

The Freethinker

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SPEAKING recently on the radio, that always lively and entertaining American, Mr. Alistair Cooke, remarked on the religious idiosyncrasies of the Anglo-Saxon peoples. He referred in particular to poster parades which he had seen in Regent Street, London, and which bore the alarming caption: "Millions will live and die without ever hearing the saving name of our Lord Jesus Christ." What, asked Mr. Cooke, must be the reactions of Muslims, Jews and Buddhists to such an announcement? And further, what would the British say if Chinese residents here were also to parade up and down Fleet Street bearing banners which proclaimed: "Millions will live and die without ever having known the saving name of Confucius"?

God Crosses the Himalayas

I was recently strongly reminded of this apt comment of the American broadcaster. For who, reading the news that His (Buddhistic) Holiness, the Dalai Lama, had fled from his capital, the holy city of Lhasa and had taken refuge in India, would realise that this event must represent—in the eyes of millions of Tibetan and Mongolian Buddhists—an event similar to the most dire calamities in the annals of Christianity? In the perspectives of Comparative Religion, Buddhism is an older and perhaps still a more widely diffused religion than is Christianity, whilst the Dalai Lama, in the theology of the Mahayana (Northern) Buddhist Church, holds a position far more exalted than even that of the Pope in the eyes of the Roman Catholic Church. For the Pope, though infallible by definition, still remains a man, whilst the Dalai Lama is not only the spiritual and temporal Head of the Buddhist Church upon earth, but is actually himself a supernatural being, the present reincarnation of the Divine Buddha. Technically there is, and always has been, only one Dalai Lama, a single reincarnated individual. It was not a mere man who fled from Lhasa, like Muhammed is alleged to have fled from Mecca, since in Muslim theology even the Holy Prophet still remained a man; rather was the Dalai Lama's flight reminiscent of the legendary Christian flight of the divine child Jesus Christ into Egypt. It was a *god* who crossed the Himalayas to seek the protection of that cultured Agnostic, Mr. Nehru and of the officially secular state of Bharat (India).

A Medieval Theocracy

The flight of the divine Buddha from Lhasa probably marks the end of one of the strangest of recorded despotisms—the last, or very nearly the last, of the medieval theocracies which probably represent the earliest form of human civilisation. Like their now remote predecessors, the divine Pharaohs of Egypt—perhaps the very earliest gods to be deified in human annals—and their Chaldean and Etruscan contemporaries, the god-kings of Lhasa have now reigned for several centuries over a monastic theocracy. In modern Tibet, as in medieval Europe, the Buddhist, or Lamaist Church was both the spiritual and,

in the last resort, also the temporal ruler of the "Forbidden Land": a modern, Far Eastern equivalent of the Papal States of the Church. As in Medieval Europe, the Tibetan Church was both the ecclesiastical and the economic master; at once the major landowner and the repository of such culture—a strictly Church-controlled and scholastic culture—as existed in that wild and arid land.

Again, in modern Tibet, as in Medieval Europe, the clergy represented the ruling class, for whom the common people toiled for the glory of—in the case of Tibet—Buddha and for the temporal enrichment of the monasteries and of their innumerable and completely

parasitic hordes of monks. For in the Lamaist version of Buddhism as practised in Tibet, the monks and monasteries played an even more important role than did their Catholic counterparts in the European Ages of Faith. There do not appear to have been any secular or parochial clergy in Tibet. The whole monastic caste, which some computations estimate at about 30% of the total male population of the country, appear to have been concentrated in the innumerable monasteries studded over the country and particularly clustered around the Holy City. Its barren surface and great altitudes (which have caused the Tibetan landscape to be compared with the probably equally rugged surface of the moon) have enabled this strange community, like some sociological relic of a remote era, to survive in an alien and totally dissimilar area. Some secular customs of the Tibetan laity, such as polyandry, also represent stratified survivals of a much earlier era in human social evolution. But, as in the case of the few other remaining theocracies in such similar hermit lands as Saudi Arabia, the Yemen and Afghanistan, the days of the Tibetan theocracy appear to be numbered. It is the end of an old song! The last Incarnate Buddha returning to India, where Buddhism was born. This perhaps marks the finish of Buddhism—or at least of that peculiar theocratic and—according even to Buddhist critics in more advanced lands—very much corrupted form of Buddhism which has dominated Tibet for so long.

Tibet in World Politics

Despite its remote altitudes, Tibet, the land of the Lamas and Mahatmas (including Koot Hoomi, who met Mme. Blavatsky by the Serpentine in Hyde Park) has not altogether escaped the secular contagion of world politics. For many years, the Dalai Lama and his monastic entourage were alternately bullied and cajoled by Tsarist Russia and by the British Raj in India across the Himalayas. In 1904 an English, army under Sir Francis Younghusband, actually invaded Tibet and temporarily occupied Lhasa. Many years later I myself heard the gallant General (who ended up as a prominent speaker on religious platforms) preach a sermon on "Universal Love"—presumably in Tibet in 1904, where his soldiers shot down the primitively-armed natives like sitting game-birds! A few years back the Chinese Communists, in pursuit of their present policy

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

Will God End Up in Fleet Street?

By F. A. RIDLEY

of a Greater China, also invaded Tibet and occupied it, this time permanently. But they do not, at first, seem to have interfered with the privileges of the theocracy. An English Communist, Mr. Alan Winnington, now resident in Tibet, actually dedicated a book to the Dalai Lama! Shades of Karl Marx and the Opium of the People! However, as there does not appear to be much in common between Lamaistic incantations on the prayer wheel and the philosophy of dialectical materialism, the present *impasse* in their mutual relations, which has ended with the flight of the Dalai Lama, was probably inevitable sooner or later.

Will God End up in Fleet Street?

The causes of the present imbroglio have been variously reported in accordance with the political points of view of their sources, as in the earlier case of Hungary. It is asserted that the rebels were patriots fighting for "their" (the monks?) country, or feudal and clerical reactionaries striving to resist the modern innovations and social reforms introduced by the Chinese. You pay your money

and take your choice. Anyhow, one cannot see the rebellion ultimately succeeding without outside help against the powerful China of Mao-Tse-Tung. It appears most unlikely that the Dalai Lama will ever see his Potala Palace again. As for Tibet and its immemorial monastic theocracy, the Chinese may go cautiously at first, but as even the most artful "dialectics" cannot make oil and water mix for ever, one is entitled to assume that the monks are on the way out, at least as far as social ascendancy is concerned. Meanwhile, what about the fugitive "Living Buddha"? For in this world, at any rate, even gods must eat. Anatole France, we recall, suggested that in future ages, when the growth of freethought had sapped his revenues, the Pope would have to earn his living in his spare time as a jockey. The present Pope would find that difficult, and the Tibetan Pope will probably be spared that indignity. A posse of journalists have met His Tibetan Holiness with, no doubt, welcome offers of fantastic payments for an exclusive life story of a real, live God. Will God end up in Fleet Street?

Fraud and Telepathy

By DR. EDWARD ROUX

(Concluded from page 132)

IN THIS WAY it would be possible to ensure five precognitive hits in a run of 25 guesses. The mathematical odds are that one of the five would occur in any case by pure chance. There would also be the possibility of the same random number turning up again immediately after a pre-arranged guess. Thus the average score above chance expectation in a series of runs would tend to be somewhere between one and four. It would probably lie between two and three, assuming that the agent had acquired the necessary skill in re-arranging his five cards. It is interesting how the actual scores reported for Shackleton are almost exactly those one would expect if he and his agents had resorted to the kind of trickery here described. In these experiments he was given runs of 50 guesses. His average rate of scoring was about 25 per cent successes, compared with the 20 per cent expected by mere guessing. Five per cent of 50 is of course two and a half. We may turn the tables on the parapsychologists and ask whether they think this is a mere coincidence.

Among writers who considered the Soal experiments as providing striking testimony of the possession of paranormal ability by certain gifted persons was Anthony Flew (*A New Approach to Psychological Research*, Watts & Co., 1953). He wrote: "Three points stand out as peculiarly impressive. These three points together . . . make it seem impossible to interpret the results as a discovery about statistics rather than as a discovery about a rare human capacity." Let us see how Flew's three points stand up to criticism once it is shown that fraud may have occurred.

The first point is that all the significant results were achieved under "telepathy" conditions, i.e., with the agent looking at the target cards. Under "clairvoyance" conditions, when the agent only touched but did not look at the cards, there were no significant results of any kind, and this irrespective of whether or not Shackleton knew which conditions obtained. Quite clearly, under our hypothesis of fraud, if the subject and agent were prepared for a precognitive run and the experimenter unexpectedly substituted clairvoyance conditions, there could be no re-arranging of the cards in the box. The subject's prepared guesses at certain points would be wasted and the final result would conform to mere chance.

The second point that impressed Flew was that the scores varied with the intervals between guesses. Thus when the cards were dealt very slowly (at five-second intervals) there were no significant scores of any kind. This could easily be arranged by the agent not interfering with the position of the five cards after dealing them. Perhaps he felt that any sleight of hand could more easily be detected by an observer under these conditions.

Flew's third point was that systematic cross checks made as control experiments gave consistently negative results. Naturally they would. These checks would simply prove that there was nothing queer about the random numbers used. Everything in the Soal set-up was in order except that the possibility of the agent "fixing" the cards was not envisaged. A practised card sharper might have tumbled to the possibility of fraud quicker than a mathematician. We have here an interesting parallel in the early experiences of Sir William Crookes and Sir Oliver Lodge, who were deceived by "mediums" whose tricks any professional "magician" could easily have exposed.

In the case of "pure" telepathy (hits on the target card), we can imagine an agreement between subject and agent on the following lines. The subject agrees, for example, to record symbols A, B, C, D, E at signals 5, 7, 8, 9 and 12. At these points the experimenter presents, say, numbers 5, 2, 4, 3, 1. The agent then arranges the cards in the order E, B, D, C, A, and again ensures five positive hits. It would probably be desirable to place the agreed guesses somewhere near the beginning of a run so as to give the agent time to get his five cards into the correct order before the run is completed. One would thus expect telepathy of this type to exhibit itself at the beginning rather than at the end of a run, and this is exactly what happened with Gloria Stewart. Believers in parapsychology suggest that the subject may get tired towards the end of a run. Since the run only lasts a couple of minutes this seems a little surprising. On the supposition that fraud was possible the hypothesis seems redundant.

It goes without saying that a gifted subject cannot perform equally with all agents. It is only with those with whom he is *en rapport* that he does well. The nature of

(Concluded on next page)

Catholics Chase the Churchless

By G. H. TAYLOR

THE Catholic Missionary Society have instigated what they intend to become a nation-wide door-to-door campaign to find possible converts to the Faith.

They have apparently been guided by reports from U.S.A., where the Crusade for Souls movement has been engaged in similar activity. Its methods will be copied in this country. Although the Archbishop of Liverpool was at the meeting when the plans were made for this all-out attempt to get Britain for Roman Catholicism, the campaign will carry no official status or authorisation. Consequently, if anything misfires officialism is not to blame. The hands of the Catholic establishment remain clean!

Nor is the word "canvass" to be used. "Of course," said Fr. Ripley, director of the Missionary Society, "we hope it will mean visits to every door in the land. But we prefer to use the word 'census' rather than 'canvass.' We call the idea Operation Information. Its particular aim is to find the churchless."

As Archbishop Heenan of Liverpool put it: "A priest should feel really happy at the end of a working day only if he has been to a house where the people really do not want him. . . . We are perhaps too diffident in our approach to non-Catholics. It would be quite foolish to try to persuade a really hostile Protestant to take instruction. But most are not hostile."

This is quite shrewd. The strategy is obviously along the best modern lines of advertising. The potential market will be tapped first, instead of prospecting in hopeless country. The drive will be at the vulnerable points. By such methods the effective R.C. population could gradually assume quite serious proportions at the expense of the Protestant section.

To help this along, straws in the wind like the repeated visits of eminent royal personages to the Pope could be used for propaganda advantage by the astute Catholic leaders. The royal visiting of the Pope is, in fact, quite a sizable straw. It is quite irrelevant to say the Queen Mother and Princess Margaret can do as they please as private persons. They are *not* private persons in their dealings with the heads of foreign powers. Royal persons are free to accept or renunciate royal privileges and prerogatives. Abdication is an effective method of renunciation. Acceptance of status carries the responsibilities and limitations of that status.

Archbishop Heenan gave the reason for the great conversion drive in these words: "Because of the progress of materialism we have an urgent self-interest in conversion work. It is necessary if we are to withstand the opposition to our way of life."

And what is the Catholic "way of life"? He should consult the figures for Catholic criminals in proportion to their numerical strength, and note the startling comparison with Protestants and with people of no religion. But possibly he has already done so. Perhaps that is why he does not mention them. They are hardly an advertisement for the Catholic "way of life."

First to react against the new R.C. campaign was the Baptist Union, whose general secretary is thus reported: "This campaign will provoke more religious competition and strife. We allow the Catholics tolerance, but I read this morning that a Baptist in Italy has been sentenced to imprisonment for speaking against the Catholic religion. We shall watch this campaign very closely."

In seeking out the "churchless" for propaganda the Catholics are playing over a very wide field. A recent TV

inquiry into what people do on Sundays unearthed some interesting statistics. Whereas 63% listened to the radio and 48% watched television (the percentages will overlap, of course), and 28% went outdoors, only 14% went to a place of worship. These contained more old people than young, and more women than men.

The Catholics have thus 86% of the adult population (15+) to work on, even more if we assume that some of the 14% are not irrevocably fixed in their habit.

One person in three said he *never* went to church at all, 7% only went to view for historic interest (this, I think, would include most Freethinkers); 11% only went on family occasions (for hatch, match and despatch), and others only on Church occasions (Easter, etc.). An inquiry centred on the cathedral city of York showed that three times as many people went to church 50 years ago. (Note that the comparison becomes even more acute when we compare the census of 1911 with that of 1951).

There is no doubt that a lot of Protestants are falling away from their Church, and it is our concern that they should not be caught in the Catholic bag.

The Catholic Missionary Society also runs the Catholic Enquiry Centre. The reader will have seen in the national, and possibly also local, press, an advertisement of a gorgeously robed witch-doctor who, on closer inspection, turns out to be a common or garden priest, inviting "seekers after Truth" to write for information. Two of our contributors, Messrs. D. Shipper and C. H. Hammersley, have had some of this. Their reports of Catholic "lessons" make amusing reading. When Mr. Shipper, in mock anguish, put forward a list of Biblical contradictions, which were "embarrassing" him, the Centre seemed to lose its grip on things, to say the least!

Secularists should give some thought to the problem of how to counteract this Catholic campaign when it reaches their town or district. Arguments at the door are of no use, since there is no audience to convert. Letters in the local press are more effective, especially when carried on as a team effort. Too many editors think they are dealing with just one "local atheist" who may be disregarded with impunity. He may in fact have a great many silent supporters who have not the time or inclination to write letters, but whose name and/or address would be useful, if they could be put in touch.

If the Catholic conversion drive reaches serious dimensions we should not be averse to an alliance, for the purpose of combating it, with those Protestants who still wish Britain to be free from Papism. I think the danger of Britain going officially Catholic is remote; nevertheless, it cannot be a circumstance for our equanimity that Roman Catholicism is here exerting an influence far out of proportion to its numbers.

FRAUD AND TELEPATHY

(Concluded from page 138)

the "understanding" between subject and agent acquires a different significance once the possibility of effective collusion is envisaged.

Getting tired suddenly after a number of years of extraordinary success is another characteristic of paranormals. Thus after two years Shackleton's ability completely vanished and nothing, we are told, will induce him to play with Zener cards again. Hansel tells us that "Mrs. Stewart's powers 'waned' in 1950 shortly after the writer suggested means whereby the result might have come about."

This Believing World

The once famous St George (for England) appears to have sadly declined these days in popularity, though a book all about him has just appeared. Emerson identified him with a scoundrel called George of Cappadocia, who was, as Gibbon noted, torn to pieces by a mob; but Brewer in his *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* seems to think that this is quite a mistake. April 23rd—a day commemorating the birth of Shakespeare—is St. George's Day, in memory of his death during the Diocletian persecution as a Christian martyr in 303 A.D.; but St. George was not officially recognised as the Patron Saint of England until the reign of Edward III, in 1349. Once the battle cry of English soldiers—"St. George for England"—he is now virtually forgotten. His once famous Dragon is only remembered as a joke. It has even disappeared from our coinage.

★

That "enfant terrible" among our peers, Lord Altrincham, has been letting himself go once again—this time in the pages of *John Bull*. He once said that the Archbishop of Canterbury "gave him the pip," a shocking thing to say of our revered Primate; and now he has added that he thought "he's a disastrous Archbishop of Canterbury and no spiritual leader." Still, his Lordship took good care to have the usual religious rites at his wedding some months ago in spite of his opinion of such a high dignitary as Dr. Fisher. Perhaps he is quite unaware that the only legal marriage in this country is the civil one.

★

Speaking to the Young Conservatives the other day, Mr. H. E. Gurden, M.P., wants to ban all Atheists, Agnostics, and non-believers, from teaching in Britain's schools. He insisted that by allowing them to teach "we are defeating the whole basis of education in this country"—for without "the correct religious background... we are helping to breed juvenile delinquency." But to prove this, Mr. Gurden should have given his hearers a glimpse of our prison records. Except in comparatively few cases, all children are taught religion in *all* schools—and the prisons are chock full of religious criminals, that is, of prisoners who own to some religious belief.

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In fact, all our prisons have special religious chaplains to deal with the "spiritual" necessities of the inmates. So few prisoners, however, claim they have no religion that the authorities have utterly refused even to think of appointing a "secular" padre anywhere. It would be a waste of money. It is a pity that Mr. Gurden did not tell his Young Conservatives these facts—and explain why so far religion has failed so completely with our young delinquents.

★

In a review of "The Purple and the Scarlet" by Guy Schofield, Mr. Christopher Hollis tells the readers of *The Observer* of "the growth of the Christian Church in the first century A.D., alike so improbable and so certain... the broad facts cannot be denied..." And, of course, the "unbeliever" must be brought in because "he is unable to accept the supernatural" and, there, "it is an even stranger story than it is to the unbeliever." It certainly is—indeed, so strange that the unbeliever dismisses it with the contempt it deserves.

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It is doubtful if Mr. Hollis has ever met an instructed "unbeliever," one who knows what Christians say of the first Christian century as well as he does or Mr. Schofield. Outside the New Testament there is simply no account of

the first Christian century. The man who should have told us all about it was Josephus, and he knows literally nothing of it. And the "supernatural" which has to be accepted by all Christians (and is accepted, of course, by Mr. Hollis) in this materialistic age of ours is considered mere credulity and superstition. How Christianity originated is almost as perplexing a problem as how man himself originated, and it has not by a long, long way been solved.

★

The question of women becoming parsons is once again being discussed and is backed up by the Bishop of Birmingham. He would have liked to see them also sit as bishops at a Lambeth conference—"it would have benefited if women had taken part" in the last one, he said. Considering that women are about 80% in the majority at church, they could easily insist on women parsons—but will they? Is it not a fact that they almost always prefer a "man" of God? And would the average hard-working "housewife" like to see pin-up glamorous lady parsons in the pulpit exhorting the men to sin no more?

Prayers for Plants

If it weren't so harmful, in lending a specious scientific air to their superstitious humbug, the extent to which parapsychologists have become obsessed with "mathematical probability" would be really amusing. In *Searchlight on Psychical Research*, the late Joseph F. Rinn, magician friend of Houdini, tells how he emphasised to Dr. J. B. Rhine that the latter "was not justified in using mathematics in judging a case into which fraud could intrude," but to no effect. For various reasons at which we can only guess—but among which wishful thinking would seem to occupy a high place—Rhine went serenely on his card-turning, dice-throwing way (taking in a few telepathic horses and dogs *en route*). So it is not surprising that we find him mixed up in the power of prayer on plants rubbish, which received so much publicity in our Sunday press recently. In the forefront, however, is the Rev. Franklin Loehr, Presbyterian, of the Religious Research Foundation in Los Angeles, who found one woman prepared to curse her seedlings as Communists. "To her" he writes—"that is an epithet of disdain, scorn and active dislike. Those poor seeds seem to twist and writhe under the negative power showered on them." (*Time*, 13/4/59.) Another "experiment" yielded sixteen sturdy seedlings out of 23 kernels prayed for and one out of 23 not prayed for (which grew no more after "several brief 'bursts' of negation"). Most of our readers would know precisely how to treat reports like this but we weren't in the least surprised to read that "one of the mathematicians on Dr. Rhine's staff at Duke University did a quick computation of the probability factor of this experiment." It worked out at over 2,000,000 to one. Which proves the power of prayer on plants, no doubt?

C.M.C.

N.S.S. ANNUAL CONFERENCE

THOSE members who wish to attend the National Secular Society Annual Conference in the Co-operative Hall, Prewett Street, Bristol, 1, on Whit Sunday, May 17th, are asked to write the General Secretary, giving details of accommodation required. The address is, of course, 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

—NEXT WEEK—

RELIGIOUS TRENDS IN FRANCE

By D. JOSEPH

THE FREETHINKER

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

J. R. DUNCAN.—*Phallic Worship*, by Geo. Ryley Scott, is not in our library.

"SCOTIA."—See above. Can you assist?

G. RICHARDSON.—Thanks for interesting verses but too long for inclusion.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch 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, May 3rd, 7 p.m.: A Lecture.

Orpington Humanist Group.—Sunday, May 3rd: Ramble. Meet Swanley Station, 10.50 a.m. Train leaves Victoria 10.16 (fast).

Get single ticket only.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, May 3rd, 11 a.m.: J. HUTTON HYND, "Septic, Mystic and Man of Action—Abraham Lincoln, born 1809."

Notes and News

No atheist, agnostic or non-believer should be allowed to teach in Britain's schools. This *pronunciamento* was delivered at a rally of Young Conservatives at Burton-on-Trent on Saturday, April 18th, by Mr. H. E. Gurden, M.P. for Selly Oak, Birmingham. "Without the correct religious background for children in our schools we are helping to breed juvenile delinquency," he added. He knew many brilliant non-believers, mind you, and they were probably fine teachers, but they were "a risk," and a risk too great to take. (*The Observer*, 19/4/59.) This has been dealt with in "This Believing World." We only wish to add here that the Secretary of the National Secular Society has written to the Selly Oak M.P., requesting evidence for his statements. His answer will be reported in THE FREETHINKER.

★

MR. WALTER STEINHARDT, of Langley, Bucks, sends us a translation from the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* of last November 1st. It tells how Herr Herman Bader, a Bavarian groom (of horses) collected the names of all the Saints

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £186 9d. 9d.; Wm. Craigie (New Zealand), 10s.; H.C., 6s; W.H.D., 2s. 6d.; Anon., 10s.; Mrs. A. Calderwood, £5.—Total to date, April 24th, 1959, £192 18s. 3d.

recognised by the Roman Catholic Church and published his findings in book form. There are no fewer than 12,812, among them 88 popes, 59 patriarchs, 227 archbishops, 2,165 bishops, 912 abbots, 135 superiors of orders, 1,262 priests, 241 soldiers, 43 officers, 144 civil servants, 29 physicians and, rather surprisingly, only 22 peasants. As for guardian saints, did you know that St. Flugentius shows special concern for tax-officers, St. Lucius for cheese-makers, St. Petrus of Alcantara for night watchmen, and St. Phillipus Neri for humorists and comedians? You didn't? Well—as Mr. Steinhardt says—now you are enlightened!

★

ON Saturday, June 6th, the Leicester Secular Society will hold a dance in the De Montfort Hall, Leicester, in aid of the Leicester Spastic Society. Tickets, 3/- each, are obtainable from Mr. C. H. Hammersley, Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester. Please send 3/- per ticket and stamped, addressed envelope.

★

"ISN'T it time someone said this . . . plainly and frankly?" asked Mr. John Deane Potter, in a bold heading (*Daily Express*, 9/4/59). We don't know; but we do know that Mr. Potter's two-column article didn't contain a single plain reference to the subject it professed to speak "plainly and frankly" about—homosexuality. We read instead about "the West End vice," "unpleasant freemasonry," "secret brotherhood," "corruption," "social disease," and of "evil men" who have "spun their web through the West End today until it is simmering scandal." Plainly—though not altogether frankly—Mr. Potter was appealing to the emotional prejudices of *Daily Express* readers; posing as the protector of society's morals. Particularly welcome, therefore was playwright Mr. John Osborne's reply the following day. "I challenge the honesty and morality of any man or newspaper that brands such men as 'evil,'" he said, and then added most pertinently: "This is the fag-end of Christian morality and it is only kept alight by the desire to burn, not to purify." Subsequent letters to the Editor were 3 to 1 for Mr. Potter 8 to 1 against Mr. Osborne; but that is only a measure of the former's success in appealing to the prejudices of his readers.

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BERTRAND RUSSELL'S book, *Why I am not a Christian*, has been on sale for about six months in South Africa, but has now been banned by the Customs authority. The penalty for importing or selling it is a maximum fine of £1,000 or three years' imprisonment. There have been some protests in the South African press, and by the time this news item appears, a public protest meeting will have been held at Witwatersrand University, Johannesburg, Wednesday, April 29th. The speakers will be the Rt. Rev. Ambrose Reeves (Bishop of Johannesburg), a liberal Churchman, Miss Fanny Klenerman, of Vanguard Book-sellers, Mr. A. D. Hall (University Lecturer in English), Mrs. W. Eybers (National Council of Women) and Dr. E. R. Roux, of the Rationalist Association of Johannesburg, well known to readers of THE FREETHINKER. In addition, Lord Russell's permission is being sought to publish the title essay of *Why I am not a Christian* in Afrikaans. There is no ban on publication in South Africa, only on its importation. Prosecution for blasphemy is possible, of course, but unlikely, and that risk would be taken.

“Records in Clay”

By H. CUTNER

SOMEONE recently favoured me with a copy of a pamphlet entitled *Records in Clay*, by J. A. Thompson, B.A., B.ED., M.SC., B.D. (a formidable list of distinctions), the purpose of which no doubt was to show me how very wrong I am on the Bible, and to bring me back on to the straight and narrow path.

Actually, it is a most interesting pamphlet, dealing as it does with “written” records at a time when it was supposed nobody could write. Apart from some descriptions of the famous Tell El Amarna tablets and the Ras Shamra tablets, Mr. Thompson concentrates on the Nazu tablets and shows from them how the description of the social life of the times they describe are reflected in the early portions of the Bible. The Nazu tablets were discovered in 1925 and are dated as of the 15th century B.C.

It must have taken centuries, perhaps even thousands of years, before early man discovered what we call writing, and “writing” of a sort is often referred to in the Bible. But, as Mr. Thompson is careful to point out, “the Hebrew word ‘to write’ is really ‘to cut,’” so it is obvious that writing in our sense of the word was not meant when it is said in Exodus that “Moses wrote upon the tables,” that is, upon “tablets.” What was meant was that the “writing” was incised upon clay tablets, like the Babylonian clay tablets in cuneiform script. Of course, in other parts of the early books of the Bible, we are told of “the book of Jasher” and the “book of the Acts of Solomon” among others. It is quite possible that there were such “books,” because the Old Testament as we have it was written many centuries after the events it is supposed to narrate, when there really were books.

The Nazu tablets, so Mr. Thompson tells us, were written “perhaps 500 years after Abraham’s time”; yet he claims that they faithfully describe “a society which very closely resembles the society depicted in the book of Genesis.” This is exactly what we should expect. When the wonderful history of Abraham and his descendents was being written up to give “Israel” or “Judah” a history comparable to that of the Babylonians or Egyptians, it was not actually *invented*. It was based on many documents written or incised. As it was impossible for the “historians” to know what kind of society it was that Abraham moved in, they faithfully copied the Nazu tablets—just as Dumas used the memoirs of a veritable D’Artagnan for his celebrated romance of *The Three Musketeers*.

Mr. Thompson quotes passages from Genesis to show how they correspond with passages from the tablets, but as an out-and-out fundamentalist, he never sees that the Genesis writer or writers or editors just “pinched” what they wanted from anything which would suit their purpose. They had to give Abraham a background, so they must have been delighted to find at hand these Nazu tablets which gave them just the details they needed. It is very interesting to find that Mr. Thompson has no doubt whatever that the events described in Genesis really took place—even the “blessings” Jacob gave to his twelve sons on his deathbed. If Mr. Thompson had known anything whatever of Biblical criticism, he would have known that the famous 49th chapter of Genesis, in which the blessings are described, prove beyond any doubt whatever that the twelve sons of Jacob were merely personifications of the Twelve Signs of the Zodiac. Nothing in the whole of the Bible is clearer than this—every “son” is clearly described as a sign; and it may be added that there are many other

stories equally based on sun, star and phallic worship. The Genesis writers did not confine themselves to using only the Nazu tablets as “references” or authorities.

As for the Ras Shamra tablets dated only a little later than the Nazu ones, it is really surprising that Mr. Thompson refers to them at all. In them there is not a line which corroborates any story in the Pentateuch. Where is Moses or Joshua mentioned? After all, Ras Shamra was a busy port in Syria and the tablets were written in several languages—Phoenician, Akkadian, Sumerian and Hurrian. But why are not any at all in pure Hebrew? If Hebrew, as Mr. Thompson no doubt believes, was the language spoken by Adam and Eve and, of course, the inevitable Serpent—to say nothing of God Almighty himself—why is there not a trace of this in them? Or indeed any of the mighty events described in the Pentateuch? Surely the people responsible for these tablets must have known of the exodus of three millions of Israelites from Egypt and their conquest of Palestine by such redoubtable leaders as Moses and Joshua? All that Mr. Thompson can gather for us from the Ras Shamra tablets are a few words found in the Old Testament, the meaning of which was not certain before the discovery of these tablets. Of course. No doubt that they were used just as the Nazu tablets were used somewhere about 300 B.C. when the Old Testament was put together in “Hebrew.”

It is the same story with the Tell El Amarna tablets which were discovered in 1887. They appear to be dated about the same time as the others—from 1420 B.C. to 1360 B.C.—and they contain nothing whatever about the Israelites in Palestine or in Egypt. They are written in Babylonian script, that is, incised cuneiform on clay tablets, but they do not show any knowledge whatever either of Hebrew or the Old Testament stories. But, of course, the tablets were used for some little details when these were needed to add verisimilitude to the Biblical narratives which were written centuries later.

Now exactly where are we? Mr. Thompson tells us that the habit of writing on clay was used in many places—“Mesopotamia, Assyria, Palestine, Syria, Crete and Cyprus.” Note that it was used in *Palestine*—yet not a single clay tablet has ever been discovered incised in *Hebrew* describing anything about David, Solomon, Moses, Abraham or the other Bible heroes—nothing whatever about the conquest of Palestine by Joshua, or about the long sojourn of the Israelites in Egypt and how they swept across to the “land the Lord gave them.”

In the Ras Shamra tablets, there have been found many phrases (Mr. Thompson tells us) which were considered by Biblical critics to show a late date—yet they are there in the tablets. This is not at all surprising. Hebrew is a “made-up” language and words and phrases were taken from all sorts of tablets, and from many contemporary dialects. Also when the history in the Old Testament was “invented,” many customs and ideas in the tablets were altered to suit the later times. The writers did not and could not copy everything in the customs and folk lore of, for example, the Canaanites as Mr. Thompson, quoting Professor Wright of Chicago, admits:

“Even when we have noted all the similarities, the borrowing and the syncretism, the differences between the literature of Israel and that of Canaan are far more remarkable and significant than the affinities.”

Thus it is admitted that the writers of the Old Testament “borrowed” from the Canaanites; just as they borrowed

from many "documents," clay tablets, and the like, and put what they made up in a script the late date of which is admitted by all students except, of course, fundamentalists.

The word "Hebrew" looks like the word "Habiru," which is found in the Tell El Amarna tablets—though what a word "looks like" in English does not necessarily mean they look alike in the Akkadian language—the language of the tablets. As the Israelites were supposed to have "conquered" Palestine about the date given to these, it is more than extraordinary that they are never mentioned. In fact, the tablets were used by the Old Testament writers to describe the "invasion" of Palestine; but the various tribes who did so, among whom were the "Habiru," were boiled down to the Israelites only. There is, of course, not a scrap of evidence that the "Habiru" were "Hebrews" and certainly none that they were the Israelites fleeing from Egypt after centuries of slavery.

Mr. Thompson finishes by saying, "We may well be grateful that God, in His providence, has permitted vast amounts of writing to be preserved for us from ancient times." It is a great pity that God in His providence did not at the same time bequeath to us "vast amounts" of tablets in Hebrew, packed with details of Adam, Eve, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph and all or indeed any of the other Bible heroes. The truth is that the more one examines the "records in clay," the more one realises that the Old Testament was composed at a very late date, built up from old and contemporary records, tablets and documents of all kinds. The early history of "Israel" is as mythical as the Arabian Nights.

THEATRE

"Brand"

THERE are certain plays which can legitimately attract the attention of outsiders to the dramatic profession, both on account of their standing as works of art and of their subject-matter. The current performance of Henrik Ibsen's *Brand* (by the 59 Theatre Company, Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, London) deserves a visit from any person with a live mind who is able to visit it.

The current production, with the Irish actor, Patrick McGoohan, in the title role, is, we learn from the very informative programme, the first in England since 1912. It appears to be beyond praise, with most effective stage scenery and what appeared to be—at least to the untutored writer of this review—really first class acting. Mr. McGoohan, as the grim, priestly fanatic who dominates the play throughout, was really quite tremendous—out of this world, in the dramatic as well as the theological sense! While the whole production gave a sense of terrific power. To come from the average West End play to such a performance of such a play must, we imagine, resemble the sensation of space-travellers as and when they alight on a new and far more advanced world.

Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906) was, of course, one of the greatest dramatists in modern or, probably, in world drama; any computation of the world's greatest would, we imagine, include him in the top dozen. *Brand* was actually his first major work to see the light, though he had already written several plays, including one on *Cataline*, which was produced here before the war, which I was fortunate enough to see. Several of his later plays have become world famous, as well as storm centres of controversy in conventional circles, for one can say that, if ever there was a free thinker in the widest sense of the word, it was the Norwegian dramatist. *Brand*, rather curiously, was

written in the then Papal States in Rome, in 1865, and achieved immediate success. The central character is said to have been based on Soren Kierkegaard, the Danish fundamentalist, whose theological slogan, "either or," became Brand's "all or nothing." Translated by Michael Meyer, the present production is a prose production of the original poetic drama.

The theme of *Brand* is simple, grim and impelled throughout by an unseen supernatural urgency. Brand is the dedicated, fanatical priest, who sacrifices home, comfort and promotion in answer to what he conceives to be the inescapable will of his Calvinistic deity. We see him refuse his dying mother the Sacraments, doom his wife and child to an untimely end in obedience to the divine call; and, after a despairing effort to redeem his peasant congregation, we see him deserted and stoned by them. Finally, in a tremendous crescendo, against the appropriate setting of dark Norwegian mountains, Brand is swept to destruction by an avalanche, calling with his last breath upon his grim deity to justify His inscrutable ways to man: a Christian after Christ's own heart! Such is the central theme; there is no space here, unfortunately, to touch upon the brilliant satire which often acts as a most effective foil to Brand's own torrential invective: the worldly-wise sheriff and the still more fanatical African missionary. It would be trite to end by saying that this is a play of special interest to Freethinkers; we are in the presence of a master work of art. It is an artistic—I had almost said a moral—duty to see it personally if opportunity permits.

F. A. RIDLEY.

CORRESPONDENCE

MALTHUSIANISM

I'm afraid that Mr. H. Cutner is rather like the woman who, when she first saw a giraffe, said "I don't believe it!" He just doesn't believe that production is being held back. Well, Mr. Cutner, many cotton mills have been closed down recently, since there was no market for their products—which doesn't mean we are all too well dressed! Thirty-eight subsidiary factories in Scotland closed down last year (to the disgust of Scottish Nationalists). The U.S.A. has just announced a surplus of 51 million tons of wheat; Canadian farmers are desperate to sell their grain. It was announced in Washington in March 1958 that farmers would be paid for doing nothing—this "new farm revolution" was planned to reduce output of farm products to halt the ever-mounting surpluses of wheat, corn, cotton and rice. (This while famine exists in Asia.) By the way, if Mr. Cutner persists in doubting these facts, he should write to the appropriate authorities in the U.S.A. and have them confirmed. Myself, I see no reason to disbelieve official statements in Washington newspapers.

I must apologise for misquoting Kropotkin in my previous letter—he actually said that Britain could feed 90 million people, not 75 million as I had stated (I quoted this as possible, not desirable!). With modern scientific methods of intensive agriculture, I see no reason for surprise. After all, in Holland, where there is about a third as much land per acre as in Britain, not only do they feed their own population well, but they export large quantities of fruit, vegetables and dairy products to Britain (you don't need a quotation for this, you can see Dutch products in every grocer's, if you look). Today, in Britain, 36 coalmines have been closed down and coal is piled at pitheads while poor people shiver for lack of a fire. In the *Daily Express*, August 7th, 1958, it was announced that the Potato Marketing Board would restrict potato planting, and that farmers caught over-planting would be fined £9 per acre. New Zealand cannot sell her butter, but margarine is used widely in Britain to feed children. Look where you will in the western hemisphere, and in Australia and New Zealand, and you will find, not shortage, but plenty; and disgraceful evidence of poverty existing in plenty; and everywhere, as Lord Boyd Orr prophesied in 1946, production slowing down and another slump on the way.

I trust Mr. Cutner will now agree that, given modern methods of agriculture, there is no danger of food shortage in the western world for longer than we need worry about.

As for the East, there, of course, it is another story. Birth control is a necessity for family life everywhere—small

families are essential to the health of mother and child alike, and any opponent of birth control is an enemy of society.

But anyone who thinks that birth control, on its own, could rectify the poverty of the world, is an ass. In at least half the world, there is no physical reason for poverty at all. Even in the other half, anomalies appear because of the absurd international financial system we suffer under. For instance, 90 millions of Japanese are working their fingers to the bone—not to try to feed themselves, but to manufacture shoddy goods to be dumped below cost on foreign markets! The Chinese and Pakistani are similarly engaged. Chinese can't afford to buy cotton clothes to cover their skin-and-bones, but Chinese cloth and products are being dumped at cut prices on British markets, via Hong Kong.

Surely, the great problem is to help these impoverished peoples to feed themselves, and as Mr. Cutner correctly indicates, "Great dams and irrigation works" are the obvious method. As an example of the way in which western politicians "help," it would be interesting to take the case of Egypt and the Nile dam, so vital to Egyptian prosperity. If the U.S.A. hadn't stopped Egyptian credit, for political reasons, and thereby stopped all work on the dam, all the fuss about Suez, and a war, expensive in lives and materials, need never have taken place. Every day America stores her surplus wheat costs her a fortune to keep it turned over and in good condition. Present-day politics, however, forbid it being given away to the starving Chinese—except with strings attached. The problem of helping our fellow man in need is not insurmountable—engineering works, as in Egypt, could be projected and executed in double quick time where required, were it not that our scientific potential is harnessed by finance and politics. I do not claim Social Credit as a panacea, but at least, under Social Credit technique, poverty amidst plenty would be impossible, and all wealth available would be distributed, not wasted, as at present.

Believe me, I am as eager to attack superstition and ignorance as Mr. Cutner, and as much in support of birth control, although for human, not economic reasons. But even in the field of education, money is the piper and calls the tune.

Putting right our faulty monetary system will not stamp out all the world's evils, but it will abolish poverty in the West (and eventually in the East), and remove the necessity for conflict between nations. All recent wars (and not such recent ones—read Dr. Robertson's *Human Ecology*, also Professor Soddy and Arthur Kitson) have been fought over markets, for economic reasons. "Lebensraum" has been a lame excuse to delude the public. Sane economic policies will remove the need for dumping and competition for markets, thereby removing the *causis belli* among civilised beings. Even when the population of the world was a tiny fraction of what it is today, wars were being waged; it will take more than birth control to stop war, I fancy.

Professor Bernal may not have proved his statement that there was enough food for everybody in the world (his being a Communist doesn't disprove him, though!). However, it is clear that there is today an undistributed surplus of food in the western world, and that production is being kept down, not encouraged. That is my finding. J. K. GRUBIAK.

IRENAEUS

Whether Irenaeus would have called a man aged nearly fifty old is of no importance. Mr. Cutner, not Irenaeus, drew the quite unwarranted inference that so elderly a man probably died in his bed. Whether the historic Jesus died about 100 B.C. or was crucified by order of Pontius Pilate one year between 26 A.D. and 36 A.D. does not concern what we are discussing. Irenaeus believed in the inspiration of the New Testament substantially as we have it, including the four Gospels, and so must have believed that Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate. Mr. Ridley, in the same issue of THE FREETHINKER where Mr. Stanley's letter appears, outlines the weird theory of Irenaeus that Jesus was put to death as a sacrifice to Satan; this theory could not have been advanced by the Irenaeus of Mr. Cutner's argument.

A. D. HOWELL SMITH.

THE POPE AND POLITICS

We are treated once more to a display of political interference by the Pope. It should be noticed with great care by all Freethinkers that although the Pope has yet again warned his subjects against voting for Communism and its allies (possibly in course of time all left-wing, liberal and radical parties), he has made no restrictions on his subjects as to whether they can vote for Fascist parties or not.

Whereas the first Pope John XXIII appeared to have started his life as a pirate, in which he presumably stole men's material goods, it seems that the 20th century's John XXIII is out to rob his subjects of their political sanity and free expression of matters temporal. CHARLES W. MARSHALL.

HUMANISM

In Mr. G. H. Taylor's thought-stirring review of Dr. Lamont's *Philosophy of Humanism* he concludes by saying, "Though I regard the term Humanism as, by itself, unsatisfactory on several counts..." Will he kindly say what he has in mind when saying "By itself," and state what are the several unsatisfactory counts?

C. E. RATCLIFFE.

[I prefer the term Scientific Humanism to just Humanism by itself, so as to distinguish it from religious varieties of Humanism such as Positivism. Ethicists like F. H. Hayward have also identified Humanism with "reverence for life" and I have even heard of Christian Humanism as "the welfare of man in relation to his Divine Destiny." On yet another count, the term Humanism is narrow enough to cut out the welfare of animals.—G.H.T.]

JOSEPHUS

The passage about Jesus in the *Antiquities of the Jews*, by Josephus, contains this: "And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross..." This implies that Josephus was at the trial of Jesus (A.D. 33?) and that he was of man's age. How this could be is surely another Holy Mystery, as I understand that Josephus lived A.D. 37-100. It is the word "us" that has caused me to question the matter. T. PRESTAGE.

OBITUARY

We regret to report the death, earlier this month, at the age of 80, of Dr. Paul Louis Couchoud, eminent French Freethought scholar, author of *The Creation of Christ*, and one time doctor to Anatole France. A tribute to Dr. Couchoud by Mr. C. Bradlaugh Bonner, translator of *The Creation of Christ*, will appear in a later issue.

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