

The Freethinker

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A WHOLE PAGE in some of our leading papers announced, "God's Way, Not Man's way for Britain", just before Easter. Moral Re-Armament had spoken again. Let us examine closely this statement of policy, for after many years, I must confess that I still don't know what MRA stands for, in a positive way. I know perfectly well that it is anti-Communist, but that seems about all. Perhaps this new announcement will bring light to a confused world?

The first sentence: "Britain needs an Easter experience adequate to answer the Kremlin". Well, most of us were looking for good weather and a bit of rest or a bit of fun, with our thoughts a thousand miles away from the Kremlin.

"The aim of MRA . . . the Cross of Christ will transform the world." As the Christians have been working on this for 1,900 years, I suppose that a new effort may be expected, although a little redundant.

"The great dividing line in the world is between the materialists—in both the Communist and non-Communist world—and those who believe in God." This plain statement seems to be the only honest paragraph on the whole page.

"Absolute Love"

"MRA is not 'anti-Communist'. . . . Absolute love is one of the standards of MRA. It hates nobody." The next sentence makes plain that MRA love is not "absolute" at all. "It does carry one hate: the hate of evil." And guess what the evil is? ". . . the evil in the non-Communist world, which denies God . . ."

MRA, which hates nobody and is not anti-communist, is later hailed by Robert Schumann as being committed to the "right idea", which is "the only real bastion which can effectively counter materialist, godless Communism". I think that Buchman makes it plain that MRA loves Christians and hates Communists. Conveniently, he ignores the hundreds of millions of Muslims, Hindus, pagans and other non-Christians.

Let us penetrate a little more deeply into the Christian creed of the MRA.

"It will take more than talk about Christ . . . It will need an actual experience of His Passion . . . What we need is the Blood of Jesus Christ . . ." But the Passion and the Blood of the Lamb, etc., have been invoked for centuries, by men far nobler than Frank Buchman and by organisations far more powerful than MRA. Yet the things that MRA hopes this Passion will burn out—"lust, perversion, hatred, greed, the worship of men, dirt and evil"—still exist. Or, at least, we suppose so, for no attempt is made to explain what all these things mean, beyond the fact that they seem to be peculiarly relevant to materialists and communists.

If it takes more than talk about Christ, we search diligently the rest of the page—and apart from talk about "His Passion" and "the Blood", "a more militant, more radical ideology", "more dedicated men", and a lot more phrases of this kind, we find nothing.

MRA talks about "absolute moral standards of honesty, purity, unselfishness and love". What standards? Do these standards apply to materialists and communists, as well as to Christians?

"The new world must be spelt out in new men." Now we come to grips with something. The advertisement actually names a number of these "new men". "A man who was thirteen years in the Communist Party in Kerala—the former Advocate General of the State of Kerala—Muriel Smith—the Chairman of the Pontypridd Council—Chancellor Adenauer—Robert Schumann, former Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of France—Bill Johnson, former

Mayor of Bethnal Green—John McGovern, MP for Shettleston—Sir Hamilton Kerr, MP for Cambridge." If this bag of converts to MRA are the "new men" who are going to spell out the new world, it will be a lovely world indeed. Outstanding among these new men is that pillar of West German "honesty, purity, unselfishness and love"—the Catholic authoritarian, Adenauer.

Nevertheless, MRA is more than "talk about Christ" or spelling bees by "new" men. "The hard materialism of the Kremlin, like the soft materialism of the free world, will only be answered by a more militant, more radical ideology lived by more dedicated men." As a soft materialist always ready to appreciate new social phenomena, I looked round for "dedicated" men. Says Mr. McGovern: "The free world must give everything for MRA or it will lose everything to Communism. It calls for a super-human effort this year. We must outbid the Kremlin . . . I must put myself more and more at the foot of the Cross . . ." I contemplate Mr. McGovern outbidding the Kremlin at the foot of the Cross, waiting patiently for "the Blood" to do its work: outside the closed door, I watch for the "ancient virtues of justice, understanding and peace" to "rule under God" over this representative of "a sane humanity".

The final message of MRA seems to be, "God's will". MRA interpret this as "peace", in spite of the fact that "today we are in a vaster struggle. We need more than human strength and wisdom".

Let no one sneer at the contradictions that run through the MRA advertisement. Frank Buchman, perhaps, does not presume to say what God's will really is. He is no Pope John. God must be allowed his little idiosyncracies, the chief of which is being all things to all men.

But has it ever struck Dr. Buchman that God deliberately created all these communists and materialists in order to carry out His purposes? If God is the creator of evil as well as of good, there is nothing to prevent him from standing behind materialism. We materialists may be his chosen instrument. We have no knowledge of this, it is true, but what proof have the Christians, and MRA in particular, that they are the chosen of God, instead of us? God works in devious ways his wonders to perform.

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

Buchman's Way for Britain

— By FRANK MAITLAND —

Blind Leadership

By COLIN MCCALL

ACCORDING TO *The Times*, in its "Supplement to the Bible in English" published (March 27th, 1961) to mark the 350th anniversary of the Authorised Version, Religious Instruction in schools would seem to be in a pretty satisfactory state since the 1944 Education Act. "The denominational question", says A. V. Murray, Emeritus Professor of Education at the University of Hull, "which so much tortured our forefathers, scarcely appears at all", though he does make an exception, in parenthesis, that Roman Catholics do not join in. But the *Agreed Syllabuses of Religious Instruction* represent, he says, "a lay contribution to religious education in our time", being in "the nature of suggestions rather than regulations", leaving teachers "free to make adaptations as they feel to be suitable".

There is something in this. Wherever possible, suggestions are preferable to regulations, and in this subject strict regulations would be quite unworkable. So the agreed syllabus is a necessary compromise: a recognition that it would be hopeless to expect teachers to treat RI as a factual subject. One has only to ask how many teachers could, for example, sincerely teach that the world was made in six days or was completely submerged, to appreciate the need for elasticity of treatment.

But, in fact, things are nothing like so satisfactory as Professor Murray suggests by his "correlations" of scripture with history, geography and politics, as well as literature. The "Secondary Schools Forum" by "Essem" in *Teachers World* recently (February 3rd), reported on the low standard of religious education in schools, and correlated it (if Professor Murray will allow the term) with the lack of religious knowledge among teachers. Letters quoted, doubted "whether one practising teacher in a hundred would pass GCE 'O' level in religious knowledge" and "whether there is any subject about which such colossal and widespread ignorance exists among teachers generally". The second of these two letter-writers, "John Mark", found "after twenty-five years' experience, with much of it among training college students, that a vague idea of what they may have learned as children in a Sunday School (if they did go to one), or from being taught by other teachers as factually ignorant as themselves, is all that so many teachers bring to their lessons". "The added tragedy is", he said, "that the very vagueness and apathy of their faith—if faith they have—is soon sensed by the children". That, of course, is the point. They have no faith. Teaching, like other professions and trades, has a high percentage of sceptics.

It is true, as *Teachers World's* "Essem" commented, that it would be inadvisable to have a music teacher who was tone-deaf, a maths teacher who was unmathematical, or have a Henry Ford teaching children that history is bunk. Yet he feared "it is quite likely that we have for years been employing irreligious people to give instruction in religion". I would assure him that it is not only "quite likely", but quite certain, though it will probably upset him even more. The worrying feature, as he saw it, was the teachers' "lack of anything approaching shame" over their religious ignorance. Indeed, he said, "nobody cares, neither the people who appoint the blind to lead the blind nor the blind leaders themselves".

But surely ignorance is a distinctive characteristic of all religion. Unless one is speaking on the simple level of knowing where to find a particular book in the Old Testa-

ment or naming the twelve apostles, on the one hand, or dealing purely with correlatives (the history or geography of the Holy Land) on the other, ignorance is universal. Blind leadership, in other words, is not confined to teachers: all are blind from Pope or Archbishop down. Some may have "vital faith"—to use "John Mark's" term—but that makes them no less blind. It may well make them more so.

The trouble, in short, lies not with the teachers, but with the subject. It is a subject on which nothing is known. Or, if you prefer it in the words of Professor Murray, "there is no correlation with science, in spite of ingenious attempts to bring it about".

World Union of Freethinkers

Week-end Conference, September 8th to 10th, 1961

Beatrice Webb House, Holmbury St. Mary, near Dorking, Surrey.

The British Committee of the World Union of Freethinkers has arranged the following programme:

Friday, Sept. 8th. Assemble at the Beatrice Webb House at 6 p.m. Dinner 7 p.m. Opening Session 8.30 p.m. Speakers: Lady Barbara Wootton, F. A. Ridley, J. Hutton Hynd.

Saturday, Sept. 9th. Morning Session: Professor Lucia de Brouckère (Brussels University), Dr. W. E. Swinton: "The Relation between the Scientific Worker and Society". Break for morning coffee between the two addresses. Afternoon: Outing if fine. Evening: Fenner Brockway, "The Challenge of Africa".

Sunday, Sept. 10th. Morning session: Speakers to be announced. Afternoon: Final meeting and dispersal.

The charge for the conference, including lodging for two nights and three meals each whole day, i.e. six all told, and morning coffee, will be £3 10s. (tea beverages extra). As the number of places is strictly limited, those who wish to attend should apply *as soon as possible to*—Colin McCall, National Secular Society, 103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1, and state if they are vegetarians or have special requirements.

Beatrice Webb House can be reached by bus from Dorking North Station, which is about 23 miles from Waterloo, Victoria or London Bridge stations. Green Line coaches run to Dorking Town, services 712, 713, 714.

PRIESTS WANTED

ROMAN CATHOLICS are all too fond of confidently representing their Church as being in a flourishing condition. We do not often hear about failures. Occasionally, however, significant pieces of information are published, and the latest gratifying news of papal failures is from Italy, where it is obvious that the lack of candidates for the priesthood is causing a headache in the Vatican (*Time*, 7/4/61).

In 1860, Milan had one priest to every 473 people; today it is one for 1,572. In Bologna and Salerno there are 81 and 60 parishes vacant owing to lack of clergy. Eighteen per cent of the clergy are over 70, and they die off quicker than they can be replaced, owing to the serious decline in candidates for theological colleges. The Genoa college reports a drop of 40% in the last 20 years and 80% of the pupils do not complete the course. Turin college is now two-thirds empty.

The Universe (24/2/61) reported that similar deficiencies exist in Latin America where 177,000 priests are now required. But today, clericalism is losing its appeal. In Guatemala, the shortage of priests, is so great that there is only one of them to every 28,000 of the population.

Answering Spiritualist Claims

By H. CUTNER

A WELSH READER has been good enough to ask me to reply if possible to some fantastic claims made by Mr. M. Barbanell in his book *This is Spiritualism*. Unfortunately, I have not seen this work, and I hate answering any book I have not read; but I have read a great deal of Mr. Barbanell (who, incidentally, cordially dislikes me), and I have been forced to come to certain conclusions about everything he says in favour of Spiritualistic phenomena.

As on many other subjects, I prefer to read both sides, and I have waded through all sorts of books in favour of Spiritualism—even such out-of-date expositions as Florence Marryat's *There is no Death*, and Mrs. Crowe's *Night Side of Nature*. I have also attended quite a few seances, heard such enthusiasts as Lord Dowding (who believes, I think, in fairies), and had a number of debates both on the platform and in print. My experience of Spiritualism is not second-hand, for I have known personally many Spiritualists. In addition I have even tried spirit healing—without any success whatever.

I do not believe that any "spirits" have ever been called up from the mighty deep or from the Etheric World or Summerland. And it should not be forgotten that one of the most famous of all mediums—she "practised" for over 40 years—Mrs. Piper, did not believe she ever called up spirits either. But this is, in a way, beside the point. The fact remains that millions of people do believe in survival, in spooks, and in "phenomena"—hence books like Mr. Barbanell's.

This gentleman always made me laugh when in the published accounts of his many experiences with "phenomena", he always insisted that everything was produced "under strict test conditions". We were rarely or never told what these test conditions really were, or who was—except himself—responsible for them; but then Mr. Barbanell was not writing for convinced unbelievers like me, but for people who were always ready to believe anything no matter how silly. They almost always had been indoctrinated with Christianity, or some other religion, and miracles were mere commonplace to them. Hence, these people were ever in the mood to swallow any kind of marvel.

There is another point to remember. Among the easiest people to hoax with spirit phenomena are professors of science, etc. Any conjuror would prefer to perform his magic before a dozen of them rather than a sharp-eyed schoolboy. Most of the professors who have swallowed Spiritualism are so innocent of guile that they were ready to believe anything could come from spirits rather than admit that they were unable to explain how any particular phenomenon was done. In a long experience with books and magazines on magic, I have never come across a single instance of a professor finding out how a particular illusion was done, or even the secret of a simple card trick.

Then we must not be so quick to accept the description of a phenomenon written by a Spiritualist. Half the success of a good conjuror depends on the misdirection of the audience. He never allows them to see what one hand is doing if he can make them see the other hand doing something else. One of the most brilliant of the slate-writing conjurors, one who completely bamboozled Alfred Russel Wallace last century, was S. J. Davey. The late Frank Podmore, who wanted a description of his tricks was

unable to see them at the time, but his brother later described them. Davey who read the account said that it proved how thoroughly he had misdirected Mr. Podmore for he utterly failed to see how the tricks were performed. When convinced believers in Spiritualism describe "phenomena", it can be taken as a truism that they have been thoroughly deceived—and this goes for Mr. Barbanell.

A famous American conjuror, J. J. Proskauer, in his *Spooks Crooks!* (published in 1932) said this about it in his Introduction:—

This book is about swindlers. Fascinating swindlers: men and women who practise the most contemptible form of deception. They take advantage of the misfortunes of others . . . Card-sharpers are upright citizens compared to them . . . persons who sell predictions and advice from "supernatural" sources, fraudulent astrologers, numerologists, cracked spirit mediums, fortune tellers. They catch about 30,000,000 people (in America) a year, and take (about) £40,000,000 away from them . . .

My Welsh correspondent wants me to explain how the following "phenomena" are done—the behaviour of a balance in a sealed cell; the interlocking of the wooden rings; the several alleged voices and messages from "Spiritland"; also the moving table and other phenomena described in Ratcliffe's *Is Spiritualism True?* And he says he is well "acquainted with most tricks in this line" which is—for me—rather vague. Exactly what tricks is he acquainted with?

As I have not read Mr. Barbanell's book, I have only the vaguest idea what the tricks (if they are tricks) are. But even if I were quite unable to describe how any of them is done, this would only prove my ignorance of the tricks; it would not prove that they were performed by spooks. Let me however take up one phenomenon—it even staggered the late Harry Price the famous "investigator" of Spiritualism during the '20s and '30s.

A pendulum is suspended in a sealed glass case and placed on a table. Quite a distance from it is the medium, and of course around them both sit the audience. The medium then goes into a trance, and the pendulum begins to move in response to questions by the audience. All fervent Spiritualists will immediately claim that the movements of the pendulum—say, one movement for "yes", two movements for "no", are due to a spook. But the true explanation of the pendulum moving is actually a very prosaic one.

Any conjuring shop will provide a "plate-lifter"—two indiarubber bulbs at the ends of an indiarubber tube. If you press one bulb, it fills the other with air. It is a little "after dinner" trick. Under the tablecloth you place one bulb under a plate, and the other in your pocket. If you now press this one, it fills the other with air and so expands and lifts the plate.

The medium has one (specially made) bulb under the carpet, and the other bulb joined to it by the rubber tube under the carpet and the leg of the table. By pressing the bulb under the foot of the medium, the other one is filled with air, and gently lifts and thus moves the table—and the pendulum (or balance) moves. In a work written by a very famous American magician, Joseph Dunninger, on Houdini, he gives a drawing of this very clever trick—I say "clever" because it is utterly unexplainable if not known.

The "moving table" phenomenon is one that my Welsh correspondent ought to know and it is quite easily pro-

(Concluded on next page)

This Believing World

So Mr. Malcolm Muggeridge had the hardihood to ask in *Sunday Pictorial* (April 2nd) whether the Christian Easter was "Pagan"? He answered his own question by, "Easter was a festival taken over from Paganism"—and its "essential character of a spring festival survives". Of course, Easter was a pagan fertility festival, and the proof is that we still make a fuss over Easter eggs—the egg being a fertility symbol *par excellence*. Mr. Muggeridge thinks that even if "the particular beliefs with which Christianity has associated may languish", the "occasion itself remains one for rejoicing". Naturally, love and fertility will ever remain the hope and aspiration of normal human beings.

★

The "News of the World" (March 26) on the question of "ghosts" was inundated with letters and pictures asking "Why? What? Where?" and other questions, and employed "the well-known author Charles Beatty" to answer them. Mr. Beatty thoroughly believes in ghosts, spooks, and the like, and easily demolished the questions where they showed any scepticism. The important thing it appears is to believe in the poor dear spooks, and you will see them right enough. We thoroughly believe it.

★

This modern monkeying about with the Holy Bible is certainly bringing misery to many devout believers. For example, translating it into our present idiom has upset huge numbers of parsons, priests, and laity, for the translation hasn't even a touch of that reverence which God's Word necessitates. Then there is the modern habit of putting "our Lord" on the stage or in a film or on some so-called religious painting.

★

Thus we get Jesus wearing jeans in a play at—think of it!—Eastertime. Obviously, nobody wore jeans in Palestine when Jesus was preaching his heartfelt sermons, and to portray him in accordance with history he should have been wearing a spotless nightie. But the latest example of these anachronisms is a church painting by Graham Sutherland in which he makes Jesus wear a straw hat—forgetting perhaps that the only men who wear straw hats these days are butchers. Perhaps, it will occur to some enterprising innovator to portray Jesus addressing a crowd in a sort of Palestinian Hyde Park speaking from a platform, while his audience are consuming miraculous loaves and fishes.

★

We used to believe that Christianity these days was not too keen to stress the dear old dictum about being saved only through the blood of the Lamb—but we find we are mistaken. A delightful Tract all the way from Canada has just reached us, entitled, "If the Blood had not been shed", attacking those faint-hearted Christians for calling the doctrine, "a gospel of gore", or "a doctrine of the shambles". It pulverises them with the Divine text from Heb. 9, 22—"Without shedding of blood there is no remission"; even goes to Leviticus 17, 11, where we find, "It is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul".

★

There is no need however to go to the Bible for the shedding of blood. The history of Christianity almost from the time when Paul, Peter, and Barnabas, were rowing with each other, to the present day, is packed with "bloody" episodes. The Crusades, the Inquisition, the burning at the stake of Catholics and Protestants, to say nothing of "witches", give lurid and horrible details of the "shedding of blood". All in the name of Gentle Jesus.

We must not forget a text about the Devil from Revelation 12, 11. It says, "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb", which may or may not be true. But reading our modern Christian writers quite a large proportion still believe that the Devil is the one true cause of sin and backsliding, and even the worship of Mammon, instead of "our blessed Lord" (as Dr. Donald Soper loves to call him). We wonder whether the translators of the New English Bible really believe in the Devil as a distinct person, and Hell as a real place? In any case, was the Devil really overcome by "the blood of the Lamb"? That is, is he still alive?

★

Something must have gone wrong with the claim of the Rev. B. Williams that his old shirts cut up into little squares and sent out to the sick, the halt, and the blind work "miracles" by completely curing them. To an investigator of the *Sunday Pictorial* recently, Mr. Williams gave lists of the way his wonderful bits of old shirt made the blind see, the dumb speak, the deaf hear, and the lame walk, in a marvellous succession of "miracles".

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And what was the result? The investigator could not find "one person on the list" who was cured. Not a single "miracle" could be substantiated—not even one in fact which should have occurred through the "laying on of hands". Still, Mr. Williams is very happy. He gets "the glorious satisfaction of doing the Lord's Work". We cannot help wondering whether a little cash from the uncured also helps?

ANSWERING SPIRITUALIST CLAIMS

(Concluded from page 123)

duced by any medium who has the necessary apparatus—merely a hook in the medium's sleeve. And "voices", mostly with trumpets, can be done by any medium in the dark, to say nothing of all sorts of other "phenomena". All this should be known to anybody who has studied conjuring from authoritative works.

But one thing should be noted, Spiritualistic phenomena follows the modern conjuring trend of becoming more difficult to detect with first-class mediums. Conjuring tricks are these days far more subtle and difficult to explain. Put on by a good showman, the "telepathic" feats we see on television are very difficult to unravel. Yet even if the people who do them insist that they are not telepathy, and have nothing supernatural about them, this will be hotly denied by viewers, simply because they themselves cannot discover the *modus operandi*.

Can we wonder why religion has so often duped the most learned of men?

HOLY MOSES!

Gordon Irving reports a believe-it-or-not story from Stornoway, in the Island of Lewis, where a cinema audience rushed from their seats following a rumour about a local minister's dream. The rumour—that the minister had dreamt that the town's cinema, the Playhouse, would go on fire because it was showing *The Ten Commandments*—and the coincidence of rockets going off to summon the lifeboat at a tense moment in the film, caused the panic.

The film had only twenty minutes to run, and had reached a spectacular scene where flames were holding back the Israelites. At this dramatic moment, outside the cinema, the lifeboat rockets were fired.

Manager A. A. Macleod heard the rumour himself. It said that a minister had seen a vision that at the last performance of *The Ten Commandments* the cinema would go on fire.

"We didn't take it seriously," he said, "but our Saturday attendance was badly affected. Only about 500 people turned up, and the cinema is capable of holding 1000." All was quiet—until the rockets went off.—"Commentary" by Bernard Charman, editor in *The Daily Cinema* (7/4/61).

THE FREETHINKER

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Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (The Mound).—Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. CRONAN, McRAE and MURRAY.

London (Tower Hill).—Every Thursday, 12—2 p.m.: Messrs. J. W. BARKER and L. EBURY.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Thursday lunchtimes, THE FREETHINKER on sale, Piccadilly, near Queen Victoria Statue.)

Marble Arch Branch N.S.S. (Marble Arch).—Meetings every Sunday, from 4 p.m.; Messrs. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER, C. E. WOOD, D. TRIBE and J. P. MURACCIOLE.

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Pichead).—Meetings: Wednesdays, 1 p.m.; Sundays, 7.30 p.m.

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, Nottingham).—Every Friday, 1 p.m., Every Sunday, 6.30 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Midland Institute Cinema, Paradise Street), Sunday, April 23rd, 6.45 p.m.: B. J. DURK, "That Man has a Soul".

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1, Tuesday, April 25th, 7.15 p.m.: H. J. BLACKHAM, M.A., "David Hume, the Modern Philosopher".

South Place Ethical Society (Red Lion Square, W.C.1), Sunday, April 23rd, 11 a.m.: J. HUTTON HYND, "The Shakespearian Ethic, by John Vyvyan".

Notes and News

WHAT CAN BE SAID, that hasn't already been said, about the stupendous Russian achievement of the first manned flight in space? Obviously nothing; so we select the most noteworthy comment by a world statesman: "When the human horizon is being extended in this way, it seems narrow-minded folly and utter lack of vision for people in this little earth of ours to take and prepare for war". Is it significant that these were the words of a Freethinker, the Indian Prime Minister, Mr. Nehru?

★

THE MONTHLY MAGAZINE of Protestants and Other Americans United for Separation of Church and State, *Church and State* (April, 1961) from which our article on page 127 is reprinted with acknowledgment, asked a pertinent question about immigration into the U.S.A.: "Why should America absorb the surplus population from those Catholic countries which deny birth control knowledge to their own people?" Italy would be the chief beneficiary of any increase in US immigration quota, and "Any welfare agency in Italy which attempts to provide birth control information for the poor can be charged with a crime, under a penal code which was adopted through Catholic pressure". The Roman Catholic Church in America is—need we add?—"the most vigorous champion in clerical circles of increased immigration".

★

"I MEAN YOU COULDN'T have a more commercial title than *Sodom and Gomorrah*," said film-producer Joe Levine

to *Evening Standard* columnist Thomas Wiseman (29/3/61). Perhaps you couldn't, but audiences that go to see the forthcoming Biblical "epic" have a few surprises in store. The two towns, for instance, are destroyed in a flood scene, it being Mr. Levine's theory that "any book you adapt for the screen, you got to take some liberties with. You got to be practical". And he assured Mr. Wiseman that "It's a great flood scene". But he is worried about "this question of homosexuality". "We can't have anything like that in the film . . . God has got to have pretty good reason for destroying Sodom and Gomorrah, but we still got to have a film that'll get past the censor". So Mr. Levine has to find "some less distasteful sins—you know, that are more box-office—like plain ordinary lust or somethin', you know".

★

THE ANGLICAN CHURCH in Barbados, which is soon likely to be disendowed, suffered a further financial shock when the Bishop of Barbados, the Right Rev. Lewis Evans condemned the raising of money through raffles and gambling games (*Barbados Advocate*, 16/3/61). "I cannot believe that it is God's will", he said, "that His Church's work should depend on occasional fairs and concerts and by the questionable means of raising money, such as raffles and gambling games. The essence of gambling is, first, the attempt to get money at other people's expense against their will. Secondly, making a definite appeal to chance. Neither of these two things is Christian". The Bishop called attention to dwindling congregations and the need for building new churches in newly-developed and newly-developing built-up areas but, as the *Advocate* pointed out, a great deal of money will be needed. Anglicans will have to finance their Church for the first time.

★

WE DO NOT, it is hardly necessary to say, condone hooliganism in either sacred or secular precincts, and the throwing of bricks through the windows of the new parish church of St. George, Stevenage, is altogether to be deplored. But we couldn't help smiling at the latest example of "desecration" reported by the rector's warden, Dr. Denys Swayne. "We have caught children—very happy children—doing things at which their parents, I hope, would be horrified", he said—"dancing on the altar, for instance". "Fortunately," he added, "they had taken their shoes off before doing so."

★

REVIEWING A STORY of the conversion of an agnostic (*Return to Belief*, by Yvonne Lubbock), Monica Furlong asked, "when is the Christian/Agnostic battle going to be seriously joined again (it's been nothing but a phoney war for many a year now), and on what grounds?" (*Sunday Times*, 2/4/61). She looked forward to getting "the stifling Victorian earnestness sufficiently out of our nostrils to turn upon religion with the intelligence, irreverence, energy and wit it deserves"; she wanted both sides to "put down their prejudices and sentimentality and start shouting for the truth". There are, she went on, "encouraging signs that here and there the Church is preparing for the coming conflict, and there are countries, like East Germany, where in tragic circumstances she is already engaged upon it". This, of course is terribly vague but, until her introduction of the East German political note, Miss Furlong seemed to be referring to an intellectual struggle, and she returned to this in her closing sentences. In truth, of course, this intellectual struggle was won by atheism years ago; it is religion's social hold that has still to be broken.

A Prehistoric Warning

By F. A. RIDLEY

ON EASTER MONDAY, as everybody knows, Trafalgar Square was crowded with marchers from both Aldermaston and Wethersfield in one of those monster demonstrations against nuclear armaments which have now become a recurring annual event. A crowd estimated at 25,000 (but I would say anything between 50 or 100,000) filled the Square. It was an entirely non-political, non-sectarian affair in which Communists and Conservatives, Atheists and Christians marched side by side and shouted identical slogans. To end an evolutionary process at four minutes' notice, appears to be rather a tall order, though unfortunately not a tall story, since the means to effect it actually exist in the so recently discovered nuclear armaments, which explains my presence in Trafalgar Square on that wet afternoon. It obviously induced many thousands more to head in the same direction not withstanding the inclement weather. After all, there are for Christians and Atheists alike, more pleasant and dignified ways of making their exit from this vale of tears than by vanishing into a white-hot mushroom-shaped nuclear cloud.

One of the most effective slogans prominently displayed in the Square represented one of the gigantic prehistoric dinosaurs with the illuminating caption, "All armour, no brains", a definition which seems to imply that these animals, our remote predecessors as lords of the Planet, ceased to be because they relied exclusively on armaments. As their surviving skeletons disclose nature had not too generously endowed them with brain tissue. In brief, these monstrous reptiles not only (like more modern militarists) relied on armaments, but actually became, one might say, top-heavy with armaments designed presumably to overcome their contemporary Saurian rivals. As, unfortunately, the evolution of their brain tissue did not advance *pari passu* with that of their weighty protective scales and ironclad biceps, they became, in time, unwieldily dreadnoughts. As a result they became prehistoric. After all, life is dynamic, and a species which ceases to be so soon—as a direct consequence—ceases to live. In which now prehistoric tale we have a particularly apposite warning for more recent times and more modern species including (very specially in 1961) *Homo*—not so *sapiens*—our own species.

No doubt the effigy of the militaristic dinosaur flexing his mighty muscles in full view of Lord Nelson on his giant column was intended by the Aldermaston marchers "to point the moral and adorn the tale". The "moral" in 1961 is tolerably obvious. The human species in the course of its historic struggle for existence has stumbled upon nuclear weapons of suicidal potency and, being still bogged down in an out-of-date system of power politics and national and ideological rivalries, is manufacturing them at a hitherto unheard of rate; the result of which is now to be seen in a world liable to be launched into eternity in about four minutes any time someone presses the right button at the wrong time, or the wrong button at the right time. In either case the result will be the same—planetary annihilation and for the human race, RIP! It is a fearsome prospect. And man has much less excuse than had the prehistoric reptiles of the Saurian era, for he has a much better brain than any dinosaur. If only he would use it! Otherwise, four minutes "and the rest is silence". Man will have joined the dinosaurs as a prehistoric animal. The melancholy

fact with which we are confronted today is, briefly, that *Homo sapiens*, the only animal known to commit suicide, has now discovered the art of collective suicide. He can now make his own species commit nuclear (and perhaps bacteriological) *hara-kiri* anytime. And strange as it may seem, there are plenty of people itching to press the button. There were even a few in Trafalgar Square on Easter Monday, loudly advocating bigger and better bombs. Faced with this appalling choice; with our species literally poised between planetary life or death, our political leaders can only mouth platitudes. They resemble powerless puppets engaged in a macabre dance upon the edge of a volcano from the midst of which ominous rumbles are already audible. Now or never is the chance for human reason to show its worth. What mankind requires today as never before, is not Moral Rearmament, but rational reorientation of his whole activities and traditional mental outlook. Otherwise it is much to be feared that the extinct dinosaur—"all armour and no brain" will cease to be a warning and will become a precedent. The ultimate verdict on our species will be collective *felo-de-se*: only there will be no one left alive to record it.

The Wakefield Mystery Plays

LACK OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF does not imply lack of interest in religion. On the contrary: Freethinkers are interested in religion as a psychological and social phenomenon. And it is rare to be able to experience anything so authentically Medieval as the *Wakefield Mystery Plays*, now being performed at the Mermaid Theatre, London. One really does *experience* them on this great, open stage, and one thinks of the paradox—Christianity in a cathedral, with all its pomp, is mere play acting, quite unreal: these plays are real. They will outlast the religion because they are more fundamental; because they are, in fact, more human.

"But doesn't Jesus appear in them?" you will ask. Yes, he does. He is baptised; he raises Lazarus from the dead; he is betrayed; tried; most realistically crucified; he rises from the dead; he judges souls at the Last Judgement. Unless I am wrong, though, it is as a man that the audience sees him (a saintly man, no doubt, but a man nevertheless): a man who is whipped and scourged. And it is as a human mother that Mary glows with love and tenderness at the birth of Jesus; is wracked with pain herself as her son is tortured.

And God is essentially a king. He may call himself a trinity, but this is meaningless theology with no relevance, no significance. He is a king on a throne, giving his orders; his angels are truly messengers. And when God is off-stage, Lucifer dares to sit on the throne. God must return to discover the conspiracy. Then he has the power to cast into Hell. But not only can Lucifer defy God in his absence. Adam and Eve can do so too. God sees only what goes on while he is there; his is no all-pervading presence.

This religion, one feels, is hardly supernatural at all, but earthy. It is, on the other hand, dramatic; it is excellent theatre. Adam and Eve are touchingly driven from Paradise: Abel is most bloodily murdered; Herod's soldiers slay the innocent infants to the heart-rending wails of the mothers. By contrast, Noah and his wife provide knockabout fun, as do the shepherds in the non-Biblical

scene immediately preceding their journey to Bethlehem. They lose a sheep and find it hidden in a cradle where they expect to find a baby. "What the devil's this?" one of them asks, "he has a lamb's snout". This is, of course, a symbolic as well as comic episode. Jesus, whom they next see in a manger-cradle is also a "lamb".

But it will be seen that the unknown authors of these Mystery plays, or the equally unknown reviser, the gifted dramatist we call the Wakefield Master, didn't always take their religion too seriously. The editor, Martial Rose, tells us that for two hundred years the plays provided "recreational delight and spiritual instruction for actor and audience" until, in 1576—the year when the first professional theatre was built in London—they were "prohibited on the grounds that they perpetuated superstition and idolatry". Today, I am not sure about the "spiritual instruction", but I have no doubt about the "recreational delight". The Mermaid Theatre, in the City of London, deserves our thanks for enabling us to enjoy eighteen of the original thirty-two plays in this remarkable cycle. They are part of our history, and all who can should make a point of seeing them. C.McC.

Church Chorus Supports Spellman All Unite for Church Aid

FRANCIS CARDINAL SPELLMAN, unofficial Roman Catholic primate of the United States, has received all but unanimous backing of the hierarchy and the Catholic diocesan press in his drive to overcome President Kennedy's opposition to federal aid to parochial schools and to include these institutions in the grants. Off at the crack of the prelate's gun, the entire corps of Catholic propagandists were sprinting toward the goal of federal subsidy for their Church. Not a single Catholic leader spoke out against the drive.

The Archdiocese of New York publicly announced that it was taking as its own the statement of Bishop James J. Navagh which was ordered read in every church. The statement assailed any federal aid for public schools if Catholic schools were not included; Congress and the President were bluntly threatened: "We pay (the same) taxes as everybody else. We want the same benefits everyone else will receive . . . We intend to use every legitimate way to insure that we get them."

Cardinal McIntyre was quick to sound an echo on the west coast. He charged that the Kennedy recommendations discriminate against Catholic children "despite the fact that their parents pay taxes and must help share the \$10 billion scheduled to be spent . . . for aid to public education."

Next was Archbishop William O. Brady of St. Paul, Minn. He said: "Every bill proposed for federal aid till now has been discriminatory, unjust, unfair. So are the present suggestions." There followed Bishop Lawrence J. Shehan of Bridgeport, who recently told the Supreme Court justices at a Red Mass how wrong they had been to hand down decisions denying subsidies to Catholic institutions. He said that the Kennedy programme "denies even the least bit of help to 5,000,000 children in non-public elementary and secondary schools". "They are excluded," he added, "because their parents exercise their constitutional right by choosing for them education other than the state."

This from Bishop Robert J. Dwyer: "There can be no doubt that if (federal aid) is to be a fixture of our internal policy, it must be administered without discrimination."

There was no dearth of lesser lights to support the

official Catholic line. Fr. Paul C. Reinert, president of St. Louis University, which recently purchased a handsome new campus site at a give-away price as part of an urban renewal programme, asserted that his denomination's educational programme "demands some responsibility on the part of organised government", and that "from this responsibility . . . the federal government has no escape."

Fr. Robert Drinan, dean of the law school at Jesuit Boston College, an open advocate of reversing the supreme court's repudiation of church subsidies, argued that parents would lose their "right to educate" their children in their faith unless public subsidies were paid to Catholic schools. David LaDriere, president of Citizens for Education Freedom, a Catholic Action group, urged persons of all faiths to join the fight against "discrimination in federal legislation for education." Msgr. John B. McDowell, parochial school superintendent of the Pittsburgh diocese, had a ready solution of the problem: "If federal funds are not given to all, none should have them."

The Catholic press was no less faithful to the line. The Jesuit publication *America*, gave full support to what it described as "Cardinal Spellman's call for a measure of justice to parochial schools in the distribution of federal aid to education." The *Washington Catholic Standard* praised Cardinal Spellman's "precision of expression" and attacked the *Washington Post* for criticising his position.

Our Sunday Visitor in a syndicated series objected to President Kennedy's proposals on the ground that "in violation of the constitutional guarantee of equal treatment under the law they make no provision for the . . . children who attend schools other than the public schools." The proposals were described as "callous." The *Register* and other diocesan papers featured a Catholic Welfare Conference story praising advocacy of Catholic school subsidies by the columnist, David Lawrence.

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Catholic Losses

WRITING IN *Christian Heritage* (April, 1961), an American magazine published by Christ's Mission, Inc., which has six converted priests and monks on its staff, the Rev. J. Ellsworth Kalas, pastor of the First Methodist Church, Green Bay, Wisconsin, refers to the growing exodus from the Roman Catholic Church in different parts of the world.

South America, of course, is giving the Vatican particular concern. A documentary report by Father John Considine, published in the *Catholic Green Bay Register* (14/11/58) revealed that "the rapid penetration of South America by Protestant missionaries since World War II is producing amazing results for them". According to his study, says the Rev. Kalas, while the world growth of Protestant members in the first half of this century has been "six Protestant members in mission lands in 1950 for one in 1900, the rate in Latin America has been ten to one", and it is still rising.

"The situation in the United States is equally troublesome to the Catholic Church," Mr. Kalas says. "A Jesuit priest doing research at Notre Dame University estimated that one-third of the Catholics in the United States 'fall away'. 'When the parish census is taken up in the parishes of our large cities, the *Lone Star Catholic* reports, 'the number of fallen-away Catholics is appallingly large.' Another priest has reported that 57%—more than half—of the Roman Catholic students at Princeton University 'fall away'" (*Lone Star Catholic*, 27/7/58).

Studies by several Protestant bodies, Mr. Kalas con-

tinues, underline the fact of this Catholic exodus, "In 1952 and again this year* the Statistical Office of the Methodist Church made a study of conversions and losses between Catholicism and Methodism and found in each study that for every Methodist who became a Roman Catholic, about four Roman Catholics became Methodists" (*Together*, September 1958). In Mr. Kalas's own congregation the figure has been about eight to one, he says, while: "At the great Central Methodist Church in Detroit, Dr. Henry Hitt Crane reports that two out of his three associate ministers are converts from Catholicism".

The exodus from the priesthood is as Mr. Kalas says, even more startling. Unfortunately here he lapses into imprecision. "Reports from Rome suggest that 2,000 Italian priests have left the Catholic Church there, at the heart of the Church's strength". What reports? Over what period? Mr. Kalas does not say. "Not long ago," he tells us (and it is again a pity he cannot be more precise, though this time it is no doubt possible to check) "almost a third of the priests in Venezuela—250—broke from Rome under the leadership of young Father Luis Fernando Castillo Mendez and established their own independent Venezuelan Apostolic Church". And in America, says Mr. Kalas, "according to reliable estimates, at least 75 to 100 Roman Catholic priests leave their Church every year, while in Brazil, Archbishop Ramos reported (*Green Bay Register*, 13/6/58) that there is only one priest to every 6,727 Catholics.

* This would seem to refer to 1958.—Ed.

CORRESPONDENCE

DR. DUHIG

Dr. Duhig in his "Intemperate Bigotry" tells us he wants to see religion destroyed, but does not say how this is to be achieved. Certainly, invective won't achieve it. People won't listen long to a ranter, and he wears himself out with ineffectual fulminations.

Myself, I have always held to the essential rightness of the policy of Charles Albert Watts, founder of the Rationalist Press Association, which in its better days was a force of almost inestimable value on the freethought front. With him, the final court of appeal was informed reason "independent of all arbitrary assumptions and authority". In my judgment, the rationalist scholarship that his Association brought to bear upon hoary dogmatism constituted the most devastating attack ever made upon orthodoxy and organised religion. It started me on the path to complete unbelief, and I doubt whether anything else would have done. As I have argued on different occasions, I still think that informed, rational criticism is the best weapon of offence.

In the same issue as the Doctor's article, there is one by Frank Maitland entitled "A New Deal for Suicides". This is the sort of contribution I like the tone of. It is scrupulously fair, yet persuasively thoughtful, and it seems to me—particularly in its last paragraph—to give us something of secularism at its positive best.

G. I. BENNETT.

From my copy of *THE FREETHINKER* (7/4/61) I have detached a page for careful preservation. It presents the splendid contribution headed "Intemperate Bigotry" by Dr. J. V. Duhig.

SYDNEY G. LEECH.

JEWS

According to Mr. H. Cutner, the "modern white Jew is descended from converts made by a few proselytising rabbis in the early centuries of our era" (*THE FREETHINKER* 7/4/61). Mr. Cutner also makes the statement that the Jews were almost wiped out in the two wars waged by them against the Romans. I suggest that neither of these statements is true. The one unmistakable thing about the vast majority of European Jews is their facial appearance. Their eyes, their nose, the general make of their face betray their origin. It is the same with English Jews. So, too, the Jew shows his origin by the way he talks in a good many cases, and of course, there are other differences. The same applies to the women. In the case of half-Jews or Jews where in immediate past generations, gentile blood has intermingled, such attributes are, of course, not so prominent, but those instances are rare. Most English Jews originally—since the second half of the 17th century—came from Spain,

Germany or Poland. Is your contributor *really* suggesting that when a man becomes a convert to Judaism (I imagine that very few indeed have done so in the last 1,700 years) his descendants take on those facial attributes most of us know so well?

There was only one Jewish War, by the way; the other was a revolt (A.D. 132-135). Most of the Jews were not wiped out by these struggles. Probably 1½ million were. Many Jews had dispersed in circa 63 B.C. when Judea was invaded by the Romans, and colonies survived away from Palestine, and continued to survive in succeeding generations.

Needless to say, I am not a Jew.

E. M. KINGSTON.

APARTHEID

I read *THE FREETHINKER* because of the breezy brand of its forceful Secularism. But why include political and economic propaganda when there are separate societies urging these views? For example, Mr. Ridley writes that South Africa's policy of *apartheid* disqualifies her from membership of the Commonwealth. I strongly disagree. Critics of *apartheid* tend to base themselves on the principle that Africa belongs to the blacks. But when the whites first came, that vast continent was inhabited by a relatively few natives, living in tiny widely-scattered villages separated by vast tracts of uninhabited land. As late as 1856, the enormous territory of Cape Colony was inhabited by 110,000 Europeans and 139,000 of other races. If we are to say that Africa belongs to the blacks, we must also say that USA belongs to the red men, and Australia to the aborigines. The whites brought prosperity to South Africa, and the blacks flocked from their villages to share in this prosperity. I cannot admit that any principle of justice compels the whites to allow the blacks, by reason of their numerical superiority, to take over the government of the white territories. The pass system was merely an attempt to stem the incoming flood of black labour, and it would be foolish for the whites to extend the vote to every illiterate black who chooses to enter the Colony.

The National Secular Society is a small body. It is not likely to help the propaganda of Secularism by taking sides on questions over which its members are hotly divided. I am not moved by the argument that the NSS has always included aims other than Secularism. This may account in some measure for its small membership. It would be wiser to leave these other aims to their specialist societies. Most of these specialist societies admit both Christians and Atheists; they are careful, and rightly so, not to take sides on this religious controversy. Cannot Secularists show equal wisdom?

HENRY MEULEN.

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