

The Freethinker

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ON APRIL 20TH the BBC Third Programme presented a discussion on "The Authority of the Sacred Scriptures." As is usual with BBC pronouncements on theological themes, this effusion was not actually very illuminating, except in the way in which it illustrated the almost complete collapse of the old, until recently, practically universal Fundamentalism which used to represent the attitude of Protestant Christianity towards God's Holy Word.

Today the situation in respect of Christianity and the Bible is more than somewhat confused, it is, in fact, much more ambiguous than was the old Fundamentalist belief in verbal inspiration, which was at least logical, besides having the merit of simplicity.

Now it appears that God's Holy Word, like the proverbial curate's egg, is "good in parts" only.

The Bible and the Early Church

As was generally recognised, even in Christian circles prior to the Reformation, the Bible—or to speak more precisely—the two Bibles acknowledged by Christianity, its own, the New Testament and that of the Jewish Church, the Old Testament, were not of equal value and did not furnish a complete guide to life and to Christian doctrine. Again, prior to the Reformation (which really put the Bible on the map) the Church was actually much more important than the Bible. The Christian Church did not, of course, need any critical apparatus to select the books of the Old Testament; it simply took them lock, stock and barrel from the Jewish rabbis (though how the rabbis arrived at the eventual Jewish canon seems also something of a mystery). But the process by which the New Testament was evolved was long and obscure; several books have dropped out and several more have got in, in some cases by apparently the skin of their teeth. Some early MSS. include works of Hermas and Clement of Rome, which were later quietly dropped and exclude others, viz., Hebrews, Peter, etc., which are now included. Evidently the Christian readers found much difficulty in discerning the authentic style of the Holy Ghost. Obviously the Church must have had some standard of selection, but at least, at this time of day it is not at all clear what this criterion actually was; why, to take one conspicuous example, if the physical Resurrection of Jesus Christ was, as we are still so often reminded, the most certain fact in all history, were the four Gospels recognised as inspired and canonical though they only give second-hand accounts of the Resurrection, whilst the Gospel of Peter which is the only one to describe Christ actually rising from the tomb carrying his cross which does all the talking, has been consigned to the theological dustbin as an apocryphal Gospel? In the case of some of the New Testament books, we can infer with some degree of probability why they were eventually included in the canon. For example, the Epistles of the Gnostic Paul were not accepted as canonical (or even perhaps as orthodox) in Rome as late as the mid-second century or so it would

appear from the significant silence of Justin Martyr about that date. Actually, Paul appears to have started his long and brilliant theological career as the patron saint of the Gnostic sect of the heretic Marcion, a dubious origin which seems to be hinted at in our now canonical Second Epistle of Peter (III, 15-16). As for the four canonical Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, it seems to be most unlikely that the farcical explanation offered by

Irenaeus, who first describes them as canonical, can be the correct one. Even uncritical second century Christianity can hardly have been so naïve as to have adopted four Gospels merely because there were four winds and four points of the compass. (cf.

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

Christianity and the Bible

By F. A. RIDLEY

Irenaeus—*Against the Heresies*.) The actual reason seems to have been the simple one of expediency; the sacred Four were already the selected Gospels of the four most important Churches, viz., Rome, Alexandria, Antioch and Ephesus. The Gospels of the smaller Churches could not compete with this "Big Four" and eventually faded away into apocryphal obscurity. Some drastic editing seems to have accompanied this process. However, while much still remains obscure, it seems clear that the Church must have had some reasons for its frequently peculiar selections; the *Apocalypse of John*, for example, still wobbled on the fringe of canonicity up to the eighth century. It was its bizarre contents rather than the name of John (who didn't write it), which eventually got "John's nightmare" safely into the canon. Serious critical scholarship obviously did not play much part in the selective process, though Jerome, in the preface to his Latin Vulgate translation (c. 400) does mention some serious critical objection to the inclusion of certain New Testament books which has quite a modern ring.

The Bible and the Reformation

From the fourth century on, our Biblical canon remained unaltered until the Reformation, but in practice the Catholic Church has never attached much importance to its sacred Scriptures; and some theologians took quite a lot of liberties with them—e.g., St. Augustine, who interpreted the days of *Genesis* as long prehistoric eras, or Cardinal Cajetan, who described the Creation story as an allegory. The day of the Bible only really arrived with the Reformation which, after a few feeble attempts at a critical exegesis that demoted half a dozen Old Testament books to the Apocryphal class, settled down to a rigid Fundamentalism which lasted almost to within living memory. This Protestant Bibliolatory was based on two fundamental propositions, viz., that all the Biblical books were of equal value and that every word of the Scriptures was verbally inspired and equally infallible. These fantastic propositions were summarised in the famous slogan of Chillingworth: "The Bible and the Bible only is the religion of Protestants."

From then on, down to our contemporary Fundamentalists, Billy Graham and Co., God's Holy Word ceased to

be a book or—what it actually is—a collection of books, and became a meaningless mass of often contradictory (but always inspired!) mumbo-jumbo. An eloquent Victorian preacher, Dean Burgon, summarised the prevailing view of Protestant orthodoxy from the university pulpit of Oxford in the stirring words: "Every Book, every chapter, every verse, every syllable, represents the direct and unerring Voice of Him who sitteth on the Throne"; while even the Catholic Newman referred to the Scriptures as "letters from our heavenly country."

The Bible and Comparative Religion

We have travelled quite a distance since the Reverend Burgon made his oracular pronouncement in Oxford, the traditional home of lost causes. Today, if not the Bible itself, at least its "verbal inspiration" seems to be a pretty hopelessly lost cause—even in the theological faculty at Oxford University, to judge from some recent pronouncements from that exalted quarter. Since the then Lord Chancellor "dismissed Hell with costs," the infallibility and inerrancy of the Bible have been declining steadily. Today, even what passes for Christian orthodoxy, seems to rest content with the rather ambiguous proposition that the sacred Scriptures undoubtedly represent the Word of

God, but only God knows how. The Vatican's pronouncements on *Genesis et al* appear to be deliberately vague, and even to imply that Biblical inspiration must be heavily diluted by constant reference to its context and current terms of reference. No doubt, as Joseph McCabe wrote half a century ago, Rome would be only too pleased to dump the Old Testament overboard as soon as possible. Meanwhile, Protestant Modernism in such critical works as the *Encyclopædia Biblica* is steadily eliminating the last vestiges of inspiration. Apart from a few very primitive sects, it is no longer true that the Bible is the religion of Protestants. It is, in fact, now becoming increasingly difficult to discover what *is*.

As for the sacred Scriptures of Judaism and Christianity, they, like the Koran, Vedas, etc., are now well on the way to their eventual destiny, which is *not*, contrary to some rash opinions, either the bonfire or the wastepaper basket, but to their proper and extremely valuable status as documents and very often key documents in the library devoted to the fascinating study of comparative religion. As such, the former "Word of God" will be found to shed much literary and psychological light on the bygone mental outlook of a still adolescent Humanity.

Chosen Question

By G. H. TAYLOR

DURING A CONTROVERSY on free will and determinism in our correspondence column, a writer says, in the course of a letter too long to publish, "Why not admit that since the Principle of Indeterminacy was established, the breakdown of determinism is a serious blow to any hope of explaining the universe by science?"

The Principle of Indeterminacy was stated by Heisenberg, and it was nothing less than theological trickery which converted it into "Indeterminism." There is a world of difference between the terms, but it is too unpalatable for theologians to notice.

What Heisenberg did was to show that the intervention of the observer through his investigating instruments interferes with the sequence of certain small-scale phenomena and thus sets a limit to the description of them in terms of deterministic causation. In other words, observation equals outside interference.

For example, the probing instruments which would seek to study the electron are vastly bigger than the electron itself, whose dimensions are in fact very much smaller than the shortest visible light wave. To predict the electron's future path we must know its position and velocity at a given time. Two consecutive photographs might be taken through a microscope with very rapid flashes of light. The snag is that the wave length of the light limits the accuracy of the observation. A particle which stops any kind of radiation is deflected out of its path in the process, and the shorter the wave length the greater the deflection. It is therefore only possible to measure the position accurately at the price of vagueness about the speed, and conversely. It is as though a speedometer and mileometer were only visible separately and not together. As the late Sir J. Jeans put it: "We only see nature blurred by the clouds of dust we ourselves make." (*The New Background of Science*.)

The difficulties of measurement are those of technique and do not arise from any innate "free will" in the particles or because "God" is having a game with us. They are difficulties of human prediction, resulting in indeterminacy and not in some grand Cosmic Indeterminism. Prof. Max Planck's book, *Where is Science Going?* is

largely a polemic against this type of theology made out of pseudo-science; among many other eminent scientists and philosophers who have protested against the erection of a principle of "Indeterminism" out of the perfectly valid and harmless one of Indeterminacy have been Einstein and Bertrand Russell. Planck quotes the now famous passage from an interview with Einstein:

Interlocutor: It is now the fashion in physical science to attribute something like free will even to the routine processes of inorganic nature.

Einstein: That nonsense is not merely nonsense. It is objectionable nonsense.

Interlocutor: Well, of course, the scientists give it the name of Indeterminism.

Einstein: Look here. Indeterminism is quite an illogical concept.

Indeterminacy, says Russell (*The Scientific Outlook*), "does nothing to show the failure of physical law to determine the course of nature." Therefore, "It is very rash to erect a theological superstructure on a piece of ignorance which may only be temporary. And the effects of this procedure are necessarily bad, since they make men hope that new discoveries will not be made." However, if Eddington "deduces religion from the fact that atoms do not obey the laws of mathematics, Sir James Jeans deduces it from the fact that they do. Both these arguments have been accepted with equal enthusiasm by theologians." (*ibid.*)

The theologian who bases his case on this kind of argument is merely assuming that what is as yet unexplained is therefore unexplainable. And in view of the history of such controversy, this is sheer dogmatism. Because a deterministic account is inadequate it does not follow that no deterministic account will ever succeed. We can distinguish between (A) the fact of causation, and (a) its application in a given instance. In (A) we are dealing with a law of nature, and in (a) we are in doubt, not as to the law, but as to how it operates in a given case. To the statement "We do not know" might be added "yet." Improved technique brings more accurate forecasting. A weather forecast by (1) a complete novice, (2) a farmer, and (3) a meteorologist, would show graded degrees of accuracy, and the same applies as science advances its techniques.

Omar Khayyam or Edward Fitzgerald?

By H. CUTNER

AMONG THE MORE NOTABLE CENTENARIES this year is celebrating, the one which comes very close to my heart is that in remembrance of the publication of Edward Fitzgerald's marvellous translation of some of the poems or quatrains of the famous poet-astronomer of Persia, Omar Khayyam, who flourished about the middle of the eleventh century, dying in Nishapur, Khorassan, in 1123.

It is said that Tennyson considered this translation the finest ever made; but fortunately, it need not be considered as a translation at all, but as some wonderful poetry, probably the most popular ever written in this country. Yet the most remarkable thing about it, apart from its immortal verse, is that it is an out-and-out glorification of what we call Secularism, the joy of life in *this* world, and it has always been an interesting speculation whether this springs from Omar or from Fitzgerald himself?

The "translator" (as far as I have gathered some personal facts about him) was a "Pagan" in every sense of the word. Few other poets have put in such exquisite lines the beauty of life here and now, and pictured it with such glamour and the magic of colour. Fitzgerald was not just putting Omar's quatrains into the appropriate English setting—he must himself have felt that the only life he knew anything about was here on this earth, and the first thing to do was to

Wake! For the Sun, who scattered into flight
The Stars before him from the Field of Night,
Drives Night along with Heav'n, and strikes
The Sultan's Turret with a Shaft of Light.

—not at all unlike the opening of Herrick's equally (or almost equally) famous poem, which begins with

Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,
Old time is still a-flying;
And this same flower that smiles today,
Tomorrow will be dying.

Fitzgerald took many years in translating Omar once he was directed to the Persian poet, and his first edition was published in 1859—and so poorly received, that it was not only "remaindered," but was put into the penny or two-penny box outside of shop of Quaritch, the famous bookseller; and there it might have remained unnoticed and dead but for the fact that it was picked up by Rossetti, who became so enthusiastic that he sent all his friends, among them Swinburne, to buy it. This five shilling book which could then be bought for a penny, can now demand its thousands of pounds as "a first edition," as well as for its rarity. Four editions were called for before Fitzgerald died in 1883. And since? It is safe to say that no other single poem in the English language has been so popular, so widely read, so superbly printed and illustrated. Why its sonorous verse should have failed to attract the poetry-loving public in the first place is one of those literary mysteries which is very difficult to account for.

Omar himself, long before Fitzgerald, had attracted the notice of many writers and historians on the literature and history of Persia; and translations of some of his quatrains and more scientific works had been made. The difficulty was to decide in the works attributed to him which were the authentic Omar, and whether all the poetry ascribed to him (but obviously not his) was due to the fact that he was considered a heretic, an unbeliever, or, as we might say today, an Agnostic, the real writers being afraid to admit their own heterodoxy. One fact has emerged from the labours of many critics and that is, not only has Fitzgerald added many lines or even quatrains which are *not* in Omar—though preserving some of the thought of Omar

—but gathered a good deal of the "Secularism" of his verse from other Persian poets.

This has been clearly demonstrated by a once famous bibliophile, Edward Heron-Allen, who shows in one of his published pamphlets how profoundly Fitzgerald was influenced in his thought and studies by the *Odes* of Hafiz, the *Gulistan* of Sa'adi, the *Mantik-ut-Tair* of Attar, and many other texts. Mr. Heron-Allen indeed was not at all disposed to call Fitzgerald a "translator"—though he could not find a better word for the way in which his *Omar* appeared in its English guise.

Incidentally, the name "Khayyam" appears to denote a tentmaker, but if there is one thing modern research has discovered, it is that Omar was never a tentmaker but a scholar—particularly on astronomy—and a poet. After all, a man called Gardner is not necessarily a gardener.

In his own time and country, Omar was known as an infidel, and, as one of his editors notes, "he was regarded askance" for this. "He is said," we are told, "to have been specially hated and dreaded by the Sufis, whose practice he ridiculed, and whose Faith amounts to little more than his own when stripped of the Mysticism and the formal recognition of Islamism under which Omar would not hide. . . . Omar was too honest of heart as well of head for this. Having failed (however mistakenly) of finding any Providence but Destiny, and any World but this, he set about making the most of it . . ." preferring to write about things as he saw them, "than to perplex with vain disquietude what they *might* be." And "this especially distinguishes Omar from all other Persian poets: That, whereas with them the poet is lost in his song, the Man in allegory and abstraction; we seem to have the Man—the *Bonhomme*—Omar himself with all his humours and passions, as frankly before us as if we were really at table with him, after the wine had gone round."

Fitzgerald's first edition was notably different from the subsequent ones. He obviously worked hard to improve his verse—much as the author of *Hamlet*, according to Swinburne, revised "scene by scene, line for line, stroke upon stroke, and touch after touch . . . not to ensure success in his own day, and fill his pocket with contemporary pence, but merely and wholly with a purpose to make it worthy of himself and his future students." Whether Fitzgerald always changed a word or a line for the better may, however, be a moot point.

The standard edition remains the first, but my quotations are from the equally attractive fourth. But most critics are unanimous that many of the strongest heretical utterances in the quatrains are *not* Omar's but Fitzgerald's. Not that he was always or at any time singing

A Book of verse beneath the Bough,
A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread—and Thou
Beside me singing in the Wilderness—
Oh, Wilderness were Paradise enow!

In fact, Fitzgerald was not always what is sometimes called an Epicurean. But nobody can read his *Omar* without realising that he had no use for religion, no use for God or his Heaven. Here and now life had to be enjoyed and, after all, Omar's world was better, far better than the one painted for us by Christianity with its Devils and Angels, its ridiculous Heaven and even sillier Hell.

And this is the great Paradox—how comes it that such a poem, singing as it does the joy of life in this world as against the religious conception of the ultimate purpose of

(Concluded on next page)

This Believing World

An American Bishop, the Rt. Rev. S. F. Bayne, has just been appointed as "right-hand man" to the Archbishop of Canterbury to promote a "pep-up" campaign for the Church of England. Why not? The C. of E. wants pepping up—in comparison with the way the Roman Church has commanded publicity from the four corners of the earth. Dr. Fisher's little lot are nowhere. Our own Royalty even pay "private" visits to the Pope—but do the Royalty of other countries ever pay private visits to our own revered Primate?

★

It is computed that there are some 40 millions of adherents of the Church of England all over the world, and one of Bishop Bayne's tasks will be "to knit them closer together" through the radio, TV, and films; but according to the account we have seen of what his future activities will be, it will not be his job to prove that Christianity is true. All the Devils, Angels, Miracles, etc., with which his Divine religion is cluttered, are taken for granted; "our Lord" believed in them—who are we to question the Son of Almighty God? We have an idea that the worthy Bishop, even with the aid of all the English Bishops, will have his work cut out.

★

And still talking about Bishops, here we have the *Daily Mirror* praising up the Bishop of Aberdeen as a future TV star because he looks like Yul Brynner, and because he has passed a test on teaching religion for a TV audience. It appears also that he has the support not only of the Archbishop of Canterbury, but also of the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster, and the heads of the Free Churches. Between them, they ought to put Freethought off the map—but will they? Not on your life!

★

The talks on religion and philosophy for schools on Tuesdays by Dr. J. A. T. Robinson recently dealt with the Gospel of John. Most biblical critics in the past have—more or less—contemptuously thrown over John; for obviously if Jesus spoke in the language recorded in his Gospel, he could not possibly have spoken as he does in the other three. In fact, the greatest problem in New Testament criticism is how to reconcile John with the Synoptics.

★

This has been easy for Dr. Robinson—though, as most children have no more idea of the course biblical criticism has taken than they have of the details of the Myth Theory, most of what the pious Dr. Robinson said must have been so much Greek to them. The Gospel of John is a riddle neither he nor anybody else has solved or could possibly solve. We do not know who wrote it, when it was written or where, or even why it was written. It is quite probably a Gnostic document of early second century re-edited in favour of Jesus as a "mystic" Being. Most of his discourses are unintelligible. They are even unintelligible to Dr. Robinson.

★

Faced with a number of teenagers on the question of prayers, Father Trevor Huddleston, on ITV's "About Religion," did his best with a number of awkward questions, which he appeared quite unable to deal with. According to him, it was just as difficult to pray properly as it was to learn to play the violin—a statement which certainly bewildered his audience. One of the questions asked him was—"How do we know when a prayer is answered?"—a query which rather staggered Fr. Huddleston for a moment.

His answer was so perfect a gem of naive nonsense that the teenagers looked more bewildered than ever. It seems that if a person was sick and you prayed for his recovery and he got well, that was the answer to your prayer. If, however, he died—then that was God's will, and so again that was the answer. In other words, you were answered either way. Fr. Huddleston requires no instruction from his brothers in Christ, the Jesuits.

★

Can people be possessed by Devils? This was solemnly and piously discussed by the Rev. L. Weatherhead, Prof. A. Kennedy, Miss Ruth Pitter, and the Earl of Halsbury at a recent TV Brains Trust. They all believed that Devils had that power—in other words, they all believed in Devils. Miss Pitter, as an earnest Christian, reverently admitted that there was no doubt about it whatever. The three gentlemen supported her, and so now we know that those horrid infidels who poke fun at Devils are utterly mistaken. The Brains Trust has settled the question for ever. Did we say Brains...?

From Ghana

THE SECOND ANNUAL CONFERENCE of the Ghana Rationalist Group took place in the Ghana Legion Hall, Koforidua, on February 7th.

Among several messages of greetings read out was one from the N.S.S. The secretary reported that advertisements inserted in Ghana's *Daily Graphic* and the Nigerian *Daily Times* brought many letters of enquiry and led to the enrolment of members.

Literature donated by the N.S.S., R.P.A., Johannesburg Rationalist Association and the Indian Rationalist Association (as well as numerous individuals) was distributed to local libraries and members. The Group was doing much good work, but it was felt that much more advertising and contacting could be done, also a regular newsletter issued, if more funds were available. It was therefore decided to appeal for donations to finance organisational and propaganda work. (FREETHINKER readers may help our very deserving Ghanaian friends by sending donations or literature—also a prime necessity—to the secretary, Lieut. R. C. K. Hewlett, R43 Huhunya Road, Koforidua, Ghana.)

A small library has been established, mainly through gifts from overseas and books are available for loan to all members. The position accorded to religious instruction in schools was discussed at great length and a letter giving the Group's views was sent to the Minister of Education (with a copy to Dr. Nkrumah).

It was decided that literature advertising the Group should be distributed to schools, colleges and libraries. The secretary should contact organisations experienced in issuing news-letters and decide on the most economical way of doing this.

The conference closed with a public lecture (given by Lieut. Hewlett) and a discussion. DAVE SHIPPER.

OMAR KHAYYAM OR EDWARD FITZGERALD?

(Concluded from page 155)

life in another world, should have had the tremendous success Fitzgerald's *Omar* has had in a Christian world? Is it merely the subtle artistry of the poet and not his thought which has captured our imagination? Is it not actually because—perhaps—that after all, those of us who are alive know something at least of this world of ours, and nothing whatever of the world to come?

The Rubaiyat is a work of genius—and it is supremely secular. That is, it is on the side of Freethought and not on the side of religion.

THE FREETHINKER

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

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

TO CORRESPONDENTS

WM. H. HOPKINS.—The Catholic Church may be pro-Socialist in one place, pro-Tory in another, pro-Fascist elsewhere, but, depend upon it, is always in the last analysis pro-Catholic.

H. MACANDREW.—You can become a member of the N.S.S. without being active. Moral and financial support count too. Membership would be confidential.

F. RYDER.—Our attack on religion takes in all religions. Christianity happens to be the one we are beset with here.

W. E. HOLT.—We do not attack God; we attack the God idea.

A.F.B.—The story of the Virgin Birth came in the popular Christianity of the 2nd century, when the Churches decided to give their god a local habitation and a name.

Miss E. CLAY.—The saying, "I do not believe in ghosts but I am still afraid of them," is attributed to Mme. de Stael.

D. AYRES.—Colonel Ingersoll would probably have become Governor of Illinois but for his freethought opinions.

R. PEACE.—Prior to the 17th century, blasphemy came within the purview of the ecclesiastical courts. Then came the Statute of William III, described by Lord Justice Coleridge as ferocious and inhuman.

F. BUTLER.—The universe as a whole is not wearing out. Expenditure and replenishment co-exist.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (rear of Morley Street Car Park).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: H. DAY.

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.: Various speakers.

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.

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

N.S.S. Conference Demonstration (The Downs, Bristol).—Sunday, May 17th, 6.15 p.m.: Various speakers. Chairman, J. W. BARKER.

INDOOR

Oxford University Humanist Group (Worcester Memorial Room).—Tuesday, May 19th, 8.15 p.m.: BRIAN WALDEN, B.A., "Humanism and Socialism."

Notes and News

UNTIL Freethinker M. Vincent Auriol became French President just after the war, the Elysées Palace had always had a private chapel. M. Auriol had it converted into four offices (*Evening Standard*, 17/4/59). Understandably, Roman Catholic General de Gaulle feels the need for a chapel in the Presidential residence and so one of the offices is to be consecrated. The other three, however, will be retained as offices; so M. Auriol's labour was not entirely in vain.

THE days of religious persecution are far from over, particularly in countries with strong Catholic areas. One

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £195 12s.; W.H.D., 2s. 6d.; C. J. Cleary, 5s.; Anon, 1s.; H.C., 4s.—Total to date, May 8th, £196 4s. 6d.

of our FREETHINKER contributors would appear to have fallen foul of this sort of thing, and now finds himself made "redundant" by his Catholic employers. An Englishman himself, he has been 13 years in technical purchasing for power stations, speaks French fluently and has two minor City and Guilds technical certificates. If any of our readers could help in finding him work in this country it would be highly appreciated.

★

WE hear plenty about the odd few highly suspect cases of answers to prayers to the B.V.M. and her right-hand woman, St. Bernadette of Lourdes. We now have to report a completely authenticated case where a prayer was not answered. Gerrard George Griffiths was sentenced to 2½ years' imprisonment by the Old Bailey Recorder on April 14th, 1959. In nine months, Griffiths had robbed the Post Office, by forgery, of £800. Before each forgery he knelt and prayed to Bernadette for help in these touching terms: "Dear Bernadette, please help me to get some money and don't let me be caught." (*Daily Mail*, 15/4/59.) Upon hearing which the Recorder, Sir Gerald Dobson, commented: "I am told you are in the habit of seeking guidance from some higher authority. So far as post offices are concerned, you apparently need none. You seem to go there naturally and almost by instinct."

★

THE Greek Government has found it necessary to interfere in some rather unsavoury affairs of the Orthodox Church. According to an April 12th despatch to the *Daily Telegraph*, there was formerly "the keenest competition among Greek bishops as to who should occupy the wealthiest sees, where their income from marriage and divorce fees is apparently enormous." Parliament estimated the revenue of the Primate, the Archbishop of Athens, as £18,000 a year "from these sources and other benefits." The new Bill "abolishes all transfers of bishops from their sees except for three principal dioceses in Salonika, Patras and Jannena" and empowers the Government to alter the election procedure for archbishops and bishops or even suspend the Holy Synod if necessary.

★

THE Annual Conference of the Rationalist Press Association will be held at Girton College, Cambridge, from Friday, August 7th, until Tuesday, August 11th. This year's theme is to be *Humanism in Everyday Life* and among the speakers are Dr. Cyril Bibby, Dr. Philip M. Bloom, Miss Kathleen Nott, and Mr. R. W. Sorensen, M.P. Members of the National Secular Society are cordially invited to attend at the reduced fee of £7 available to R.P.A. members. Further particulars may be obtained on application to the Secretary of the R.P.A., 40 Drury Lane, London, W.C.2.

★

READERS who were unable to see the 59 Theatre Company's production of *Danton's Death*, by Georg Büchner, at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith (THE FREETHINKER, 27/2/59) will be glad to know that this play is to be shown on BBC Television, in the World Theatre series, on Tuesday, May 19th, at 9.15 p.m.

NEXT WEEK

THE MARWOOD CASE

By F. A. RIDLEY

The Good Civil Servant

By PETER F. MOORE

AMONG THE MANY SURPRISING THINGS one discovers if one studies Niccolo Machiavelli is the dichotomy between his life and his writings. In time some psychologist will get around to making a study of this double nature: on the one hand the political theorist and founder of the *realpolitik* school; on the other, the old fashioned republican civil servant who was singularly unsuccessful. Machiavelli was a Florentine in that city's heyday. He was a contemporary of da Vinci, Michelangelo and many others who became immortals. His diplomatic career was normal, and he became Assistant Secretary of State in 1498 at the age of 30. Then, in 1512, he took the wrong side and the Medici forced him into retirement, where he wrote *The Prince* and his not generally known *Discourses on Livy*. In 1518 the Medici commissioned him to write an official history of the city, and to advise on constitutional problems. 1527 saw a temporary expulsion of the Medici, but Machiavelli was passed over for his old post on the grounds that *The Prince* had taught the Medici things they otherwise wouldn't have known. (Considering the family career, there could not have been much left for *The Prince* to teach them!) He died a bare few weeks later.

"Machiavellian" has passed into the language, via Thomas Cromwell, meaning any form of cunning and evil. As early as the 1570's, La Noue, an old Huguenot cavalry captain, complained that in France the young read nothing but romances of chivalry and their elders read nothing but Machiavelli, to the ruin of good faith among neighbours and subjects. Kit Marlowe makes Machiavelli prologue to *The Jew of Malta*. And Shakespeare's caricature of Richard of Gloucester boasts that he will "change shapes with Proteus for advantage. And set the murderous Machiavel to school." (*Henry VI*, Part III, Act III, Scene II.) There are many other references in sixteenth century literature to this unsavoury reputation.

The question as to whether it is justified raises one great problem of all political theory and practice: Are politics inside or outside the moral law? Is there even a moral law at all? Machiavelli was the first to say bluntly that politics are outside, and governed by laws of necessity, which may or may not coincide with what is generally held to be "good." *The Prince* gives a complete and beautifully written guide to those who wish for power. It tells them nothing that they do not know already, but it codifies that knowledge. The danger is that it gets into the hands of the "wrong" people! Indeed, Machiavelli, with his curious failure to grasp the mechanical advances of his time, did not seem to realise that once in print it would be available to all who could read, and the essence of *The Prince* is that its doctrines should be known only to a few. Witness the dialogue between the thief and the judge.

Judge: How could you steal from those who trust you?

Thief: It's no good trying to steal from those who don't, your honour.

But this is only a part of the teaching. There is much sound sense. It is held that once having obtained power, it can only be maintained by legal and just government: "Despoil no private citizen of his goods or womenfolk." The famous passages on lies and murder warn that if they are over-used they defeat their own object. But those who hold that Machiavelli did not mean what he said about the nature of power can have no knowledge of Renaissance Italy, where murder, civil war and revolution were commonplace and were pursued with a good conscience. These things were

done outside Italy, too, but the Feudal system, with its theoretical laws, held sway in the rest of Europe, and such things were held to be wicked. They were carried on with a guilt complex which made open discussion distasteful. Voltaire was right when he attributed horror of *The Prince* to hypocrisy.

Although this book has achieved great notoriety, its companion, *The Discourses on Livy*, gives a fuller picture of Machiavelli's thinking. It was the book which got him put on the Roman *Index*. In one passage he makes a pointed reference to the failure of the Baglioni of Perugia to murder Pope Julius II when they had the opportunity in 1505. Yet Machiavelli's whole attitude to religion is, to say the least, ambiguous. He was not concerned with Christian values; he considered them impractical. But he held that religion was a necessity to the State. It was not important whether it was Christian or Pagan, just as long as its form is maintained and the lower orders convinced that everything is proper and immutable. A typical commercial outlook, in fact. The ruling class are above law, but unless stability is maintained trade will collapse. A good civil servant must uphold the State at all costs. However, the ruling class must beware of being sold by their own propaganda, and religion must be in the hands of the State, which can wield it for business purposes, not in the hands of a Roman Church who wish to use the power to maintain a land-based economy which forbids usury: a law loathsome to all good Florentines.

Hence Machiavelli as Italian nationalist hero! He saw that a united Italy would crush the Papacy and give civil servants and traders much more scope. But Machiavelli wasn't the only nationalist. One Cesare Borgia, not unknown to history, had matured plans for throwing out both France and Spain, though his methods occasioned some disquiet! It is sure that *The Prince* and sections of the *Discourses* were based on the career of Cesare. There is an account in the Everyman edition of the famous trap at Senigalia, an instructive but amoral affair involving the removal of some Roman nobles to "a happier place." The influence of the Borgia is to be seen in the instruction about allowing the unpleasant things to be undertaken by servants who can be punished afterwards. The Ruler will thus obtain a reputation for justice, and get his own way at one and the same time.

Another neglected volume is the *Art of War*, written after Machiavelli had been called upon to resurrect the Florentine city militia in 1506. It is significant that he was so keen to keep the officers from wielding too much power that nobody had any power at all, and chaos reigned. Only the great condottiere, Giovanni Della Bandre Nerrie, could make order out of it. Still, despite his failure to find a cure, Machiavelli made a very accurate diagnosis of the disease of war, *viz.*, "Generals make far too good a living for there to be any real peace."

The weakness in all Machiavelli's work springs from his love of Republican Rome and the classical world in general. He always assumed that the solution lay in a return to that ideal. Yet this love of the ancient world is also his great strength, for it gave him the length of view to grasp the essential nature of politics. It is a pity he never wrote on that other great historian who had a similar fate, Thucydides, whose *History of the Peloponnesian War* bears out Machiavelli's contentions.

Whatever his shortcoming as a diplomat and a soldier and his failure to grasp the technical future, Machiavelli remains one of the greatest of political thinkers. It wasn't the novelty of his ideas which made him an unknowing revolutionary, but the way he looked at fundamental problems and, what is more, made others look too. And, despite the pious horror of the respectable, the *realpolitik* school has gained ground. To my knowledge, Machiavelli has never been properly countered. Thomas Hobbes, Spinoza, and the French eighteenth-century thinkers regarded him highly. And many revolutionaries have regarded *The Prince* as holy writ. It has never been proved wrong, but it has often been misapplied. It does not give licence; it is merely a pointer to the factors which do, in fact, govern politics.

Modern thought has been swinging in favour of Machiavelli ever since the unification of Italy in 1870. He enjoys a distinguished posthumous fame. From a melodramatic villain in the reign of Elizabeth I to a gentle humanist in the reign of Elizabeth II. Neither assessment is true.

Paul Louis Couchoud

By C. BRADLAUGH BONNER

IT WAS WITH GREAT REGRET that I learned of the death of my friend Couchoud, *mon cher maître*. Like his great friend, Prosper Alfarc, he was a man of great personal charm, immense erudition and admirable uprightness, whom it was a privilege and a joy to know.

A Doctor of Medicine and Agrégé (equivalent in academic importance to Fellow) of the University of France, he had been medical adviser to Anatole France, who encouraged him to follow courses on biblical criticism at the Sorbonne, and showed a lively interest in his studies of Christian origins. In the 1920's he wrote *Le Mystère de Jésus*, published by Watts in English under the title *The Enigma of Jesus*. This was the third of a series of studies of Christian origins of which Couchoud was the General Editor; the first was a history of Christianity by Houtin, several were by Turmel, whose centenary will be celebrated next year at Rennes, and the tenth was on Orphism by André Boulanger, whose death occurred earlier this year. It was a remarkable series; remarkable also in that the publishers, Rieder, were able to market 8,000 or more copies of any of the works. Couchoud edited also a series on Judaism; among the authors are to be found Zangwill, Zweig, Halevy and E. and J. Vandervelde.

It was his study of the Apocalypse which I had the honour of translating, and two years later, in 1933, his great work on *The Creation of Christ*, which included a translation of "Jesus the God made into a Man" (*Jésus le dieu fait homme*) and a reconstruction of the Gospel of Marcion. His limpid and effective style made his work a pleasure to translate and this labour brought me into contact with the author, to my great benefit.

For him, as for Alfarc, there never was a man Jesus Christ. The god Jesus was gradually formed over a period of about three centuries, beginning with the Book of Daniel, c. B.C. 160, and reaching completion in the gospel of Luke. Hence, Jesus is something far removed from the subject of Renan's story. In a sense, wrote Couchoud, Jesus is more real than any man, just on Don Quixote is more real than Cervantes himself or any of his Spanish contemporaries. The pretence that Jesus was an historic personage is not met with before the second century A.D.; he is a composite character; of such stuff are the gods.

Some readers of this brief notice may recall that in 1947 Couchoud spoke at the conference held by the World Union of Freethinkers at the Conway Hall, London, when

it was my pleasure to be his chairman. I appreciated that he should speak from the same platform as his translator, for, as the Italians have it, *traduttore e traditore* (translator is traitor).

The Germans had seized his clinic and most of his belongings; the new French government took over what the Germans had already taken, promising ample recompense to our friend, which he had the greatest difficulty in obtaining; in fact, I do not know if he did receive all that was his due. Then his wife died and he himself fell seriously ill. His sister was a fervent Catholic. He found himself poor, ill and alone. It is to the credit of the Rationalist Press Association that it made him a grant which helped to alleviate his situation. Yet he never ceased his studies, and here it may be noted that he published also volumes on Spinoza, Pascal, Asiatic Sages, etc., for his interests were wide.

During the past year, bedridden, he yet was preparing a new French edition of Marcion's Evangelion (Gospel). Early this year when I wrote him, I gathered that this work was nearing completion; I fear that it was not concluded.

Couchoud and Alfarc were about the same age; Alfarc was 77 when he died four years ago; Couchoud was 80 this year. They remain linked in my memory not only for the similarity of their work, but as two of the noblest characters I have met.

CORRESPONDENCE

LOURDES

The criticism by "Medicate" of the C.T.S. pamphlet on "Lourdes" is a jumble of quite inaccurate data from the pamphlet and vague speculation concerning the treatment of T.B. peritonitis. Your critic is quite wrong in saying that a *laparotomy cannot cure anything*. If he had himself attended patients suffering from T.B. peritonitis in hospitals, as I have, he would have learned the truth of the remark on page 13 of the pamphlet, "Sometimes a laparotomy has the effect of causing the disease to get less severe and recede." I have attended patients suffering from tubercular peritonitis, who have had the "bed, open air and nourishing diet," until their abdomens filled with fluid, their temperatures rose and they vomited frequently in great pain, and were given morphia by me until death was a final release. These patients were treated by me in hospitals in England, and so I understand and accept as true the statements made by the various doctors who attended both Mlle. Fretel and Marie Baillie. Their descriptions ring true and come within my personal experience of persons suffering from this disease. I also selected these two cases because they arrived in Lourdes *in extremis* and made spontaneous recoveries. They appear to have reached the point of no return as far as medical experience goes and then recovered their full mental faculties, observed the disappearance of their grossly distended abdomens, begun to eat anything offered to them and recovered their physical strength at a truly astounding rate.

If your critic had taken the trouble to read Alexis Carrel's *Journey to Lourdes* (Hamish Hamilton), he would have seen that even in 1903, Carrel sets forth the well-known surgical treatment of incising the abdomen and letting out the fluid from the grossly distended abdomen in the hope that this would help the recession of the disease. This "laparotomy" would also have confirmed the nature of the disease, and this, of course, was done in the later case of Mlle. Fretel (1941).

Your critic is quite wrong in stating that Mlle. Fretel had had injections of streptomycin *six weeks previously* (i.e. to the cure), when the article specifically mentions the fact that the streptomycin had been *discontinued four months* before the sudden cure. This fact was attested by 20 doctors who signed the report. Another blatant error made by him is that Mlle. Fretel was given Communion at the same time as she was being immersed in the waters for the *third time*. To put it mildly, these misquotations show a gross disregard for the carefully worded article.

This gross error will cause amusement to all Catholics who have bathed in the waters at Lourdes, and who know that Communion can *never* be administered at the same time. The article quite definitely states that the cure of Mlle. Fretel occurred during Mass before the altar of St. Bernadette, when, of course, the priest had to come down from the altar to administer Communion to the faithful.

It would seem that your free-thinking critic merely pushed away the pamphlet and began writing anything that came into his freely-thinking brain. His total disregard for the medical authorities on the spot, namely, Prof. Pelle, of Rennes, and Dr. Hylli, of Landvisiau, in the case of Mlle. Fretel, and Prof. Alexis Carrel, the Nobel Prize winner, in the case of Marie Baillie, gives us some idea of his free-thinking capacity.

"Medicate's" choice of peptic ulcer as an alternative diagnosis to tubercular peritonitis in these two cases shows how grossly ignorant he is of practical medicine and surgery. If these two persons had suffered from peptic ulcer and had travelled to Lourdes *in extremis* suffering from grossly distended abdomens, vomiting and in great pain, the on-the-spot diagnosis would have been hopeless general peritonitis due to perforation of the ulcer and their spontaneous recovery without operation would have been accepted by all practising surgeons and physicians as equally miraculous. (Dr.) N. C. HYPHER.

COMMENTS ON THE ABOVE

Though I was not responsible for the article Dr. Hypher is criticising, his letter prompts me to make a few comments. I shall confine these to the case of Jeanne Fretel.

First, though Medicate's wording is a little ambiguous, he did not mean that Mlle. Fretel had had injections of streptomycin six weeks previous to the cure, but that she had had them for a six weeks' period—previously, *i.e.* before the cure. This is correct: she had them from April 16th to May 29th, 1948. Medicate is thus right in saying that she had had medical treatment though, as Dr. Hypher says, this was discontinued four months before the cure. The Doctor also makes great play of the alleged "blatant" or "gross" error that "Mlle. Fretel was given Communion *at the same time* as she was being immersed." But again, Medicate does not say this. "On her being immersed" might have been better expressed as "On her having been immersed," but it needs a very special reading to interpret it as "at the same time as being immersed." And while we are on inaccuracies, let us take one of Dr. Hypher's—or the C.T.S. "carefully worded article." According to Dr. D. J. West's examination of the Lourdes dossier, the Fretel report was signed, not by 20, but by 28 doctors.

But these are minor matters. What is surprising is that Dr. Hypher should accept the Fretel cure so unqualifiedly and pour scorn on Medicate's doubts and suggested alternative. Dr. West (*Eleven Lourdes Miracles*) confirms that "the diagnosis of tuberculous peritonitis... rests entirely upon clinical impressions. The patient's abdomen was opened about six times, but there is no mention of any attempt to utilise these opportunities to confirm

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the diagnosis by histological and bacteriological examination of the biopsy material. There is not even a description of the superficial appearance of the abdominal organs... no report of any bacteriological examinations of pus from her fistulae... no mention of any inoculation of fluid found in her abdomen at operation into a guinea pig, although this test could have clinched the diagnosis of tuberculosis." Dr. West describes the absence of any easily obtainable objective bacteriological evidence of T.B. as "curious." And he comments on a letter of Dr. Debroise of Rennes (who examined Jeanne Fretel at Lourdes): "If these statements do give a true picture of medical methods in certain parts of France... it is highly regrettable from the point of view of the investigator of unusual cures—and perhaps even more regrettable from the point of view of the sick patient." "On the information given," he says, "no one could feel much confidence in the diagnosis." And "On the unsatisfactory, jumbled and occasionally inconsistent information available no definite scientific statement can be made about Jeanne Fretel's condition."

Dr. West gives five possible diagnoses which would be consistent with the case history, and among them is ulcerative colitis. So perhaps Medicate wasn't so "grossly ignorant" after all. Certainly he isn't as credulous as some Catholic doctors can be.

COLIN MCCALL

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