department of the Yonne. The worthy parish priest who served these parishes has surreptitiously disappeared, and some people allege that he has earned the right to a *trappe* of honour, in a monastery.*

A funny thing is that pious emissaries are coming to interview parents of girls who go to Catechism, to persuade them, so it is said, not to lodge a complaint against this parish priest.

But this has not stopped the Mayor of Mailly-le-Ville from writing to the District Attorney and the police, asking for an enquiry. The latter had been asked to let the matter drop and it has been entrusted to the D.A. The police have learned that the priest, after Catechism, used to keep one or two girls back, but never the same.

Workers at a local dairy from which children have been victims of this disorderly priest have been advised to keep quiet if they want to keep their jobs. The local press, of course, does not know a single thing about this pretty story.

**Trappe* means (a) a trap, (b) a Trappist monastery where criminal French priests are sent as a punishment instead of to gaol or the guillotine.

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.

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

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, February 8th, 7 p.m.: A Lecture.

Central London Branch N.S.S. (The Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, February 8th, 7.15 p.m.: Lady V. FLEMING, "Religion at Home and in the School."

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, February 10th, 7.15 p.m.: AVRO MANHATTAN, "Of Ants and Collectivism."

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, February 8th, 6.30 p.m.: A Film, "Children of Hiroshima."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (N.C.S. Public Relations Hall, Broad Street).—Sunday, February 8th: R. O. F. HICKMAN, "Local Self-government in the City of Nottingham."

Orpington Humanist Group (Sherry's Restaurant).—Sunday, February 8th, 5.30 p.m.: F. H. A. MICKLEWRIGHT, "Humanism or Sectarian Education."

Oxford University Humanist Group (Taylorian Institute).—Tuesday, February 10th, 8 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, "The Menace of Rome."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, February 8th, 11 a.m.: W. E. SWINTON, PH.D., "Fact and Fantasy in Science."

Study Circle.—Friday, February 6th, 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. Third: "The Origin of Christianity." Fee 1/- per meeting. Non-members invited.

Notes and News

THE REV. S. W. G. ELVINS, of St. Alban's Church, Cheam, Surrey, greeted the New Year with some strong words (*The Star*, 2/1/59). "From time to time"—he said—"I am asked to baptise children by such names as 'Bertie,' 'Tommy,' 'Penny' or 'Lu.'" "I always refuse to do so," he continued, "as I consider the use of such abbreviations, or nicknames, offends against the dignity of the baptismal services." We have no wish to defend "Bertie," "Tommy," "Penny" or "Lu," but talking of the dignity of the baptismal services offends us. "Dearly beloved, forasmuch as all men are conceived and born in sin," it begins, and sin and its "washing away" recur "from time

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £53 8s.; H. Fitton, £2; W.H.D., 2s. 6d.; C. E. Ratcliffe, £1; T. Roberts, 4s.; Mrs. R. Poulter, £2 2s.; J. D. Hughes, 10s.; W.G.W., £40; R. Stewart, £1; F. J. W. Archer, 15s.; Dr. H. Johnson, £1.—Total to date, January 30th, 1959, £102 1s. 6d.

to time," to borrow Mr. Elvin's phrase. "O merciful God, grant that the old Adam in this child may be so buried," "Grant that all carnal affections may die in him," are other examples of the "dignity" of Christian baptism.

★

THERE is, we suppose, some advantage in looking at things in their best light. To be always realistic would make life unbearable, particularly for the clergy. We can, therefore, understand the comments of the Bishop of Woolwich, the Rt. Rev. Robert Stannard, on the drop in church marriages referred to recently in this column. "This isn't to be regretted," said the Bishop (*Kentish Mercury*, 19/12/58). "It means that more people are realising the significance of a Christian marriage, whereas at one time it was the 'thing' to be married in church." True: realising its significance and rejecting it.

★

"DEARLY beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul." This moving plea from the first epistle of the (alleged) first Pope, might well form the basis of Peter's latest successor's address to visitors to Rome. Temptation must obviously be strong in the Eternal City. Indeed, it seems that Italian police recently had to adopt drastic measures in order to preserve John XXIII's own peace of mind (!) as he drove through the city. That is the conclusion we reached when we read in the *Daily Herald* (26/1/59) that the *carabinieri* painted out the "curves" on posters of a "life-sized Marina Vlady, shapely French film star, in a tight bathing suit," because the posters were along the route the Pope would be travelling.

★

ON Sunday, January 18th, the morning service was cut short at Lenton Parish Church, Nottingham, when the organist and the choir were affected by gas fumes from a coke boiler under the chancel. Well, accidents (or Acts of God?) can happen anywhere, and fortunately all those affected recovered quickly. We mention the episode in order to record a singularly frank admission by the vicar, the Rev. Robert Neill. "I began to suspect that all was not well during the sermon, when one two people went out," he said. But, he added, "I did not put it down to fumes!"

★

THE first Bulletin of the Aberdeen Humanist Group, dated January 1959 has just reached us. It brings news that Mrs. Margaret Knight will be debating in Belfast on February 17th, and that her opponent will be Lord Pakenham, the Roman Catholic Labour peer. No further details are given.

★

ONE of our Canadian readers, Mr. B. M. Atkins, of Toronto, greeted the election of a Jewish mayor, Mr. Nathan Phillips, with a letter in the *Toronto Globe* (18/12/58). It will, he wrote, give our "over-Christianised and provincial" city, "a more or less tolerant, cosmopolitan, and sophisticated outlook. Long may he reign."

—NEXT WEEK—

THE VATICAN COUNCIL RESUMES

By F. A. RIDLEY

Exit the Abominable Snowman?

By F. A. RIDLEY

IN our generation of Sputniks and artificial satellites, science appears to be substituting a new species of technical prodigies for the more primitive prodigies of an unsophisticated age. Whilst an occasional poltergeist still apparently lurks amid the shadows of subnormal experience, the once prolific crops of dragons, vampires and similar monstrosities seem to be drying up. The whole "monstrous regiment" of childhood terrors becomes nowadays "translated" either into pure fiction or into more sober facts of everyday existence. However, there are still a few remote and imperfectly explored areas of our planet, where mysteries, whether psychic or zoological, can still hide with reasonable success. And there are, of course, often the depths of the ocean, largely inaccessible to human research, in which unknown or mythical monsters (from the fabulous sea serpents to the "Moby Dick," which haunted the dreams of Captain Ahab) abound. The terrestrial myths endemic on our planet still manage to co-exist with the more scientific marvels nowadays projected into outer space.

Tibet is among these more inaccessible regions; in particular the enormous mountain ranges which separate it from India and its borderland states. Explorers of the occult, such as the learned but eccentric Madame Alexandra David-Neal, have familiarised their wonder-seeking public with Tibetan lamas, who live in a world of psychic and physical marvels, to which the student of comparative religion will find many analogies in the religious records of a more credulous age in nearer lands than Tibet. And we do not forget the auspicious or—as Charles Dickens might have written *accurately* in this connection—suspicious occasion, when the late Madame Blavatsky once emerged from her bourgeois residence in Lansdowne Road, Holland Park, and actually encountered the famous Mahatma, "Koot Hoomi," fresh from the remote altitudes of Tibet, whence he had been miraculously transported to—of all places—the banks of the Serpentine in Hyde Park. It is, of course, true that when Madame Blavatsky encountered the holy man in the flesh (or was it in the spirit?) that other eminent member of the Theosophical Society, the late George Lansbury, had not yet changed the Victorian Serpentine into the modern Lido wherein mixed bathing is permitted. Perhaps the holy hermits of Tibet are no longer seen there because they avoid this profane spectacle? However, whilst the psychic Mahatmas do not appear to quit the rarified heights of the Himalayas any more—perhaps they are now too preoccupied with the "godless" Bolshevism on their own doorstep?—the supply of marvels continues to keep Tibet in the news. Above all, there remains the strange mystery of the Abominable Snowman, Tibet's most important contribution, at least since Koot Hoomi, to the fast growing *corpus* of science-fiction.

The hidden drama of the Snowman, whose alleged footsteps on the snow have aroused so many conjectures, now appears to have taken a new turn. For, in the opening days of 1959, we heard on the radio that an Italian explorer in the Himalayas has not only seen the Abominable one *in carne et sanguine*, but has actually photographed him in his native terrain: a notable feat—and an unprecedented one in relation to Tibetan prodigies, since Mme. Blavatsky unfortunately omitted to do the same with the holy Koot Hoomi. Nor, apparently, did Mme. David-Neal manage to photograph her levitating lamas as they performed their devotions and gyrations *in space*. But now, so the BBC

tells us, we actually have a representation of the unknown abomination, which has hitherto haunted the dreams of explorers and the nightmares of the natives of those remote altitudes. In brief, the Abominable Snowman has—or soon will have—"a local habitation," as well as "a name"! The BBC bulletin described him as a very tall monkey—about 6ft., I seem to remember—who walks on his hind legs; and, to judge from his hasty disappearance as soon as the explorer clicked his camera, he apparently regards *Homo sapiens* as, also, an abominable snowman! If this sensational news is true—and who can doubt the veracity of the BBC?—we think it may be regarded as the news of the week, even taking precedence over such phenomena as "small worlds," whether balloons or artificial satellites.

It would then appear that the mystery of the Himalayas—we dare not write the last mystery, since Koot Hoomi is still at large!—has been laid to rest. *Requiescat in pace*. For, surely, of two things one?

If the famous photo turns out to be a snowy blank, then the Abominable One merely melts into a mirage, into the snowy Himalayas, in which case he will have justified the suspicions of some critically-minded observers. If, contrarily, the photo reveals the amiable features of a tall ape or baboon (perhaps a mountain species hitherto living in an altitudinous isolation) then a new ape or monkey will feature in the text books and we may see a *bona fide* (ex) Abominable Snowman in the not-so-snowy recesses of Regents Park.

In either case, the age-long mystery will have been solved: the Abominable Snowman will be abominable no more. Probably he will not be the last. For all the present odds are that the "man-in-the-moon" will soon definitely speak Russian, and it may not be so long before the famous "canals" on Mars—which so long puzzled the astronomic world—will also have lost their mysterious significance. Science marches on! and in its stride converts gorgons, minotaurs, and abominable snowmen into either myths or natural phenomena. Certainly this process makes the world less picturesque, but that seems to be the prosaic price which we pay for progress. Meanwhile we are eagerly awaiting the promised photograph of the first—and last!—authentic abominable snowman.

True Story

A FRIEND OF MINE was touring in North Wales with his family and decided on the spur of the moment, one Sunday morning, to attend a chapel where service was about to begin. The warden, noticing his English visitors, asked if they were aware that the service was in Welsh, and whether they would be able to follow it.

Having come so far, the English visitors decided to chance it, even though they would not be able to understand a word. They accordingly took their places in their pew. They sat patiently through the proceedings, doing their best to keep in step, on the principle of "When in Rome, do as Rome does," and contrived not to attract any attention to themselves. They settled down to comfortable anonymity, which they preserved right up to the point when, for the one and only time during the service, the minister departed from the Welsh tongue and spoke these words in English:

"The collection will now be taken."

G.H.T.

Facts for Freethinkers

No. 22. RELIGION IN SWEDEN

By DAVE SHIPPER

THE RELIGION OF SWEDEN was Roman Catholicism until the R.C. Church had its lands confiscated by King Gustav Vasa (1523—1560), who introduced a Lutheran State Church, which still retains its position of privilege. The power of the Church prior to this confiscation may be gauged from the fact that it owned 21% of Swedish soil, compared with 5.6% owned by the Crown itself. Christianity had been dominant since 1000 A.D. and had a stranglehold on education.

In the century following the establishment of the Lutheran State Church the position of the clergy became that of "a body of civil servants with the duty of executing ecclesiastical matters in strict adherence to the orthodoxy prescribed by State law." (*The Social Structure of Sweden*, by Anna-Lisa K lvesten.) In 1686 Church law drew up a "religious code of behaviour and church attendance," and made submission to clerical control of life and thought a compulsory civic duty. Deviationists were punished heavily by the courts and Sweden went through a "witch-hunting" phase in the 17th century, when several hundred women were burned at the stake.

Until the 1850s offenders were still being heavily fined, jailed or exiled for deviationism; assembly for the purpose of preaching "new" creeds was a crime. The "Conventical Edict" (*Konventikel Plakatet*) of 1726 forbade the assembly of people in private homes for worship and Bible-reading and thus gave the State Church monopoly added strength. Some of the first emigrants to America left to escape this law, which was in force until 1858. With the growth of education dissenters grew more numerous and at first were progressive in demanding freedom of thought, later establishing a new orthodoxy of their own. Today the Pentecostals are the only sect of the old dissenters who claim to be growing.

In Sweden, like the other Scandinavian countries, the State Church retains its position because of tradition. Most children are "born in the Church" and approximately 90% are baptised and confirmed by the official ritual. Most people are married and buried by the Church, religious teaching in schools remains compulsory (non-conformists find this an obstacle, although R.C. and Jewish children may withdraw), and the State appoints bishops and pays the clergy. As the clergy administer public registration of births, marriages, deaths and other statistics, they silence many critics by pointing to their labours as "civil servants"!

In 1951 a new Dissenters Act allowed secession from the State Church without the necessity of joining an alternative religious sect, a welcome advance for atheists. It should be noted that in spite of the prevalent religious apathy and the support of Social Democrats (the largest party) for disestablishment, only 2% left the Church in the first year. We can assume many of the 2% were those who had been agitating for this move for some years and therefore the figure would drop later. (Perhaps we may draw a line from the Norwegian position. Norwegians obtained the right of secession in 1845, but less than 5% had utilised the right by the 1930s.)

A Gallup Poll was conducted in 1942 in an endeavour to ascertain the proportion of church attenders. Figures obtained would show that Swedes attend church: (a) At least once a month, 20%; (b) "Sometimes," 50%; (c) Only Christmas morning, 10%; (d) Never, 20%.

We must bear in mind that (as in Britain) many people

completely apathetic to religious claims still consider that churchgoing imparts a veneer of respectability! We can, therefore, expect an inflation of the (a) and a deflation of the (d).

Another poll by the Swedish Gallup Institute asked the question, "Do you consider yourself religious?" and divided the answerers into "social classes":

	Total %	(i) Upper	(ii) Middle	(iii) Lower
Yes	28	41	34	22
No	62	47	56	68
Don't know	10	12	10	10

It will be noted from this table that piety increases with social status!

Two comparable groups of one hundred people were asked the questions: (a) "Do you believe in God?", and (b) "Are you religious?" (Although we believe 100 is too small a number for this type of question, the difference in reaction is interesting.)

	(a)		(b)	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Yes	62	78	25	31
No	15	6	60	53
Don't know	8	2	4	—
Prefer not to answer	15	14	11	16

It will be noted that the females were more "positive" than the males and that, although almost 70% of both sexes professed themselves God-believers, under 30% claimed to be "religious."

The Swedish Freethought Society (*F rbundet f r Religionsfrihet*) remains small in the absence of a Catholic threat. The State Church has shown remarkable elasticity in adapting itself to a society which has adopted enlightened divorce and abortion laws and views "free love" with equanimity. Disestablishment, when it comes, may be a death blow. We trust our Swedish friends will be prepared to take advantage of a situation which may, however, not arise for some time.

Wisdom Well

The pilgrims landed, worthy men
And, saved from wreck on raging seas,
They fell upon their knees and then
Upon the Aborigines.

ARTHUR GUTTERMAN.

I would rather sit on a pumpkin and have it all to myself than be crowded on a velvet cushion.—THOREAU.

There is no Heaven, there is no Hell; these be the
dreams of baby minds;
Tools of the wily fetisher to fright the fools his
cunning blinds.

SIR RICHARD BURTON.

A man is accepted into a church for what he believes and is turned out for what he knows.—MARK TWAIN.

And when religious sects ran mad
He held, in spite of all his learning
That if a man's belief is bad
It will not be improved by burning.

W. M. PRAED in *The Vicar*.

CORRESPONDENCE

TALL STORY

I quote from Notes and News (16/1/59): "We honestly don't know what to say about the much heralded article in *The People* (4/1/59)—'Did Prayer Cause this Miracle?'" It leaves us speechless." Well, I sum the article up in one word—Tripe. I enclose copy letter, the original of which I sent to *The People*.

After all, the paper is popular press, primarily devoted for the "benefit" of gullible masses which thrive on the sensational by lapping it up by the bucket—judging by the resulting conversations.

A. C. ROBINSON.

P.S.—I read the said article in *The People* dated 11/1/59.

[Mr. Robinson refers to a second article; our comment was on the first, and our date was correct. In his letter to *The People* Mr. Robinson likened the affair to "Abracadabra"; we said "black magic," so our conclusions are similar.—ED.]

THE ENEMY

MR. MCCALL'S account of Dr. C. B. Daly's reviewing tactics shows us the "good Catholic writer" in all his ignobility. Insufferable arrogance, unctuous condescension, smug self-satisfaction; these are the marks by which you may distinguish the typical Catholic author. His working rule is delightfully simple; it is merely a matter of lavishing reckless adoration on anything Catholic and equally reckless abuse and misrepresentation on anything non-Catholic. His not to reason why; his but to repeat, dutifully and literally, what "Holy Mother Church" has taught him. When faced with concrete arguments he clouds the issue with a series of irrelevant "analogies," "parallel instances," "interesting comparisons," *ad lib*. He is ever ready with spiteful insinuations and malicious sneers. He dodges anything too difficult for him to tackle by "humorously" suggesting that his readers would only find this subject a bore, anyway. He is vociferously, bull-headedly partisan; it simply does not enter his mind that other points of view are worth serious consideration; to him "non-Catholic" means much the same thing as "nonsensical." "Heresy" or "infidelity," therefore, is not argued about, but dismissed with a contemptuous shrug and a flippant jest. Among the people he is writing for "everyone knows" that "of course" those outside the Church are poor, bewildered, deluded creatures whom lucky, thrice-blessed Catholics ought to feel sorry for!

Behind the puns and quips and self-conscious facetiousness is fanatical, disciplined contempt. It is tacitly assumed that Catholic ideas and values are the only worthwhile ones, and that ideas and values that run counter to the Church lead straight to hell. The Catholic is taught to hate whatever the Church tells him to hate, without asking any questions. His is a parrot-voice, expressing, not his sincere convictions, but the formal stereotyped "party-line" laid down for him by those to whom he is pledged to render abject obedience. He is told what his attitude must be, what friends he may have, what books he may read, and what propaganda he must preach. If he neglects his "duty," he imagines hell gaping for him and God's wrath overwhelming him.

The Catholic is taught to juggle with words in order to convey a false impression while still technically remaining within the bounds of truth. He is a master of sophistry and casuistical double-talk. He is an arch-opportunist, able to seize on anything, and squeeze propaganda for the Church out of it. He is *the* enemy.

S. W. BROOKS.

MR. HUXLEY AND THE CONSTITUTION

I am surprised at the complacency of Mr. Huxley with regard to the House of Lords (*THE FREETHINKER*, November 1958). If there was ever an undemocratic institution it is the complete example, and by the new policy of adding peers and peeresses thereto *ad infinitum* our country and its elected House of Commons is being unfairly treated by giving the House of Lords more members. Certainly government by democracy is being usurped.

During the recent tri-centenary of Oliver Cromwell I took the occasion to write a letter to *THE FREETHINKER*, which you were good enough to print, pointing out that in those times (300 years ago) the House of Commons deprecated the existence and advised the abolition of the House of Lords as a danger to the state. Unfortunately this sentence of death was not carried out, and the Lords have been a confounded nuisance to the state ever since. For a long time they have prevented reforms, and even now they can postpone legislation if they have a mind to do so. A reversal of thought over the House of Lords is overdue.

We are informed by Mr. Huxley that H.M. the Queen represents the "Will of the People." I am afraid there is a departure from the truth in this statement. The people are not consulted in regard to the selection of the Queen, and the appointment is conducted upon lines which restrict it to one particular family. Our Queen is a lady with a neutral and peaceful demeanour in carry-

ing out her official duties as head of the state. We cannot overlook the fact, however, that a schoolboy is heir to the throne! Under the present system we have to maintain the relatives of the Queen at great expense. In no other high office of state does this remarkable custom prevail.

I should like to add that the National Secular Society favours complete secularisation of the state. That is one of our chief principles. In view of the manner in which the office of Queen is bound up with official Church regime there is not much likelihood of secularisation at present, but it remains a worthwhile ideal.

ALFRED D. CORRICK.

OBITUARY

MEMBERS of the Bradford Branch, National Secular Society, who have missed Mr. Jack Ross for the past two years or so will regret to learn of his death after a long illness. Together with Mrs. Ross (who survives him and is in good health), he was for many years a most diligent attendee at lectures and meetings, and a stout advocate of Freethought as a "rank and filer." A secular service was conducted at Cottingley Hall Crematorium, Leeds, by Mr. F. J. Corina on January 13th.

FRANCIS JOSEPH MUNSTER, who died on January 25th at the age of 79, left his native Germany during the Hitler regime and settled in Birmingham, where he was a keen and generous supporter of the local branch of the National Secular Society. It was his own wish to have a Secular Service, but his relatives decided upon a Jewish one. Two Birmingham Branch members, Mr. Millington and Mr. Smith, attended the cremation.

W.M.

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