

The Freethinker

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JUST BEFORE MIDNIGHT ON FEBRUARY 29th, an earthquake due, it is now thought, to the eruption of an underwater volcano, devastated the Moroccan town of Agadir on the North African coast. The earthquake itself did not take much time: to be precise, it lasted about 12 seconds. But it did its job — if that is the right expression! — with terrible thoroughness. The town is now a pestilence-ridden, corpse-strewn mass of rubble, while of its 50,000 or so inhabitants, about 12,000 are computed to have perished. The remainder are homeless, reduced overnight to the level of refugees—the latest additions to the world-wide problem which the current "Refugee Year" is just now endeavouring to impress upon contemporary human consciousness. There is, however, one significant difference between the refugees from Agadir and those in most other parts of the world. For, whereas the others represent the unhappy effects of human — of political and military — conflicts, these wretched Moors are victims of an "Act of God." A natural catastrophe, that is, which, on the time-honoured principle that all acts for which no visible human cause exists, has to be attributed to God. The Lord — or so Genesis informs us — created the earth, and the earth — or at least that part of it around Agadir — went sadly wrong. The sorry result is all due, ultimately, to the bad workmanship of the Creator. On the Creation hypothesis, no other assumption is possible. For Almighty God who made "the earth and the waters under the earth," by definition knew everything, including what was going to happen in Morocco on the night of February 29th, March 1st, 1960. It would be heresy to allege any alternative explanation. It would be to deny the Catholic faith, without belief in which a man cannot find salvation. Not to mention the local Muslim faith, which also teaches in a most unequivocal manner, that Allah, the Supreme and Only God, made Heaven and Earth, and all that is therein. Christian or Muslim (or any other) there is really no escape for the theologians, nor even for the rank and file theists of all creeds. God was ultimately responsible for Agadir. And, since responsibility for such a cataclysm necessarily includes its results, it is to God also, that the Theist must ascribe all the attendant horrors in the hopeless town during the hours and days that followed the earthquake; the helpless human beings trapped in the ruins; the children screaming hopelessly for parents who will never reply; the hordes of rats that took possession of the deserted streets and enjoyed a hideous, verminous carnival on the bodies of the dead and, it is much to be feared, on those still living but trapped. For all this Chamber of Horrors, God must bear the blame.

Lisbon and Agadir

The problem posed for the Theist by the Agadir earthquake is not actually a new one. Nor is the current issue of THE FREETHINKER the first to consider it from a standpoint critical of Theism. For the Portuguese capital of Lisbon was similarly demolished with even greater loss

of life by an earthquake on November 1st, 1755, and no less a person than Voltaire wrote a famous poem on the subject. The great French satirist asked God some very pertinent (and no doubt, from a theistic standpoint, impertinent) questions. Obviously the Christian assumption of a God of Love, who yet permits such horrors, is one that calls for explanation. However — and it is a startling proof of the contradictions that can co-exist even in the

most razor-like of intellects — Voltaire himself, whilst eloquently denouncing the Christian god who permitted the destruction of Lisbon, yet to the end of his life, believed in some kind of a personal god! Any kind of god who is more than an abstraction must *ipso facto*,

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

Agadir—and God!

By F. A. RIDLEY

by the mere fact of being a god, be held responsible for the created universe and, accordingly, for anything that goes wrong with any part of it. And that includes Lisbon in 1755 and Agadir in 1960 — or, for that matter, Pompeii A.D. 79, destroyed by an eruption of Vesuvius. Was not the god of the Jews, honest enough to say through the mouth of his prophet, "I create evil"? If evil gets out of hand, who else is ultimately responsible?

Theism and Evolution

So far we have merely been considering the older theistic dogmas that made God, as the direct creator, solely and immediately responsible for the creation of the universe. This is what may be termed the "aboriginal" theistic view and, in this writer's opinion, the *only* one to fit in logically with the rest of the Christian scheme of salvation. Nowadays, however, one has to take account of "modernists," "Christian evolutionists," and the like. According to such, evolution is a fact, at least to the extent that it may be regarded as the method by which God (enlightened perhaps by Darwin!) elected to work. When viewed from such an angle, unpleasant phenomena like earthquakes and volcanic eruptions are merely "incidents" in the vast workings of cosmic evolution, for which God is only *indirectly* responsible. However, it does not really need much critical acumen to see that such reasoning involves a glaring contradiction, and is actually a mere quibble. Obviously any god who is predicated as almighty, when he designed the universe — whether in six days, as in Genesis, or over the vast duration posited by evolution — must, again by definition, have foreseen *every* detail of his cosmic structure. Therefore, he must have foreseen Pompeii, Lisbon and Agadir. For the consistent Theist of any and every denomination, however he may twist and turn, there is really no escape from this, for him, fatal conclusion. The very assumption of a creator necessarily involves the assumption that he and no one else is responsible for every mishap that transpires in his creation. A perfect workman makes no mistakes, nor does his work contain any imperfections.

Agadir — and God

The horror of Agadir, though not the first nor even the worst of its kind, occurs at a period when knowledge is

far more widely diffused than in earlier ages; far more so, for example, than two centuries ago in Voltaire's day. So, we do not doubt that, despite all the belated apologists of religion, it will bring home to millions the stark and obvious impossibility of reconciling the facts of the cosmic process with the belief in the ruling Providence of an ethically minded God.

Not, of course, that there is anything new in so obvious a hypothesis. Here, as in so many other departments of thought, the ancient Greeks have already adequately summarised the matter. Was it not Epicurus who, three centuries before Christianity began, went on record with this notable dictum?: "Either God is all-powerful and not all-good; or he is all-good but not all-powerful; or he is neither."

The tragic death in the dark that came to so many thousands in Agadir only underlines this fundamental pre-Christian critique of Theism.

Revolt from Religion

By F. S. HOUGHTON

THE END OF LIFE'S JOURNEY APPROACHES and I would like to try and estimate the causes of my revolt from religion. My parents were very pious and in the latter Victorian decade the vogue of Victorian evangelism spread to the Church of England, so much so that a newly built church in our village was named the Church of "St. John the Evangelist." The parson used to visit our home to hold regular family week night prayer meetings. How I dreaded this weekly drudge on my knees, and how when meeting the parson out of doors, if we could not dodge him, we boys were obliged to raise our caps to him. At our weekly home prayer meeting hymns would be sung: I remember the erotic "Safe in the arms of Jesus, Safe on his gentle breast" and the silly "I would like to die said Willy, if my papa could die too, but he says he isn't ready 'cos he's got so much to do."

In addition to this home evangelism, we children had to go to church three times on Sunday, and I hated Sunday coming round. We also went once a week to a Church Army meeting. When I was a year or two older I did some mental questioning about the dogma of the Church and this used to exercise my childish mind considerably, but it was here that I made my big mistake. I noted that everyone except myself believed in religion, and I came to the mistaken conclusion that they must be right and I wrong. What a pity that I capitulated and didn't persist in my childish unbelief!

In 1898 I got a job as office boy in a lawyer's office, and just about this time the typewriter began to appear in commercial offices. My boss had just bought a typewriter, and he took me on to learn it, but unfortunately he bought one with the wrong keyboard arrangement and later on I was obliged to relearn to use an orthodox keyboard machine. Still, I used to have a good bit of time on hand so, with the dual idea of filling this in and getting me along with the machine, my Solicitor gave me his essays to type out. He had a literary flair. One day he brought in a book he had borrowed, and it was the *Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam. I shall never forget the thrill of this glorious Persian poetry transliterated by Fitzgerald.

My next job was in a Railway Passenger Office and I had to do duty turns every alternate Sunday, assisting a senior. One Sunday, about the year 1900, G. W. Foote came to our town to give a lecture for the local Secular Society. I had never heard of Mr. Foote or the Society, but my senior in the office had, and he did his best to persuade me to accompany him to this meeting. As my

home was three miles away and I had to walk there and back for an evening turn of duty, going to this afternoon meeting would have meant going without my meal at home, but I have always since regretted I didn't take the opportunity to hear this fine freethought speaker.

What I didn't miss was the second-hand bookseller who visited our open-air market each Saturday night. This old fellow used to lay out his stall on an old pram and for lighting he wrapped newspaper round a couple of candles so that the wind would not blow them out. He would open each book so that we in front could see the title page. As we turned the pages, he would comment, for he had the peculiar ability of reading print upside-down with the same faculty with which we could read it right way up. He mostly dealt in non-fiction works, and my weekly coppers would go in the purchase of one or two of his books every Saturday. Here are some of them: Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, Rollin's *Ancient History*, Merrivale's *History of the Romans*, Green's *History of the English People*, Buckle's *Civilisation in England* and Lecky's *Rise of Rationalism*. My opinion is that Lecky still wants some beating.

I had missed Foote, alas, but about 1912 I used to go to Leeds City Square on a Sunday evening to hear an atheist speaker, J. W. Gott, and to him I owe much of my freethought and my revolt from religion.

Readers Reply to Mr. King

The letter from Mr. King of Balliol College, Oxford (March 4) was, to say the least, highly amusing. To start with, the reading matter in THE FREETHINKER is backed up by indisputable, cold, hard facts. To try and make out, therefore, that it is an insult to the intelligence of your readers, is very amusing. He says that "Christians might embrace the 'freedom' you offer if you showed in your paper that this led to a fuller, mature and more joyful life, such as they now find in the Church. But evidence for this is sadly lacking, even between the lines."

I wonder if Mr. King is aware that there are countless thousands of Freethinkers all over the world who were churchgoers and who now lead a much fuller, maturer and more joyful life than they found in the Church. As for evidence, let him try to get a Freethinker to go back to the Church.

M. D. SILAS.

I humbly submit to our Balliol Scholar that the dogma of the Blessed Trinity is the most foolish belief of any religion past or present. Then there is the silliness of the scheme of salvation, the needlessness of the sufferings of Jesus, the brief duration of his so-called death. The idiocy of "he that believeth not shall be damned" the senseless brutality of unbelievers in the lake of fire where the smoke of their torment ascends for ever.

J. R. DUNCANSON.

Mr. P. D. King says that faithful Christians are not disturbed by jibes. I might remind him that faithful Buddhists, Muslims, Zoroastrians, and all other religions would fervently echo his sentiments. But I trust Mr. King will continue to read THE FREETHINKER.

C. O. SYMES.

What exactly does Mr. King expect THE FREETHINKER to print? Praise of the Pope and his Omnipotent God?

Surely when the Church says that "under certain conditions" the Pope is infallible, all Roman Catholics are bound to accept it?

Also, even if Mr. King's omnipotent God, "is not bound to act in strict accordance with the democratic codes" it is not necessary to show quite so much ignorance as to the fruiting of fig-trees, mental illness or the cause of blindness, etc.

As to a substitute for the "joy" of religion (or a crutch for a cured cripple) surely even Mr. King realises that this "has whiskers on."

C. STANLEY

I do not belong to that "dangerous juvenile, fear mongering body who call themselves Christians". I consistently read your paper and thought that the many exposures in it, of the fashion in which the Church makes and holds its adherents, would help the more intelligent of them to realise the irrationality and folly of their belief.

Alas! I was wrong. All the time you were insulting their intelligence, — and mine.

Fie on you. Vacate that Editorial chair at once and let Mr. King of Balliol College, Oxford take over. He will show me how to achieve the fuller, maturer, more joyful life, such as Christians find in their Church.

And may an undemocratic, Omnipotent God help me.

ARCHIBALD BAYNE.

Free Speech

By D. H. TRIBE

FOLLOWING A SIMILAR CONFERENCE held on November 21st, 1959, and reported in THE FREETHINKER on January 1st, 1960, the National Council for Civil Liberties called a Conference on Anti-Semitism and Racial Incitement on February 27th, 1960.

Speaking "off the cuff" at the first conference, I opposed any attempt at legislating against prejudice because of the difficulty of enforcement and the existing plethora of censorial legislation. But I allowed myself to be swayed in favour of voting for the introduction of such a measure by the argument that it would publicise the fight against intolerance. Since then the position has entirely altered. A Private Member's Bill has had its first reading, and gained considerable publicity. Indeed, for a month or so before this, anti-Semitism had been widely denounced in most mass media. So we have now to speculate on the results of making this measure law.

The Executive Committee of the National Secular Society has done this, and comes out in unanimous opposition to the Bill. That its sponsors have given little real thought to its likely consequences, was shown by the consternation into which they were thrown at the Conference when someone suggested that offensive matter, such as a film, might be imported to circumvent the legislation; and it was left to the writer — one of the very few who deemed the measure unworkable — to reassure them that that loophole at least was covered by the word "distributes."

The first speaker from the platform was the Bishop of Southwark. Somewhat superfluously introducing himself as a Christian, he said, "Within the Christian faith there is no distinction of colour, race or creed" — which is true, at any rate theoretically, and if you forget about doctrinal disputes. Then he added — with what I hope was ingenuous glibness — "It therefore follows that Christians must believe in the brotherhood of all men." This professional plug blatantly ignored the fact that religious prejudice is not directed against the people *within* one's own persuasion, but against those outside. After that, His Lordship gave an excellent survey of many of the causes of group prejudice — feelings of economic insecurity, real or imagined, the desire to find a scapegoat, dislike of the unusual, chauvinism, suspicion of those whose first loyalty seems to be outside their land of domicile and, where Jews were concerned, a borrower's dislike of usurers.

Mr. Neil Lawson, Q.C., delivered pretty much the same speech as at the previous conference; stressing the inadequacies of existing legislation, and giving little indication of how he expected the new measure to be applied.

Finally, Sir Leslie Plummer, M.P., author of the Private Member's Bill. Sir Leslie shocked us all by referring to the obscenity and threats to which he has been subjected, and is much to be admired for his courage and urbanity in these deplorable circumstances. He also referred to criticism from people who quoted Voltaire, "I do not believe in what you say, but I'll fight to the death for your right to say it." These critics were, he thought, not facing up to the harsh realities of the situation.

In the general discussion on education, a "teacher from a religious school" claimed that she had no trouble at all from prejudice. Her formula for this remarkable success was, "Teach the Christian faith and tell children that God who made everybody loves them all." Perhaps Jesus never need have died! We were not surprised to hear that this lady from the type of institution that has brought intellectual dictatorship to an exact science as well as a fine art,

thoroughly approved of the Bill. A West Indian delegate praised the bishop as a "Christian Gentleman," though he somewhat spoilt the beautiful picture by alleging racial prejudice within a parish church which happens to be in Dr. Stockwood's own diocese. It seemed that at any moment someone might suggest sending an S.O.S. to Billy Graham before closing the Conference with the Lord's Prayer. Alas I opened the discussion on legislation, and from that moment it was never a glad confident morning again.

What was the problem? Colour discrimination and religious discrimination. Colour wasn't something we could alter — at least by existing scientific techniques — and we must simply adjust ourselves to differences. But religion was entirely different. No one was born with a religion. It was something he was taught. The Conference had apparently overlooked the obvious fact that you cannot have religious discrimination without religion, and if we are going to be realistic — as everyone from the Lord Bishop on had urged we should — the best way of eliminating this discrimination was to eliminate religion. (Suddenly there descended on the meeting an awful hush, in which you might almost hear — and doubtless some delegates in fact did — the agonised gasps of the heavenly hosts.) Surely it was significant that anti-Semitism was most prevalent in Christian, and more recently in Islamic countries both of whose religions were derived from Judaism. Dr. Stockwood had rightly said that one dislikes someone from whom one has borrowed, but did not go on to say that this applies to ideas as well as goods. Christians had simply borrowed the Jews' religion. No wonder there was hostility. Further, every time the Lord's Supper was celebrated, His followers commemorated what they believed to be the greatest crime in the annals of history, a crime for which they called upon themselves a curse ratified by Christ Himself on the way to the cross. If one accepted the New Testament at all, one must consider persecution of the Jews as the will of God. Praising all the speakers from the platform as liberal-minded men with excellent intentions, I concluded by calling myself an "unblushing Voltairian" and stating the National Secular view that legislation of this sort was not the way to deal with prejudice.

So utterly was it beyond the bounds of Sir Leslie's limited imagination that anyone in England might not believe in Christianity, or that any disbeliever could possibly have any knowledge of its Scriptures, that he chose to interpret the above as an attack not on Christianity, but on the Jews. Perhaps he imagined that the National Secular Society was an offshoot of the National Labour or National Socialist parties. What Sir Leslie and other Christian intellectuals — if we assume that this is the category to which he belongs — fail to appreciate is that ordinary Christians perversely imagine that the Bible means what it says, and cannot intuitively distinguish between those passages dictated by the Holy Ghost and those scribbled down whenever his back was turned.

Though the NSS has nothing but praise for the tireless work of the NCCL, it feels obliged to express its opposition on this occasion. The proposed measure will surely be condemned by liberal opinion as treating Fascism with Fascism. We do not believe that ideas, however foolish or dangerous, can be disposed of by driving them underground. Rather should they be dragged out into the open to be scorched by the pure light of reason. Religious and

(Concluded on next page)

This Believing World

Amid all the hullabaloo about the engagement of Princess Margaret, there was one thing forgotten. This was the complete failure of all Spiritualists, Mediums and Astrologers to forecast it. There was not the slightest hint that any spirit in Summerland, or in any world which has a different "vibration" from ours, had even a ghost of a notion that such a memorable event would take place in the Royal family.

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When it comes to telling people that Uncle George or Aunt Martha had unfortunately left some "jewels" or a forgotten will in the top right-hand drawer of an out-of-date bureau, you might or might not rely on the spirits. But when it comes to foretelling some important event — like the World War II, for example — we always expect and get an utter failure.

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Still, this has never bothered the clients of our "well-known" fortune tellers. The *Daily Mail*, for instance, has come out lately with a delightful boasting of one of them who is now in "big business" because of his extraordinary success in foretelling the future — particularly of "sceptics" who go to laugh at the "predictions" but come away out-and-out believers. Some of these "fortune tellers" use the usual pack of cards, others concentrate on some personal possession of the client. And, of course, their predictions are always infallible. We can only express our amazement that any responsible national newspaper can perpetuate the boundless credulity engendered by fortune tellers.

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Although the Roman Church indignantly repudiates any idea of divorce and insists that Roman Catholics must never, never break their marriage vows, it is extraordinary how many do get away with it. The latest example is one of the well-known Lyons family who somehow manage to impress their fans how thoroughly Catholic they always are. Even daddy Ben Lyon, hitherto a non-Catholic, proudly entered the Faith at last. His daughter, however, Church or no Church, got her divorce — and we wonder what the Vatican is going to do about it. Is Miss Lyons still married in the eyes of God Almighty?

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In spite of the most frantic efforts on the radio and TV, there appears to be a widely held opinion that the Bible is still a closed book to the people of this country. Millions of copies of the Precious Word are sold every year and dozens of criminals and similar types swear every day on it all over the country — and yet it remains comparatively speaking unknown. So ABC television is spending £150,000 to bring the Book back again to the people with a series filmed in the "Holy" land.

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The director is Mr. J. Haggerty and he is moved by one thought only — "to show that the Bible is a living book and not a museum piece." Well, we are simply dying to hear how well the Serpent spoke to Eve in Hebrew, to see some perfect shots of the Ark (still to be found on Mt. Ararat), the way the Devil tempted Jesus and wafted him through the air to land safely on a pinnacle of the Temple, and similar sights and sounds.

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Of course, Mr. Haggerty may only want to show us scenes from the Palestine of the day, in which case he should explain whether he thinks the black, brown, yellow, and white Israelis are all descendents from the Biblical Jews.

In any case, does he really think that a scene taken, for example, in the town of Babylon proves that there really was a Tower of Babel — or that a picture of a whale actually proves that the story of Jonah is true in every particular?

Leicester Anniversary Meeting

ON SUNDAY, MARCH 6TH, the Leicester Secular Society celebrated the 79th anniversary of the opening of their hall in Humberstone Gate. The guest speaker was Mr. H. Cutner, who needs no introduction to FREETHINKER readers. It was Mr. Cutner who kept the paper going through the worst days of the war and he still does more than his share in connection with it.

At Leicester he was in reminiscent mood though, as the President Mr. G. A. Kirk pointed out, it is impossible for Mr. Cutner to speak without being provocative. Since becoming a Secularist 60 years ago, he said, his attitude towards religions had never changed; he rejected them all . . . Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam . . . the lot. Nor did he believe in Spiritualism. In addition to Mr. Cutner's fascinating reminiscences, there were also musical items by Mrs. Gregory (piano) and Mrs. Cotteril (soprano).

FREE SPEECH

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race dogmatists have a case to put. It is, in our opinion, a false, indeed a revolting one. But we shall be creating a very dangerous precedent if we deny them the right to put it.

As for tangible instances of persecution, we already have laws against sedition, murder—ritual or otherwise—assault, threats of physical violence, behaviour likely to lead to a breach of the peace, libel, and so on. Intangibles will be just as difficult to pursue by any new as by any old legislation, and every act that is unenforceable serves only to bring law itself into disrepute. But even if the proposed measure were really operable, would it replace prejudice with harmony? If a landlady could be forced to admit someone she didn't want, would she not find a thousand and one ways of making life intolerable for the tenant? At least a discriminatory advertisement can be useful to coloureds and liberal whites alike as indicating the sort of place best to avoid. The fight against prejudice is to be waged not in the courtroom but in the classroom. Repressive legislation could become a remedy worse than the disease. It was well within the bounds of possibility that "any written matter or illustration insulting to any person or persons because of their race or religion" could be held to include an attack on religion, if any devotee claimed that he found this personally insulting. The free criticism of ideas and institutions would then be undermined, and we should find ourselves well on the road to totalitarianism. A healthy society is untroubled by the carpings of prejudice — just as the South Africa Boycott meeting on February 28th in London ignored Mosley's leaflets and lorries — knowing that hatred does most harm to the hater. If our children are nurtured in world brotherhood, discrimination will start to disappear. If they are not, legislation of this sort will be worse than useless.

—NEXT WEEK—

FOR STEPINAC — A SAINTHOOD ?

By EVA EBURY

THE FREETHINKER

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All articles and correspondence should be addressed to THE EDITOR at the above address and not to individuals.

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Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1.

Details of membership of the National Secular Society may be obtained from the General Secretary, 103, Borough High Street, S.E.1. Members and visitors are welcome during normal office hours.

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. W. BARKER and L. EBURY

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every week-day, 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 Place, W.1.) Sunday, March 20th, 7.15 p.m.: A Lecture.

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1.) Tuesday, March 22nd, 7.15 p.m.: M. MITCHELL, "Life in Israel Today."

Dagenham Branch N.S.S. (214 Fitzstephen Road, Dagenham) Friday, March 18th, 7.30 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, "The Vatican and the Summit."

Harlow Humanist Group (Tye Green Community Centre, Bush Fair) Sunday, March 20th, 2.30 p.m.: Inaugural Meeting.

Leeds Humanist Group (Trades Hall, Fountain Street.) Sunday, March 20th, 7 p.m.: A Meeting.

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate.) Sunday, March 20th, 6.30 p.m.: L. EBURY, "Does Freethought Matter in 1960?"

Marble Arch Branch N.S.S. (formerly West London Branch) (Carpenter's Arms, Seymour Place, off Edgware Road, 3 mins. Marble Arch Station) Sunday, March 20th, 7.30 p.m.: D. JOSEPH "Holy Relics."

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Trades Hall, Thurland Street.) Friday, March 18th, 7.30 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY, "The Resurrection."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Education Centre, Broad Street.) Sunday, March 20th, 2.30 p.m.: A Lecture.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1.) Sunday, March 20th, 11 a.m.: A, ROBERTSON, M.A., "The Establishment."

West Ham and District Branch N.S.S. (Wanstead Community Centre, The Green, E.11.) Thursday, March 24th, 7.45 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, "The Power and Secret of the Jesuits."

Notes and News

THE SECRETARY of the National Secular Society asks readers who wish to attend the Annual Dinner and Dance in the Pavilions Arms, Westminster, on Saturday, March 26th, to order their tickets without delay, so that final arrangements can be made. The Dinner is always a happy social occasion and this year the Guest of Honour will be Mr. Hector Hawton, Editor of *The Humanist*, monthly magazine of the Rationalist Press Association Ltd. After March 19th, of course, tickets will have to be obtained from our new address.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

Will readers please note that, from March 19th, 1960, the new address of:-

THE FREETHINKER,
THE PIONEER PRESS (G. W. Foote & Co. Ltd.)
THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY and
SECULAR SOCIETY LIMITED will be
**103 BOROUGH HIGH STREET,
LONDON, S.E.1.**

"PARENTS! DO YOU WANT schools which teach our children to conform? Or do you want schools to teach our children to think?" asks the Home & School Council (90 Market Street, Johannesburg) and the Natal Education Vigilance Association (P.O. Box 2605, Durban) in a four-page leaflet issued by the former body. "Let us make it quite clear to Dr. Verwoerd," it says, that "we want Education *not* Indoctrination." And it explains that the government intends to make all teaching Christian-Nationalist, interpreting "Christian" in the narrowest Calvinistic sense. Evolution and modern science are rejected; unless a teacher is a Christian he is "a deadly danger" and "no subject may be anti-'Christian' or non-'Christian'." The leaflet calls on South African parents to "Keep our children free." We hope the parents will respond.

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IN 1957, OUR FRIENDS of the Ethical Union opened Burnet House, in Burgess Hill, Hampstead, London, to provide housing accommodation for elderly persons, mainly Humanists and Freethinkers. Tenants have their own rooms and furniture, but are provided communally with services, such as central heating and hot water. It was an admirable venture and it has been most successful in creating a happy atmosphere where the tenants can live free from anxiety, confident that there are people who really care about their well-being. But — the old problem! — money is needed to meet the gap between income and expenditure, and sympathisers are asked to covenant to pay a fixed sum for seven years, or until their death, whichever is the shorter period, or by making a bequest. And, although there are no vacancies at present in the House, elderly readers are invited to apply for housing.

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THE LATEST CONTRIBUTION to our "Silliest Argument for the Existence of God Department" comes from Mr. H. R. Turney of Tiptree, Essex. He takes it from the *News of the World* (14/2/60) and it tells how "After a quarrel in a public house on Christmas Eve, Arthur James Cook went berserk and firing a revolver wildly in the street he injured four men who were strangers to him." "One cannot help thinking Providence played a hand," said Mr. E. J. P. Cussen, prosecuting at the Old Bailey, "because all four men escaped serious injury from what was a fusillade of shots."

★

BUT IF PROVIDENCE was a little late in playing its hand in Mr. Cook's case, it never played it at all in another Old Bailey case reported in the same issue of the *News of the World*, when Jamaican-born Renford Bob Green was sentenced to four years' imprisonment for rape. "It may sound funny to you," said the victim, Mrs. Inez Irene Wood, "but I got down on my knees and prayed."

★

WE HAVE JUST ADDED a Ghana threepenny to our religious postage stamp collection, and most intriguing it is too. The emblem, printed in black on a green ground, with a red, yellow and green border, may best be described as like an amoeba doing rock 'n' roll. Its title, "God's Omnipotence."

No Room For God

By H. CUTNER

SIR JULIAN HUXLEY'S ADDRESS given recently at the Chicago University to mark the centenary of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, based as it was on Science and Evolution, was naturally received with a howl of anger by Christians. Perhaps "howl" is a little too strong, for of course Christians must not, dare not, show anything but a "Christian" spirit; and "howling" is no part (we are told) of "true" Christianity. Christians must meet obloquy and persecution and unbelief with the unconquered rock of Christ.

Be that as it may, a number of parsons in South Africa who read reports of Sir Julian's Address are (as far as the "meek" and "kindly" spirit engendered by the example of Christ allowed) very angry with him, judging from a number of copies of the *Natal Daily News* sent us by a thoughtful reader. No one expects that even Natal should be in the forefront of intellectual progress; and no doubt it is not very easy for Natal parsons to get some of the latest pronouncements on the Christian religion from benighted and blatant infidels — like the present writer. After carefully reading five of their essays to put Sir Julian right, I hope they will not be too angry with me for declaring that if they have done nothing else, they have certainly contributed to the gaiety of nations. They appear to have stepped right out of a prim and pre-Darwin era formed in the wilds, say, of Scotland, or in so many of the villages in England last century.

There is the valiant thrust of the Rev. W. L. Wellington, "Sir Julian should leave facts of Christianity to its experts" — a deadly assault which, at the age of 13, I never could counter. In reply to my outrageous unbelief then, I would be angrily asked whether I put myself on a par with Mr. Gladstone. *Mr. Gladstone!* That more than eminent old parliamentarian was received by the clergy as one of them, a theologian, a very great theologian — and I dared to pit myself against such a staggering eminence! If he believed, how dare I disbelieve?

And so, how can even a Sir Julian Huxley dare to question the rock-like beliefs of Christianity tested for nearly 2,000 years, the divine experiences of thousands of millions of men and women through the centuries? How dare he talk about or give an opinion of a religion of which he is no expert? It was colossal impudence.

What a pity it is that Mr. Wellington has missed so many lectures by Freethinkers who, without a shred of the "instruction" he was lucky enough to receive, have shown that it is parsons like him who are not experts at all, but emotional "believers" in a fanatical supernatural world for which there is not, and never can be a scrap of evidence.

Mr. Wellington, of course, sadly admits that "it is possible to know a great deal about the Bible and Christianity" — but "that does not mean that one knows Jesus." Quite right — it is possible to know a good deal about *The Arabian Nights* but that does not mean one knows Aladdin's Wonderful Lamp. This kind of argument gets us nowhere. Nobody knows Jesus any more than anybody knows Cinderella.

Mr. Wellington has, like so many parsons, discovered that Evolution has only pushed back the origin of the Universe. If it has "evolved," then it must have had an "Evolver" and that eminent Person was God Almighty. "So in the beginning," triumphantly cries Mr. Wellington, "God created"; and poor Sir Julian is thus piously unseated, and Christianity and the Bible reinstated in a victorious counter-attack.

A Presbyterian minister, the Rev. J. W. Cunningham, in his reply dragged in Newton, Einstein, Voltaire, Jung, and Darwin, all of whom helped him either to prove that God existed, or could be easily controverted if any didn't. "To deny the existence of God," cried Mr. Cunningham, "is to defy man," a truly awful thought. In any case, he wiped Sir Julian almost off the face of the earth with an argument too devastating to miss here.

According to Mr. Cunningham, Sir Julian said that, as man was lonely, he *invented* a "divinised" figure, implying, "I am lonely, so I seek God, therefore God does not exist." To which comes the counter-blast — "I am hungry, so I seek food; therefore food does not exist." This reminds me of the way a devoted Trinitarian answered an unbeliever who claimed that it was impossible to visualise or think that three could make one by giving as an illustration a cup of tea which he said was composed of tea, milk, and sugar — three in one. When the parson was asked about the water to make the tea he thought this was an unfair reply.

We human beings all have to have food whether we are or are not unbelievers, and we grow food to supply our wants. But where is the evidence for "God"?

Then a Roman Catholic, Fr. D. Kelly, stepped in with the heading to his article "Science is realising God transcends the Universe." Fr. Kelly insists that when Sir Julian denies the existence of a God, he is not speaking for Science. He quoted Dr. Milliken, "the noted American scientist" who said somewhere, "Modern science of the real sort is slowly learning to walk humbly with God, and in learning that lesson it is contributing something to religion." Here of course Fr. Kelly feels that Dr. Milliken is speaking for Science, because he worships, no doubt, his own God; while Sir Julian is not speaking for Science because he "denies" his particular God. This is a typical Roman Catholic argument. However, he claims that there is no basic conflict between science and religion "since science as well as religion is based on FAITH." Considering the way the Roman Church has consistently opposed Science as well as learning of any sort "for the masses," this lumping them together in the name of Faith is most intriguing. The "basic" idea behind Science is "ascertained facts." How can the Roman Church or any other Church produce an ascertained fact in proof of God Almighty? Where does the Heavenly Gentleman reside—in "Heaven"?

The real gem in the discussion is that of the Rev. J. Adler who almost angrily pointed out "the wonderful prophecies" in the Old Testament of Christ, particularly his Birth which were all written "hundreds of years before it happened." Even Christ himself told us that his words were "trustworthy." And never forget that on the problem of Evolution, "Darwin himself later retracted some of his statements and altered others" — in fact, *The Origin of Species* is now "outdated." As for Sir Julian, it appears "he knows nothing about the difference between the disclosed and undisclosed will of God." And "just as naively," he said, "The earth was not created, it was evolved." In that way, the Rev. Mr. Adler gloated over the fact that for him, "the old tried and trusted religion is sufficient." Mr. Adler obviously does not realise that on this nobody cares two hoots. No doubt any old Basuto witch doctor talks in much the same way.

Finally, the Rev. W. J. Massey, who is a Methodist, agrees with Sir Julian that even religions "evolve" — except that "science, rightly appreciated, is teaching us more

and more that this is God's universe, and that religion must look upon science as another medium of God's self-revelation." In other words, "most thinking Christians" (they include of course Mr. Massey) "have accepted that what scientists call evolution is actually Divine action in a creating world." I am sure that most "thinking Christians" will have accepted nothing of the kind for what all this actually means I have no idea. To call Evolution "Divine action" must make some of the other parsons squirm even if they understand what is meant.

Anyway, Mr. Massey does not like the way Sir Julian dismissed Mr. Massey's God as "man-made," and appears quite certain that "even the unbeliever comes back to point of recognition" — whatever that means. Possibly Mr. Massey envisages "unbelievers" unbelieving everything at first, and then coming back to as fervent a belief in God Almighty as he himself shares with the other parsons. We have had not a few "unbelievers" who insist that Jesus was a "Freethinker," possibly the greatest Freethinker who ever lived. Perhaps "our Lord" is also an "unbeliever," the greatest unbeliever who ever believed in God Almighty.

These five parsons caused some discussion, not particularly "unbelieving"; but I hope they will not be very angry with me if I state that it is a great pity parsons enter into any controversy with an "unbeliever." We infidels know Christianity as a rule very well indeed — some of us in fact far better than the average clergyman or theologian. But we have never met a clergyman who really knows the Freethought case. The fact that thousands of books, pamphlets, and articles, are published every year to prove that God exists is surely proof enough that the evidence does not exist. To believe in God, you must have Faith and no argument. These articles in the *Natal Daily News* prove this to the hilt.

A Damnable Doctrine

By WILLIAM McILROY

I can indeed hardly see how anyone ought to wish Christianity to be true, for if so, the plain language of the text seems to show that those men who do not believe — and this would include my father, brother and almost all my best friends — will be everlastingly damned. And this is a damnable doctrine. — CHARLES DARWIN, *Autobiography*.

AMONG AN INCREASING NUMBER of Christians, there is now a tendency to soft-pedal, and even criticise, one of the basic doctrines of Christianity — eternal punishment. Intelligent and humane people recognise it as one of the most vicious and harmful ideas ever propagated. At the same time, it should be remembered that the Roman Catholic Church retains this appalling doctrine, and the orthodox Protestant groups have not issued an official rejection of it. Although it is obvious that among both clergy and laymen there is a difference of opinion about the nature of hell.

Needless to say, the fundamentalist sects cling tenaciously to the "bliss or blisters" teaching, and revel in picturing the torments of the damned. It is quite useless appealing to the better instincts of a member of the Plymouth Brethren or the Full Gospel Assembly. These fanatics immediately declare "the Bible says" and can easily justify the hell-fire doctrine from the "impregnable rock" (Matthew 18.8; 25, 41 and 46; Mark 9.47; Psalms 9.17).

More particular descriptions of hell may be found in Luke 16, 23 and 24; Revelation 14.9-11, and Revelation 19.20. And Romans 5.18 tells us that the God of love and justice we are urged to worship has devised this fiery Belsen to vent his wrath on men and women because Adam sinned. But because thousands are understandably revolted by the hell-fire doctrine, many Christians attempt to distort the historic meaning of hell. Hell, we are sometimes told,

is not a place; the word "eternal" does not mean forever!

Such word-spinning will deceive few. We know only too well what the Christian Churches have taught, what the theologians have written, and what the masses have understood by hell. It has always been a place of everlasting punishment, where men, women and (according to many prominent Christian leaders) little children may be sent. It would be expecting too much from a *just* God to lower the temperature a few degrees and arrange for the prongs of the pitchforks to be less sharp because the offenders were under age!

These teachings have blighted the lives of millions; caused untold misery to children and their simple-minded parents who believed the ravings of neurotic sadists. Countless sermons have been preached, and millions of words written, describing the horrors of hell. Men who have been regarded as the mouthpieces of the Almighty, and whose teachings have influenced masses of people, have subscribed to this brutal and revolting doctrine. They racked their brains to compose even more lurid descriptions of the torments awaiting "the unsaved."

Jonathan Edwards believed that "little infants, that appear so innocent and pretty are God's enemies at heart," that "all are by nature the children of wrath and the heirs of hell, and everyone that has not been born again whether he be young or old is exposed every moment to eternal damnation under the wrath of Almighty God." Charles Spurgeon poured cold water on those faint-hearted Christians who did not believe that sinners would remain for ever in the fiery furnace, declaring that: "In hell there is no hope, not even the hope of being annihilated. On every chain is written the words 'for ever'." And Jeremy Taylor described hell as a place where "husbands shall see their wives, parents shall see their children tormented before their eyes. The bodies of the damned shall be crowded together like grapes in a vine-press which press one another till they burst."

At least the Roman Catholics promise a passport for the pearly gates if you do as you are told — although naturally the journey is made much easier if you or your relatives are able to pay for masses. And with most of the Protestant fundamentalist sects, being "washed in the blood" is guaranteed to do the trick. But the predestination theory of the Calvinists held that large numbers of people were by God's will destined for hell, and no amount of repentance or good works could alter the divine plan. And it was the Calvinists who indulged in the most colourful and apparently authentic descriptions of hell, as though, like the fairies, it was at the bottom of their garden. One Scottish Presbyterian minister even announced to his flock the dimensions of the lake of fire and brimstone! Vivid descriptions of hell, together with the prediction that the majority of mankind would go there, frightened the wits out of congregations and not infrequently pushed the neurotic over the borderline of sanity.

However, it is an ill wind that blows nobody good. The spectacle of men and women (not forgetting the unbaptised babies) sizzling in hell would, according to some Christian teachers, add to the pleasures of the righteous, who would be permitted to watch from heaven. No less a person than St. Thomas Aquinas wrote: "That the saints may enjoy their beatitvde more thoroughly and give more abundant thanks for it to God, a perfect view of the punishment of the damned is given them." Perhaps the deity who so thoughtfully books the best seats for the chosen remembers to have ice lollies and cool drinks served to them at frequent intervals! Can the philosophy of such "Top People" be "I'm all-right Jack"?

Bearing in mind the brutal doctrine of hell, it is hardly

surprising that Christians have hanged, burned and tortured while they had the power to do so. Any student of history knows the horrors of child labour in 19th century England, when the Churches kept silent and Christian employers made five-year olds work 14 hours a day in mines and factories. Christians have always indulged in cruel sports and congregated in thousands to watch executions. Can we wonder, when they worship a god who is supposed to make people suffer for ever? Belief in, and worship of such a God are hardly likely to make people humane or tolerant.

But the eternal punishment doctrine is not only brutal and sadistic, it is utterly stupid. The aim of punishment should be the prevention of crime and the reform of criminals. The everlasting punishment of men and women for an error of belief, or of children who have not been baptised is monstrous. Only people who are vindictive, and lacking all feelings of compassion, could fail to be repelled by the idea of anyone suffering for ever in hell.

Indeed, as Chapman Cohen said, "the only one who deserves to go there is the one who created it."

CORRESPONDENCE

ISLAM

Dr. Krinkill (*THE FREETHINKER*, 26/2/60) attempts to paint the Copts as long suffering under a succession of wicked Muslim rulers; he does not bother to mention the fact that prior to the Arab conquest of Egypt the Copts had a name for being intolerant fanatics. It would indeed be a hard task to counter all the charges laid against Islam, for no details are given as to where the writer got his "facts" from, or whether the source was Muslim or Christian — or neither.

In the introduction to Sir Abdu'llah Suhrawardy's book *Sayings of Muhammad* (E. P. Dutton, N.Y., 1941) the following interesting passage appears: "When the Roman Emperor embraced Christianity, the population of the whole Roman Empire, including Egypt, was by decree forced to renounce all other religions and adopt Christianity; but it was not until after 500 years of Muslim rule in Egypt that, as a result of peaceful conversion, the Muslims formed even 50 per cent. of the total population." Dr. Krinkill asserts that three years after the "Arab-Muslim conquest, the conquerors were able to force £6,000,000 out of their Christian subjects in taxation." It is true that a tax was placed on non-Muslims, the conquered races were given the choice of accepting Islam or paying a moderate capitation tax (jizya) which, as a matter of interest, released them from military service — compulsory for Muslims. The non-Muslim subjects were called dhimmis; of these the Imam Ali said: "The blood of the dhimmi is as the blood of the Muslim (*The Spirit of Islam*, Syed Ameer Ali). Muhammad himself is on record as saying "He who harms a Jew or Christian will have me as his accuser." As further evidence of Muslim liberality to non-Muslims can be cited the preferential treatment given the monks of St. Catherine's Monastery; when I visited the monastery not so long ago I found the monks to have a great respect for the Muslims, a respect not born of fear.

Christianity has itself shown how baseless are many of the charges laid as Islam's door. When the Archbishop of Valencia drew up a document to lay before Philip III, recommending the expulsion from Spain of the Muslims, one of the main charges was that they allowed religious freedom to their subjects, in the words of the charge: "That they commended nothing so much as

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that liberty of conscience in all matters of religion, which the Turks and all other Muhammadans suffer their subjects to enjoy." (*Apostacies and Treasons of the Moriscoes*, Archbishop of Valencia, 1602.) R. W. MORRELL, PH.D.

CATHOLICS AND COMMUNISM

Mr. D. H. Tribe hopes that "Catholics and Communists will come to prefer coalitions to corpses" but the *Daily Express* reports (22/2/60) that Roman Catholic bishops in East Germany read "a pastoral letter denouncing materialistic Communism." "A clear Yes for Christ means a clear No for materialism," the latter said. "There could be no compromise between a belief in God and the atheism advocated by Communism." G. RICHARDSON.

FISH OF ST. PETER

The Irish News, the voice of Roman Catholicism in Northern Ireland recently (19/2/60) recounted what it called the "legend" that the haddock was the fish "in which St. Peter found the piece of money" because of the dark spot on either side of the dorsal fin; taken to be the Saint's thumb and finger print. It is not difficult "to refute this old legend," said the *News*. "But surely it would be pushing pedantry too far not to recognise and appreciate the deep Christian spirit that permeated this pious belief: so long may it continue to be a popular tradition!"

Poor Peter only caught the one fish with a built-in cash register; his successors have caught millions of fish, all with Peter's Pence in their mouths. One must not be too pedantic; one might speak the truth and cause the fish to open their eyes and shut their mouths. S. J. YOUNG.

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