



transformation (recently described in a well-documented article in these columns by Mr. C. Bradlaugh Bonner) may have been due to the intercession of the Virgin — or to the historic and technical backwardness of the country. Anyway, whatever happens about Russia on May 13th, the Virgin's interplanetary trip was apparently not entirely wasted!

In the present writer's opinion, a most important fact about the Fatima episode is the name of the obscure hamlet where it transpired. For Fatima is the woman in the Muslim creed who most resembles the Virgin Mary in that of Christianity. She was the only daughter of the Prophet Muhammed to survive and produce offspring, who later became Khalifs and Sultans in Islam. Presumably, the Muslim Moors who occupied Portugal during the Dark Ages, named the village after Muhammed's daughter who

held a status not unlike that of Mary in Catholic Christianity amongst several heretical Muslim Fatima sects. It appears to be rather more than a coincidence that Mary should appear in a place named after her Muslim opposite number. A local Muslim cult may have left traces there. The Vatican does nothing for nothing. Is, as Bishop Fulton V. Sheen recently suggested at Fatima, "our Lady of Fatima destined to be the bridge between Rome and 200 millions of Muslims who believe in God but not yet in Christ"? Is Fatima already marked out on Vatican maps as the starting point of a new alliance between Rome and Mecca against the common enemy, "atheistic communism"? It seems to be not impossible. But even if so, we do not think that this particular secret is likely to come out of the sealed box containing the Virgin's revelations at Coimbra upon May 13th, 1960.

## Old Gods for New

By LESLIE HANGER

SOME MONTHS AGO THE FREETHINKER carried an article about the attempt to revive the ancient religion of Mithra in present-day London. To the impartial student of European history it is a little surprising that Christianity should have triumphed over Mithraism in the first instance. As far as that goes, why did Europe go to Asia for any god, Jesus, Mithra or what have you? On Mount Olympus there lived in happy anarchy, a delightful variety of gods, each and every one worthy of adoration. But, if the solution to the sins and ethical shortcomings of the present day are to be found in the revival of an antique cult, I see no reason to go outside the bounds of Britain. There are two dieties, a god in Dorset and a goddess in Somerset, who have all the necessary attributes for the job.

When the Romans built their city of Bath they found the site presided over by the goddess Sulis whom, with the open-minded tolerance of pagan culture, they accepted and identified with their own Minerva. A hint here for the modern missionary who might have better success if he converted pagan dieties into Christian saints! In 1927 excavations revealed a bronze head of Sulis-Minerva, a beautiful work in the finest tradition of Greek art, which it is easy to visualise as an object of worship. Serenely self-confident, the goddess commands respect and adoration but does not invite extravagant praise from self-abasing celebrants. Hers is a face backed by the wisdom of the Stoics, tempered by the reason of the Epicureans and the judgment of the Sceptics. In short, a goddess for civilised men, worth all the Madonnas put together.

About 40 miles further south, on a Dorset hillside at Cerne Abbas, is another candidate for divine leadership of a new religion. Cut in outline in the chalk hillside is the figure of a man 180 feet high, brandishing a ragged club 120 feet long; and what is no doubt his chief attribute, a phallus of 30 feet. Here again we have a Celtic god named Helith, romanised to Hercules, though known today as the Cerne Giant. As a work of art it is not remarkable, though it has a certain primitive vigour which some modern art critics might find acceptable, and a sense of movement that is very difficult to achieve in that medium. It may have been in existence when Julius Caesar landed, but its resemblance to examples of native art executed under Roman influence suggests it was cut during the third century when the emperor Commodus revived the cult of Hercules. The most remarkable thing about the Cerne Giant is that it continued to exist throughout the centuries, for such figures cannot survive unless they are periodically scoured, a work of some considerable labour. The only explanation is that the people of Dorset held to their faith

in Helith, in some shape or form, down to recent times. No doubt they were convinced that the fertility of crops and stock depended on Helith. Perhaps their own fertility, too, for a woman wishing to bear children had only to spend a night on the hillside with the Giant to have her wish fulfilled, a custom which is said to survive today. What efforts were made to suppress this survival of paganism with the coming of Christianity is not known, but the monks of Cerne must have been less than pleased to have this Phallic idol in full view of their abbey. A day's hard work would have obliterated it, in a year or two it would have been overgrown and lost for ever. This was never done, and it can be assumed that they found it convenient to ignore the cult so long as the Church was not openly defied.

Christianity, with its reluctant tolerance of sex as a necessary evil, is at a disadvantage under such circumstances and, for that reason, Helith is still a possibility for anyone wishing to start a new religion. His manly, virile figure would look well on television, films and the popular Press and, as successful religions are always reactionary, his personification of primeval force would be welcomed as a counter-blast to the bewildering progress of this scientific age.

However, to be entirely successful, a religion must be all things to all men, it must appeal to the intellect and the emotions and have something for everyone from eggheads to morons. If it were possible to persuade Minerva of Bath to spend a night on the hill with Helith I am sure that such a union would produce a diety which would sweep the world. But alas, Minerva is impervious to the passion of love!

### CHRISTIANS AND HUMANISTS AT OXFORD

THE *Daily Telegraph* (3rd and 4th February) carried very good reports of the lively Oxford University lectures arranged by Christians and Humanists. The former's star performer was Dr. Ramsey, Archbishop of York; the latter's, Mrs. Margaret Knight, who was her usual forthright self. Dr. Lee, vicar of the University church of St. Mary the Virgin, is reported as saying that the Humanist Group were "rather lightweight," but they seem to have kept the Archbishop on his toes when they questioned him. And Dr. Ramsey "said he was a humanist in the classical sense in which Erasmus was 'a person who cares greatly for human beings and the human race' . . . [but] this was rather different from the modern interpretation of the word."

# Father Abraham

By H. CUTNER

ONE OF OUR DISTINGUISHED HUMANISTS, Mr. A. D. Howell Smith has, after over 50 years of Freethought, put it on record that in his opinion Abraham of the Bible — it is interesting to note that there is never another Abraham in that pious volume — was an historical person, and that anybody who imagines that he was a "myth," a fiction, is utterly wrong. Like so many of our very reverent Humanists, he no doubt would like to bury those aggressive Freethinkers (like myself) who find very little historical truth in the Book of God, and who, as in this case, are quite sure that Abraham is merely a "personification" of some natural phenomena.

When I pointed out to Mr. Howell Smith that even Paul — or whoever wrote the Epistles attributed to Paul — looked upon the story of Abraham and Sarah and his "handmaiden" as an allegory, that is, a fiction, he came back with: this does not alter its literal truth. His reply reminded me of a note in one of the latest "theological" works I have been reading, *A Critical Introduction to the Old Testament* by Prof. G. W. Anderson (1959), a work I may deal with in a future article. It is,

The arbitrary nature of this type of interpretation is aptly illustrated by Denney's account of a sermon preached by Spurgeon on, "Return return, O Shulamite." "He said he did not know whether the voice was that of Christ calling to a backsliding Church, or that of the old companions of the Church calling her away from Christ; but to be sure of getting the truth, he preached on it quite earnestly first in one sense, and then in the other!" (*Letters of Principal Denney to W. Robertson Nicoll*.)

Fortunately for Freethought, this double way of dealing with Bible problems is mostly the prerogative of Christians or of people who have not yet thrown off the shackles of religion in general, and of the Bible in particular.

Just as they managed to get into the Bible the idea that "the Jews" were God's Chosen People — a piece of arrant nonsense only kept alive these days by Fundamentalists — so the compilers of the Bible managed to give the impression that Abraham was the "Father" of the Jewish "race." As a matter of simple fact, when God changed his name from Abram to Abraham, it was because "a father of many nations have I made thee." As Robert Taylor pointed out, "This passage alone is fatal to the pretence of the people called Jews, or of any other particular nation, to be called the descendants or children of Abraham; since he was not to be the founder of a nation, or any peculiar people, but 'a father of many nations,' the common progenitor of all the families of the earth." And, of course, if Abraham had his name changed, so had Sarah — she was to be "a mother of nations, kings of people shall be of her." Any British-Israelite will vigorously claim and prove that this "prophecy" has been fulfilled in the British race and its kings and queens. They are all descended from Abraham and Sarah particularly Queen Elizabeth II.

That the whole story of Abraham is pure fiction can be seen at once in the fact that his "father" is "Terah" which, in spite of the pious protestations of reverent Humanists, is merely another form of "Terra" — the Earth. And of course he came from "Ur of the Chaldees" though, in actual fact, the word translated "Chaldees" is in the Hebrew "Chasdim," meaning Magicians or Astrologers. And it cannot too strongly be impressed on readers that very nearly every name in the Bible was made up, that is, they are the inventions of the Bible writers. They have a definite meaning in accordance with what they do; and if we understand them, they give the clue to their

"personifications." Why should the name Abram which merely means "the Father of Elevation" be changed to Abraham which certainly means the "exalted" Father?

Robert Taylor claimed that Abraham was a kind of personification of Saturn, and he gives what are, to me at least, perfectly valid reasons. He claims also that "Our Father which art in Heaven" in the so-called Lord's Prayer was none other than Abraham, for neither the name of Lord nor of God occurs once in the prayer. But, of course, he was much more than just Saturn. In writing or working up the Bible stories, the compilers drew on all sorts of legends and myths, and even true stories from other nations. Abraham was, says Robert Taylor, "the original Abram-Esrael, or Angel of Death of the Chaldeans." He was the *Israel* of the ancient Phoenecians who said that the name of Saturn was also Israel — just as we find God named as the God of Abraham or the God of Israel, thus confounding the two names. Saturn married his sister just as Abraham did; and just as Saturn was ready to offer his son Jeoud as a burnt sacrifice, so Abraham was ready to sacrifice his son Isaac. And, of course, the "seed of Abraham" was bound to be like "the stars of heaven" — countless.

There are still many more remarkable proofs that Abraham was a personification of Saturn — and in some ways also of the Sun; but it would require a big book to show this — not just a small article in these columns. But let us see what the *Encyclopedia Biblica* which, though very sceptical, is still on the side of the Angels — much more so than on the side of Freethought — has to say.

And first there is the declaration that Abraham to J and E (that is, to the "old Hebrew historical documents") "is not so much a historical personage as an ideal type of character." The writer is the Rev. T. K. Cheyne, and he adds that "the framework of the narrative may be derived from myths and legends." Dr. Cheyne shows how the "narrative" was written up, and he has again to admit that "the tradition as it stands is doubtless inadmissible," though "historically also the narratives of Abraham have a claim to our attention." He quotes Robertson Smith, "we may regard Sarah as a feminine corresponding to Israel," and "we may take the marriage between Abraham and Sarah (or rather Sarai) to symbolise the political fusion between a Southern Israelitish tribe and non-Israelitish clans to the south of Hebron. The relationship between Abraham and Hagar may also have a political meaning." Cheyne does his best, however, to preserve some "history" in the story of Abraham even if there never was an Abraham. As a member of the Church of England he was perhaps not able to do anything else. The real point to note is that he does *not* believe in the "historicity" of Abraham.

And finally. Any careful reader of the biblical story will have noted how some of the incidents in the "life" of Abraham are duplicated as well as being more or less repeated in the life of Isaac. "We are twice told that Abraham passed his wife off as his sister," says Prof. Anderson, "once in Egypt, and again in Gerar. A similar story is told of how Hagar was driven out from Abraham's

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—NEXT WEEK—

LIBERTY: AN ODE

By ALEXANDER PUSHKIN

## This Believing World

The various opinions expressed by physicists and astronomers that our Earth may not be the only inhabited planet in the Universe has naturally caused great concern to a number of "men of God" who feel that they are left out of the picture unless Jesus and his Churches can be shoved in somewhere. If there are any "little green men" on Mars, or "glamorous females" on Venus, they must have souls, and therefore they would have to be saved; and the only Saviour in the whole of the galaxies is Jesus Christ. The sooner therefore the inhabitants of other planets realise this, the better for their immortal souls.

★

Dr. D. Soper insists that in the other worlds, "if you find similar physical conditions you will find similar moral and social problems. And you would therefore find there a Christ . . . who was the galactic photograph of God . . ." And of course, Fr. Christie claims — and he ought to know — "that if God has created creatures elsewhere, we may be sure he has a relationship with them . . ." It is all so beautifully in harmony with "Revelation," the true Revelation, given only to the Church of Christ. Have these people really outgrown the *Arabian Nights*?

★

Every now and then we find that, in spite of Jesus and many famous spirit doctors helping "spirit" healers like Mr. Harry Edwards (whose faith in Jesus is always touching) the unfortunate patient dies. For example, a 15-year-old boy, Billy Clark, died of a brain tumour in spite of "faith-healing treatment," we learn from the *Kentish Mercury*. What with a coma following pneumonia, Jesus and the spirit doctors were completely powerless — but of course hundreds of thousands of cases of unnamed and unknown patients have been cured of pneumonia and coma in the past by a mere touch of the marvellous hands of our (always) "well-known" healers. The *Kentish Mercury* should be severely admonished for thus giving us particulars of one of the failures.

★

A glance at a Bible Concordance will prove that whatever evils Jesus attacked, cruelty to animals was not one of them. As a matter of fact, he never once even used the word "animal." However, the Rev. E. K. L. Quine of Leicester tells readers of the *Leicester Mercury* that a German writer, Julius Boehmer, once discovered a Coptic manuscript — which has since disappeared — in which Jesus is shown "rebuking" a man for ill-treating a mule which was being badly injured. "Our Lord" promptly touched the animal which immediately became well; and this proves beyond the shadow of doubt that Jesus did care for animals. No doubt Mr. Quine now believes that "our Lord" was the greatest animal lover who ever lived.

★

Still, even if the story — like the one of the Woman Taken in Adultery — is a fake, it is so like the spirit of Jesus and Christianity, pleads Mr. Quine. So even if not true, it should be believed. We never get parsons in the same way pleading for the truth of "our Lord" cursing a fig tree because that is so like the spirit of Jesus and Christianity. The cry raised against cruelty to both children and animals — and let us never forget that the infamous torturers are almost always fervent Christians — is a purely secular one. It is not Christianity but Secularism in practice.

★

So "Daddy Grace," one of the best known of America's negro preachers has just died, and is, no doubt in the opinion of all his 3,000,000 (or more) followers, safe in the arms of Jesus. His claim was — he said so himself —

that he was "the only saviour, the world's chief cornerstone," and "the world will end when he is gone." When he spoke, angels took his words down in shorthand. If this kind of hopeless and ignorant credulity shocks us, we should never forget that it is part of the Christian heritage. Daddy Grace never said anything sillier than the drivel which came from dozens of parsons in the Press and on the radio and TV this last Christmas.

★

The Rev. Simon Phipps came in the other Sunday on ITV's "About Religion" with the astonishing statement that Jesus never "drew the line" at anybody — all, all were welcome. Yet he is shown in God's Precious Word cursing the Pharisees — what for, God knows, for nobody else does. If Mr. Phipps disagrees, let him tell us why the "money changers" in the Temple were attacked by Jesus with (we think) a whip. Did "our Lord" never draw the line at them?

## Secularism and Society

A POX OF SWASTIKAS on synagoges. A plague of discrimination against negroes. It goes on all the time in Christian countries. It happens especially in Christian countries. Yet Christians have the temerity to hail these events as pagan atavisms, and long for a revival of Christianity.

Can anyone really be surprised at anti-Semitism who has read the New Testament — how the Jews issued a curse on themselves before Pilate's judgment seat, and how Jesus endorsed it on the via dolorosa? Can anyone who knows anything about ghettos and pogroms claim Christians as the champions of Jews? Or who recalls that Hitler, elected to office in a Christian country, had ten years earlier proclaimed that the extermination of Jews was the work of the Lord? For as often as Christians break the bread and drink the wine they show forth the Lord's death till He come. Who can be murdered without a murderer? And it is impossible to go on celebrating a crime without building up (not to put too fine a point on the matter) a distaste for the criminal. Nor can anyone who accepts Noah as first saviour of the human race afford to ignore his curse on Canaan — the traditional ancestor of the negroes.

Religion was born with regionalism, grew up with nationalism, and came to maturity with imperialism. It is very difficult for a religious fanatic to have a world view, save in terms of proselytism. And proselytism is always on the threshold of aggression. It is equally difficult to visualise world peace without world government; or world government in a world torn by religious antagonisms. But self-interest makes strange bed-fellows. And we hope that Catholics and Communists will come to prefer coalitions to corpses. For Secularists the long-range view is a rational approach to human problems on which alone can ultimate stability rest.

D. H. TRIBE.

## FATHER ABRAHAM

(Concluded from previous page)

household . . ." And, naturally, he points out that "the Pentateuch in its present form comes from a later age than that of Moses."

I am quite certain that nothing in this article will have the slightest effect on any of our reverent Humanists. Abraham, like Jesus, is an historical character — that is the "modern" view, and we should move with the times. Atheism, Secularism, Rationalism, are outmoded. Well, well. For myself, I can only add that through the years my scepticism has been more and more confirmed. I neither believe in Jesus nor in Abraham as historical characters.

# THE FREETHINKER

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Inquiries regarding Secular Funeral Services should also be made to the General Secretary, N.S.S.

## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### OUTDOOR

- Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (The Mound).—Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. CRONAN and MURRAY.  
London (Tower Hill).—Every Thursday, 12—2 p.m.: Messrs I. W. BARKER and L. EBURY.  
Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every weekday, 1 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, CORSAIR, SMITH, etc. Sunday, 8 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, MILLS, SMITH, etc.  
Marble Arch Branch N.S.S. (Marble Arch).—Meetings every Sunday, from 4 p.m.: Messrs. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER, C. E. WOOD and D. TRIBE.  
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.: Sunday, 6.30 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

### INDOOR

- Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics Institute) Lecture every Sunday, 7 p.m.  
Central London Branch N.S.S. ("The City of Hereford" Blandford Tuesday, W.1) Sunday, February 21st, 7.15 p.m.: H. JARVIS, D.O., "Freethought in Health and Medicine."  
Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1) Tuesday, February 23rd, 7.15 p.m.: MISS B. SMOKER, "G.B.S. and the A.B.C."  
Leeds and District Humanist Group (City Museum Lecture Hall, Park Row) Monday, February 22nd, 7.30 p.m.: Debate with Christidelphian on "Life After Death."  
Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate,) Sunday, February 21st, 6.30 p.m.: E. TAYLOR, "An Innocent in the U.S.A."  
Marble Arch Branch N.S.S. (formerly West London Branch) (Carpenters' Arms, Seymour Place, off Edgware Road, 3 mins. Marble Arch Station) Sunday, February 21st, 7.30 p.m.: C. MCCALL, "The World Struggle Against Religion."  
North Staffordshire Humanist Group (Guildhall, High Street, Newcastle) Friday, February 19th, 7.15 p.m.: Lecture and Discussion.  
Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Education Centre, Broad Street), Sunday, February 21st, 2.30 p.m.: A Lecture.  
South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1) Sunday, February 21st, 11 a.m.: DR. W. E. SWINTON, "Refugees and Research."  
West Ham & Dist. N.S.S. (Wanstead Community Centre, The Green, E.11) Thursday, February 25th, 7.45 p.m.: J. W. BARKER, "God and his Book."

## Notes and News

THE JANUARY ISSUE of the American Freethought magazine, *Progressive World*, contains an interesting account by Corliss Lamont of his recent trip to Europe. From 1951 to 1958, the State Department refused to renew Dr. Lamont's passport because of his "publicly expressed dissenting views on domestic foreign policy." Finally, he sued John Foster Dulles, won his suit and obtained his passport in 1958, and sailed from New York on the first day of

Spring, 1959. From Dr. Lamont's impressions, we select those dealing with Hyde Park, "where radicals and dissenters and even crackpots can talk their heads off with no interference from the public authorities. There ought to be a Hyde Park of free speech in every city of the world, including our own United States. And as I listened to these orators in London's Hyde Park, I couldn't help reflecting how much better Great Britain had preserved its civil liberties since the end of World War II than had America. To be sure, during this period occasional violations of free speech have taken place in Britain, but the country has experienced nothing comparable to the far-reaching suppressions of our McCarthy era, the consequences of which are still etched deep in almost every sector of American life." Dr. Lamont is Lecturer in Philosophy at Columbia University and will be well known to readers as the author of *The Illusion of Immortality* and *The Philosophy of Humanism*.

★

FOR THIS YEAR'S Conway Memorial Lecture at the Conway Hall on Tuesday, March 15th, 7.30 p.m., the South Place Ethical Society have secured the well-known broadcaster and author, Mrs. Mary Stocks, B.Sc., who will speak on "Youth in an Affluent Society." Mrs. Stocks was formerly Principal of Westfield College, University of London, and has always taken a keen interest in the activities of young people. Mr. R. W. Sorenson, M.P., will be in the Chair.

★

*Republica* OF LISBON has recently printed in its columns a Portuguese version of Mr. C. Bradlaugh Bonner's FREETHINKER article on Ferrer of 6/3/59 heavily censored. In fact, 47 per cent. of it was suppressed, but the censorship was somewhat erratic. Evidently anything adversely critical of Portugal's neighbour Spain and Portugal's Church was to be excised, and so it must have been difficult for the censor to find anything that could be left for the public to read. Nevertheless, that Ferrer was a great and good man, whose execution aroused a storm of indignation throughout the civilised world, and whose memory was last year commemorated at Brussels as one who was a martyr to Freedom of Thought is now known to all readers of *Republica*. Doubtless they can read between the lines.

★

THE LATEST WARNING that Roman Catholicism is losing its grip on Latin America, comes from the Rev. Roger E. Vekemans, Director of the School of Sociology of the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, who should know! Father Vekemans puts much of the blame on Hispanic Catholicism, says *Newsweek* (18/1/60), and its lack of concern with "life in this world." "Since we have a technical civilisation, it's not enough to have a highly devout piously spiritual Catholicism," explains the Father. Moreover, the shortage of priests is acute: 30,000 for some 180 million people and the vacuum is being filled, not only by secularism, but by Communism, native religions, Freemasonry, and the Protestants, who have sent 6,000 missionaries to the continent in "the last few years." So, while Rome can still nominally claim 86 per cent. of Latin Americans, this percentage "is falling rapidly." The area should be treated as a mission territory, concludes Father Vekemans, for "it cannot save itself with its own resources: it needs help."

★

THE GENERAL SECRETARY of the National Secular Society, Mr. Colin McCall, will have his own special Easter celebration this year. On April 16th, the day after Good Friday, he is to be married to Miss June Goodhew of Watford, Herts.

## Controversy

### MR. A'HARA OBJECTS

I HAVE BEEN MISQUOTED BEFORE, but seldom so blatantly. May I have the opportunity of restating the personal views which I expressed in my letter? These were (1) THE FREETHINKER will make little impression by attacking *so militantly* doctrines taught to people in their childhood: they resent it in the same way as Mr. McCall resents his cherished views being treated lightly. (2) Mr. Bennett's sympathetic and thoughtful articles will make considerable impression. (3) Atheism is illiberal. (4) Christianity thrives on abuse: the staunch church-goer is seldom so happy as when he feels he is a martyr.

As to (1) Mr. McCall has written little to the point, and, in fact, to my criticism puts forward no argument at all. (2) He will not discuss. (3) He "doesn't dispute because it is irrelevant." Freethinkers say to the Theist, "We don't know what you mean by 'God'." I am forced to agree: Mr. McCall has adequately shown that I don't know what "God" means. He has not thought it to his purpose to attack (4). Does this indicate agreement?

The views of what he calls "my friends," he must have realised (though of course he would not want his readers to realise), are quite separate from my own. As he might have surmised, I have been sowing the seeds of freethinking through THE FREETHINKER, and sent him the rather stale crop just to keep him in touch with things. I cannot say his article has helped myself or THE FREETHINKER for the near future.

In the first place, if he is not worried about the views of such people who "agreed in the necessity of religion for the unthinking masses," he has the alternative of making the masses think, or scorning such people as Plato, whose "Foundation Myth is meant to replace the national traditions — part of which was and is religion — of any community" (H. Lee); Lenin, "religion the opiate of the masses," etc.; Nietzsche, with his "numinous instinct" in man; and Havelock Ellis, who claimed that the religious impulse was natural in some men and could not be understood by those who do not need it. Schopenhauer in his *Dialogue on Religion*, Julian Huxley in *Religion without Revelation*, Wells in *Mind at the End of its Tether*, all discuss the problem. Mr. McCall dismisses it as "dishonesty." That is a value judgment, not an argument. Yet that an attempt must be made to make people think for themselves is deducible from his concern over children's education. But this discussion on education belongs to an argument concerning religion as a substitute for thinking, not specifically to one of tolerance.

Secondly, he vaunts his journalistic "tradition." Really, I hardly expected to meet with such Salvation Army-emotionalism. Surely the dangers of group loyalty have been demonstrated quite sufficiently for anyone in the last two generations to see. How much suffering might man have avoided, had he said with Aldous Huxley, "an infidel wherever groups, communities and crowds are concerned."

Having proclaimed his devotion to the cause (which no one really doubted), Mr. McCall proceeded to more mundane affairs: "Does militancy affect the validity of an opinion? . . . Of course not." Of course not. But, (though I wish Torquemada and Hitler had not been quite so violently militant), what I questioned was not validity, but the modus operandi of disseminating an opinion.

As for tolerance, the fourth heading under which he attacks "my friends'" views, I have a strong personal reason for thinking he has not proved his point. If he does "respect the right of a person to hold and express

his views" he might easily have proved this to me by giving a fair expression of *my* views, though this can still be remedied. Since he managed to put forward his own case from my letter with so much fervour, I think fair play is called for.

The crux of my friends' criticism of THE FREETHINKER's intolerance centres round those views which you do not respect. If Mr. McCall wishes to quibble over words, let me bring their criticism into line with my own by altering intolerance into "unnecessary sneering tone which prevails." This tone is obtained by the use of emotional and emotive words and phrases. Take for example, Mr. McCall's last paragraph, or that remarkable use of language "Needless to say, he sees it wrongly" which is not only unnecessary, but quite irrational. No doubt Mr. McCall calls this militancy. Such a euphemism for his rather unbecoming literary limitations fails to satisfy me as an answer.

A. W. A'HARA.

### MR. McCALL REJOINS

WELL, MR. A'HARA has had the opportunity of restating his views. I can't hope to deal with them all, but I shall begin with an outright challenge. He accuses me of misquoting him "blatantly." Will he please give one instance in my article, "Are We Intolerant?" where I misquoted his letter? Just *one* please, though preferably the most blatant.

And let me explain that his letter, commenting on Mr. Bennett's article of November 27th, wasn't written until over a month later and began: "Rather belatedly I would like to express my appreciation of G. I. Bennett's article . . ."; that it was nearly as long as the above; and that we had already received more letters on the subject than we could find space for. These were reasons why it couldn't be printed as a letter and why I decided to deal with it in an article, a copy of which, by the way, was sent to him. I am not aware that I treated it unfairly, but anyway, Mr. A'Hara now has the chance to show where I have, if I have.

He says I resent my "cherished views being treated lightly." I don't; but I do object to THE FREETHINKER being wrongly accused of intolerance. Mr. A'Hara "cannot say" that my article has helped him or the paper. What should I have done? Wooed him and his friends with sweet words and phrases? Let me remind readers that he wrote in his first letter of "the vitriolic, almost psychopathic attacks of Ridley and Cutner" (his own words, these; his friends had not yet appeared). He also said that what his friends "missed in THE FREETHINKER was tolerance. The title is a misnomer: it should be Atheists' Part One Orders. THE FREETHINKER has no more room for tolerance than Christianity . . ." (I am not sure whether this means "than it has for Christianity" or "than Christianity has," but both are false.) Whether Mr. A'Hara agrees with his friends, I don't know. I am in favour of personal expression in letters rather than statements of friends' views, but there it is.

I suspect that "abuse," like crankishness, depends a great deal on one's point of view. If Voltaire was abusive about Christianity, I don't think he made many Christians happy. Reverential treatment of their absurdities is what they like. But as far as possible, FREETHINKER writers argue factually rather than abusively. It is our critics, Mr. A'Hara, who are more abusive.

Certainly they have a habit of twisting our arguments, from which you are not exempt. You say I am "not worried about the views of such people who 'agreed in the

necessity of religion for the unthinking masses'." Look again at what I wrote, viz: "I am not especially worried over the views of such people *about our paper*." And note the words I have italicised. I didn't say I wasn't worried that there were such people. I am. But I don't consider them suitable judges of THE FREETHINKER. And it was whether an insistent Atheist was as irrational as an insistent Christian mystic that I said was irrelevant, not whether Atheism is illiberal.

I am accused of Salvation Army-emotionalism because I say I am proud of THE FREETHINKER's tradition: a tradition of honesty, forthrightness and, as I think I showed, tolerance. Group loyalty has its dangers, or course, but it is essential to human life. To oppose a group, merely because it is a group, is foolish. It depends on the group and what it stands for.

Mr. A'Hara has not taken my point on the distinction between respect for the right to hold views and respect for the views themselves (except in relation to his own letter) yet this seems to me to be crucial to our argument. On militancy he is dangerously confusing, having irrelevantly and irrationally introduced Torquemada and Hitler. However, he brings his friends' criticism in line with his own by substituting "unnecessary sneering tone which prevails" for "intolerance." That at least is something. Perhaps he has taken the point after all! I shouldn't have thought that THE FREETHINKER's tone was prevalently sneering; nor am I aware that I am a particularly emotional writer. But these, like my "unbecoming literary limitations" (sweet alliteration!) are questions that others must decide.

COLIN MCCALL.

## Looking Back

By F. S. HOUGHTON

THE SCENE IS CHESTER-LE-STREET, County Durham, and the year 1924, about which time a Branch of the National Secular Society was in being. The leaders were Jack Brighton, Frank Price, W. Brown and "Old" English, our outdoor propagandist. At this juncture I became a member, previously having been an unattached unbeliever for years. The Chester-le-Street Branch, under the direction of Jack Brighton, became very active and held regular outdoor and indoor public meetings at surrounding places, notably at Darlington, Gateshead and Sunderland.

Jack Brighton could always draw a big and good-humoured audience. Regular meetings were held at Houghton-le-Spring, a neighbouring township, and a Branch was formed there and a permanent meeting room was rented for a very few shillings per week. This attracted some dozen or so new members who unfortunately turned out to be members of a Communist school who were looking for a free home. It soon expired as a Branch of the N.S.S. One good thing about this room was a large framed portrait of Charles Bradlaugh which I coveted but could not obtain.

Two or three of us who were motor cyclists induced the local Motor Club to hold a grass track meeting on a Sunday; another member and myself being largely responsible for its organisation. We were immediately in trouble and were intimated. The promoters were called to Police Headquarters and the Riot Act read to us. The local clergy were in violent opposition. The magistrates threatened prosecution, but these magistrates happened to be shareholders and directors of local cinemas which opened on Sunday evenings. We pointed out that they were financially interested in a form of entertainment which opened on Sundays, so that we were doing no worse than that. Their argument was that they were licensed to open on Sundays

by the local authority and we were not. The matter was raised by us with Mr. Chapman Cohen for legal consideration. His letter stated that the Cinemas were breaking the law by opening on Sundays, and that licences given in such circumstances were invalid; that licences were out of order which contravened the law and should not be issued. He opined that no prosecution would take place and this proved to be correct. After sticking to the proposition and inducing diffident promoters to toe the line, the grass track event took place on a Sunday; thousands attended, and every church within miles was without a choir that Sunday evening.

The next noteworthy event was an outdoor projected meeting at Sunderland outside the Victoria Hall. I say projected because it didn't come off. Two or three of us went there to hold our meeting and, after borrowing a beer box from a nearby pub, got a start. Outside the Hall was a long queue of women, four or five deep, who were waiting for the opening of a Spiritualist meeting, the star performer of which was Aimee Macpherson. I got on the box to open for Jack Brighton and he got started. As soon as it dawned on the audience what we were about, we were surrounded by a crowd of excited, gesticulating and angry women, yelling at us. Things looked pretty hot for us, when the hall door opened and Aimee Macpherson appeared, dressed in a long white silk robe and demanding to know what the row was about. Some women shouted to her "What shall we do to these wicked men?" Aimee Macpherson replied: "Sisters, we will pray for them." Pretty soon we were surrounded by kneeling women and we looked like a couple of "right Charleys." However, we were probably lucky to get away with whole skins!

Jack Brighton was outstanding in his contests with Spiritualists. Our Branch had a debate with a Spiritualist Lyceum in a Durham Pit village. I took Jack in my old Citroen to this meeting and as usual, he had no difficulty in demolishing his opponent's case. After the debate, arrangements were made for the principals to be photographed together. We went into a yard at the rear which was surrounded by a brick wall about 6 feet high. Jack and his opponent faced the camera. To our consternation and the great exultation of the Spiritualists three figures appeared on the resultant photograph. Our side investigated the matter, called on the photographer who produced his negative, and sure enough three figures were on it all right. Only one exposure had been made and only two persons had faced the camera. The Spiritualists were not slow in claiming a spirit manifestation, their exultation increasing in proportion to our puzzlement. The explanation occurred months later, when Jack met one of his friends who told him that he had looked over the brick wall and had seen the party being photographed. His figure was reflected in the window in front of which the photograph was taken, and his reflection came out clearly on the print.

Chester-le-Street Branch was later incorporated in the Newcastle-on-Tyne Branch of the National Secular Society, but during its individual existence the Chester-le-Street Branch had experienced some hectic times.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### RAISING MONEY

A few weeks ago, shortly after Christmas, I found one of the women employed in my office crying and excitedly talking to a group of her fellow employees. When I inquired into the reason for the commotion, she told me that the priest had informed her they were going to build a new parish church and that he expected a contribution of \$500.00 from her to be paid in two weeks. Said the priest to her: "God has been good to you in giving you that nice job you have and your brother is Assistant Chief of Police. It is time for you to do something for God." She was frantically trying to raise the money. Undoubtedly the priest will get his

\$500.00. Said the lady "I am not going to quit my Church over \$500.00."  
MARTIN LECHNER (St. Louis, U.S.A.)

### MR. BENNETT AND MR. McCALL

Poor Mr. Bennett! What very hot water he is in! All because he dares to suggest that Christians are people, too, belonging to the same race as ourselves! From the way in which Mr. Huxley growls, "Scratch him and find another of them," one infers that he puts all Christians (and Mr. Bennett also) in the category of "Bloody" Mary, Torquemada, and Judge Jeffreys.

Mr. Huxley is entitled to this opinion, so is Mr. Bennett. No-one says to Mr. Huxley: "If you can't be more polite to believers, you'd better shut up!" Why, then, should Mr. Huxley take it upon himself to say to Mr. Bennett, in effect: "If you can't be more militant and aggressive, keep quiet altogether?" Totalitarian uniformity of expression is the very negation of Free-thought. If Mr. Huxley can't see this, he is subscribing to the wrong paper!

"Modern man," taken by and large, is not noticeably "scientifically-minded" in any real sense. Of the few that are competent to formulate a world-view based on science (and not on popular prejudice) all I have to say is this: what evidence about these people and their experience is possessed in tangible form by Mr. McCall? I cannot think offhand of any modern scientist who is a conscious and vocal champion of atheism. "The world as we know it," taking "we" to mean "modern man in general," is not a specifically godless world, merely an agnostic or indifferentist one. "We," as above defined, do not reject gods, anthropomorphic or otherwise; "we" just leave them out of the reckoning.

S. W. BROOKS.

[Mr. McCall writes: I don't want to prolong this discussion, particularly as Mr. Brooks and I are nearer agreement now. I have never drawn a sharp distinction between agnosticism and atheism. Leaving gods out of the reckoning is, in my view, atheistic.—Ed.]

### CONTRADICTIONS

Professor Ernest Kahane makes what appears to me to be a quite unjustifiable statement. He writes: "Contradictions do not trouble the true rationalist . . . What appears to be in contradiction is either a myth or true." And then he goes on to deal only with apparent contradictions which are capable of scientific resolution.

He makes no attempt to deal with the contradictions which are incapable of being resolved scientifically — and yet these are probably the contradictions which cause most trouble in human society. I am thinking of the basic assumptions which are necessary to all kinds of moral evaluation. For contradictions at this level we desperately need to have some generally agreed basis of social co-existence which will be fair to all bases of assumption.

The contradictions I have in mind are of belief — like the Moslem opposition to Roman Catholicism in Algeria; of nationalism — like Turkish opposition to Greeks over Cyprus; of racialism — like African opposition to Boer domination in South Africa.

I think our job as human beings is not merely to cogitate and discuss these things amongst ourselves. We have to build up a group agreed on humanism (as against nationalism and racialism) and freethought (as against authoritarianism of one form of belief) to heal these divisions and to make human society in the world as a whole a fast-developing actuality.

E. G. MACFARLANE.

### MR. BENNETT REPLIES TO A CRITIC

Mr. W. E. Huxley writes always provocatively apropos of myself in the hope, I think, of drawing my fire. He has on different occasions charged me with being a politician and a Christian and declared that the NSS will make progress when I and my sort are ousted. Now he misconstrues me by saying I suggested that unbelievers are responsible for the black pages of political history.

I think I need not deny that I am neither a politician nor a Christian. I am what Mr. Huxley himself claims to be — an atheist. But between us there are two notable differences. In the first place, he is emotional about this condition of mind, whereas I am not. I am an atheist not so much because I dislike Christianity as because I disbelieve in the truth of it. Indeed,

I have no belief in any supernatural creed whatever. In the second place, mine is (I hope) a complete rationalism, whereas his is not. He appears to apply rationalism only to religion: I try to apply it to everything answerable to reason.

But what I find most disturbing is Mr. Huxley's apparent lack of toleration in matters of religion. We may reject the faith of religious people, but we have to live with them — in the same way that capitalism has to live with Communism, republicans with royalists, white people with coloured, and man with man the whole world over. That does not mean we have to condone encroachments from any source upon the lives and liberties of law-abiding men and women. In the educational, social, and general secular spheres we must be always ready to defend and uphold what we believe just and true. No man of the Church or any other has a moral right to enforce beliefs and opinions; he has only the right to transmit and implant them by reason and persuasion. That is an ethical principle which holds good for all departments of life.

I conceive our task to be not so much the elimination of religious belief as the vigorous and forceful definition of its nature and limits. Religious faith is a personal and private affair (just as atheism is) and no one may coerce others to accept it. There are, of course, subtle educational means of bringing about that acceptance. So long as these are financed by and limited in application to the religious community itself, we can do little or nothing about them; but we can demand that no one outside that community shall be subjected to such proselytising influences.

G. I. BENNETT.

[This correspondence is closed.—Ed.]

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