

# The Freethinker

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A FEW WEEKS BACK, a discussion on the Christian belief in immortality was announced on the radio. Though all the participants were clergymen of various Protestant Churches, I patiently sat through the entire programme. A theological education such as I once received, has its undoubted uses—particularly one may relevantly add—for regular contributors to THE FREETHINKER. In any case, I for one, have always thought that it is a rash assumption to suppose that every Christian is a fool, or every theologian an unqualified moron, for undeniably some theologians have been men of marked capacity—an opinion which I once expressed to the late Chapman Cohen who cordially agreed with it. On this occasion, however, and in particular reference to the Christian dogma of immortality which the clerical pundits were supposed to be discussing, I cannot honestly state that I gathered much enlightenment. As one who seeks to be not only a Secularist but a genuine Freethinker, I am always, I hope, prepared to listen with attention, to any real arguments put forward by the more serious type of Christian or theistic apologist. On this occasion none was forthcoming, for all the speakers took the “sure and certain hope” of the Resurrection morning for granted, without making any attempt whatsoever at any rational proof. (Roman Catholic theologians, to do them justice, would probably have made some attempt to “prove” the existence of human immortality by some form of scholastic logic.) The nearest, however, that our Protestant (Anglican and Nonconformist) experts got to providing any rational proof for their belief was when one stated that there were “good philosophical arguments” for human immortality. Since none of these “good arguments” was again referred to during the rest of the discussion, it is obviously impossible to pass any judgment on their validity. If speakers appeal, as these did, solely to faith, they obviously cannot expect their assertions to carry any conviction to people who require some rational justification for their faith.

## Proofs of Immortality

The belief in some form of human immortality is, of course, very ancient, and was probably anterior to anything that can be properly called a coherent religious belief. Since the emergence of what may be generically termed religious metaphysics in the past 5,000 years, it has been the general rule to “prove” human survival in one of three ways: by religious authority (as the BBC speakers did), by metaphysical argument, or by spiritist “phenomenon” supposed to emanate from some *post mortem* world. One can only remark again with reference to these various lines of “proof”, that faith is useless and irrelevant to those who do not share it. The often ingenious arguments advanced by philosophers (Plato is still probably the most subtle of such metaphysical reasoners), are now increasingly discredited by the growing, and already overwhelming, available scientific evidence in favour of the materialist or monist conception

of the basic unity of mental and material phenomena. As for spiritism, the bulk of its alleged manifestations, are so extremely puerile (even were they not, as so often, obviously fraudulent), that it seems to be a sheer waste of one's time and energy to devote any at least substantial part of one's activities to tracking down the hypothetical “spirits” into the murky Beyond! Life—this life—after all, is short. The fantastic expansion of human

knowledge, including knowledge of the human organism, has already made it, if not bullet-proof, certainly at least as near to it as makes little difference, that consciousness is a function of the brain, that it is interrupted or disordered

by sleep or accident (e.g. where does the “soul” go during a long period of unconsciousness such as I once underwent, nearly a week in all?) and that it ceases altogether in its individual functions at death. Or, in brief, death like birth, decay like growth, are natural forms of all organic (including human) activity. Indeed, in the light of present day knowledge, not to mention the entire current trends of human inquiry, it seems to be quite obvious that the old dogma of human immortality, whether in its Christian form or any other, represents an outmoded survival of a view of human nature and the human organism that is, at bottom, merely an anachronistic survival of pre-historic thinking.

## The Mystery of the Social Order

However, and notwithstanding the above, it seems to be a fact that the belief in immortality, if not in its more realist form of the traditional Christian belief in the “Resurrection of the Body”, at least in some vague spiritist form, is still very prevalent and is by no means confined to socially illiterate circumstances. Granting that this is so, the essential query about immortality would appear to be not, is it true? for we know that it is not, but *why*, despite all the growing volume of evidence against it, do people still go on believing it? Here our reasoning must change to the psychological and sociological planes. Psychologically, what it is convenient to call human nature, recoils before the fact of finality, of eternal separation between the living and the dead. However, it is probably true that the “natural longing” for survival has been much exaggerated by religiously-inclined writers. For who really wishes to live for ever, particularly anyone accustomed to the sight of old age and of concurrent disintegration, decay and death? Ultimately, the belief in human survival would appear to resolve itself into a sociological question. It seems probable that the belief in immortality will never disappear altogether in any social order which dooms the majority of its members to permanent physical or psychological frustration, as probably every recorded society so far known, has doomed them. In all such societies, the prospect of compensation in another life will still prove irresistible to many. Here, the Emperor Napoleon's classical definition of the social function of religion (and of immortality in particular) is

VIEWS and OPINIONS

## On The Resurrection Morning

By F. A. RIDLEY

especially apt. "I regard religion", said that great military psychologist, "not as the mystery of the Incarnation, but as the mystery of the social order. Once take away from the poor, who are in the great majority, their comforting belief in another world, where a different distribution of goods prevails, and they would rise in revolution and cut the throats of the rich". Or, in brief, the belief of the masses in human survival arises ultimately from social frustration, whereas in the case of believers who are not frustrated, religious, or psychological motives presumably predominate. Assuming this to be true, the belief in human immortality would appear to wax as the

attractiveness of *this* life and world simultaneously wanes. In fact it has often been remarked that ages of fear and frustration are usually ages of robust religious faith. It is my submission that whatever the evidence, the belief in the "Resurrection morning", will only finally disappear when people no longer have to find compensation for their frustrated lives down here, in deceptive and humiliating fantasies about a life after death. Or put briefly, the belief in immortality has now ceased to be a theological or philosophical problem and has become a psychological and, still more, a sociological one.

## Billy Graham in Manchester

By R. W. MORRELL

MANY PEOPLE WILL BE AWARE that the great northern city of Manchester is to be the venue of a Billy Graham Crusade from May 29th to June 17th. Whether or not the citizens of that city will consider this an honour is an open question. As the North of England Crusade, to give it its full title, is to be held in the Manchester City football stadium the organisers hope, and no doubt pray, that the weather will remain dry. Alas it has been found in the past that the Christian three-in-one god is often at loggerheads with its different parts and has allowed it to rain. But no doubt the followers of Jesus put the positive blame for bad weather on the Devil (a very real entity to Christians of Dr. Graham's type) for after all he is supposed to be Prince of the Air.

Now it would never do for a Billy Graham crusade to flop. Not that one would expect this to happen with hordes of Christians ready to offer themselves continually for "conversion"; but it cannot be ruled out. The organisers have taken this into consideration and advance work is well in hand to "draw the crowds". As is to be expected they want to bring in the more youthful element in society and to achieve this the "Youth Committee" has sent out a circular letter under the signature of its chairman, the Rev. L. R. Barker, M.A., to all heads of secondary schools in the area the crusade hopes to cover, which is quite extensive.

The letter draws attention to "the possible dangers inherent in this method of evangelism" but (the Youth Committee) "hope that you share with us our anxiety concerning the lack of Christian faith and practice among so many young people today". The above extract from the letter clearly begs a number of questions, perhaps the most important being whether or not Christianity is of value to young people. There is no evidence to suggest that it is, and from my own experience among young people of the type the crusade wishes to reach I would not hesitate to say that they are better off without it. Another point the extract implies is, that the organisers of the crusade are aware of the fact that such crusades produce little of lasting value—to the Christian bodies associated with them. It has even been suggested by highly placed Christian authorities that they do more harm than good. Such considerations have sunk deep into the minds of the Youth Committee members and they say further on in their letter that they will do all in their power "to promote sincerity and depth among young people affected by this Crusade". This observation is indeed of interest.

The "Youth Committee" explain that they know some "senior pupils may be occupied with GCE exams during the Crusade period" and, this being so, they hope to organise, perhaps on a Friday evening, meetings specially for youth. They further state that Dr. Graham cannot

undertake school visits "but it may be possible to arrange for someone to speak about the Crusade". No one need doubt that any school wanting a speaker will get one: there will be no "it may be possible" about it.

The letter illustrates one of the many methods by which religious bodies seek to make their presence felt in our educational establishments. As well as letters to heads of schools, they also send posters which they request be placed on school notice boards, as though the activities advertised were in some way official. Likewise teachers who are active in religious movements can often assert indirect pressure to get children to attend religious functions. A teacher can arouse the child's interest in such a way that the request to attend comes from the child, and of course this allows it to be argued that no pressure was used. Few parents would bother to object if their son or daughter requested permission to attend a function out of school hours if a teacher or teachers were in charge. Freethinkers who object to religious indoctrination in schools should watch the activities of outside organisations for, while they can get away with things without any protest being raised, they will continue to interfere. Only when such bodies know that the possibility of public protest, even to invoking the 1944 Act (such outside activities could well be denominational indoctrination and RI in schools is supposed to be strictly non-denominational), might be forthcoming, will they think twice before getting up to their little games.

### NSS AND RPA CONFERENCE

THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE of the National Secular Society will this year be held in the Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1, the headquarters of our friends, the South Place Ethical Society. The Conference itself will be on Whit Sunday, May 21st, in two sessions, morning, 10 to 12.30; afternoon, 2 to 4.30, and will be for members only. It will be preceded on the Saturday evening at 7 p.m. by a reception for members and friends, and followed on the Sunday evening at 6.15 by an open air meeting at Marble Arch. On the Monday there will be a short ceremony at the NSS headquarters, 103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1, which will be named, "Bradlaugh House". London members who would be willing to accommodate provincial visitors are asked to notify the Secretary of the Society.

THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE of the Rationalist Press Association will be held at Girton College, Cambridge, from Friday, August 4th until Tuesday, August 8th. This year's theme will be "The African Revolution: A Challenge to Humanists", and the speakers are Leopold Takawira, Dennis Phombeah, H. Lionel Elvin, and Joao Cabral. Members of the National Secular Society are cordially invited to attend at the reduced fee of £7 10s. available to R.P.A. members. Further particulars may be obtained on application to the Secretary of the R.P.A., 40 Drury Lane, London, W.C.2.

# Poison

By COLIN McCALL

FROM TIME TO TIME readers who would otherwise remain unaware of the spiritual sustenance supplied each month by the organ of the Maltese St. Paul's Apologetics Circle, *The Faith*, are allowed to taste a few samples in these columns. Not that *The Faith* has much home made stuff to offer: it is primarily a purveyor of Roman Catholic produce from other lands. The May issue, just to hand, is fairly representative.

Of its twelve pages, one is divided between an article on the origin of life and some "Shorts in Thoughts" by Bishop Fulton J. Sheen; another deals with thumb sucking by children; a third has "The Convert's Corner" by the Rev. John A. O'Brien of the American University of Notre Dame, completed by a further Fulton Sheen column; a fourth is shared by Maritain on spiritual and temporal power and Douglas Hyde on a Family Fast Day in Austria. St. Augustine occupies most of a fifth; "Question Box" the greater part of the sixth. That may not sound so bad, but it is only half the paper. The other half is devoted mainly to attacks on Socialism and Communism. There is no crime in that, but there is, I maintain, in the tone of the attacks—a crime against humanity.

The worst is the front-page article, "May Day's Battle against Communism", by a former editor of the American *Daily Worker*, Louis Francis Budenz, now a lecturer at Fordham (Jesuit) University in New York, and a perfect example of an "ex-" who becomes a ferocious "anti-". Mr. Budenz takes his lead from the Pius XI encyclical, *Divini Redemptoris*, "on atheistic Communism", which described it as "a satanic scourge" engaged in "diabolical propaganda". Unless we understand the "overwhelming truth" of the Pope's words, says Mr. Budenz, "we shall never be able to combat it". This means that "we Americans (if thus blinded by Moscow guile and Krushchev-created 'cultural exchanges') will be rendered impotent to defend our homes and the welfare of our children".

Notice the emotionally-charged, near-hysterical language. Mr. Budenz is scared to death of cultural exchanges between the USSR and the USA, in a way that a rational person must find hard to understand. One doesn't have to be a Communist, or even a "fellow traveller", to appreciate the Bolshoi Ballet, a Gorki play or—as I did in a reissue the other week—the film *The Cranes are Flying*. A normal Englishman and, I am sure, a normal American, would enjoy these examples of Russian culture, and benefit from them. The BBC, to its credit, televised the May Day celebrations from Moscow without any danger to our homes or the welfare of our children. To the Roman Catholic Church, however, these cultural exchanges are part of a scourge, an "evil . . . coming down on us". And the reason is clearly expressed by Mr. Budenz. Dialectical materialists commit the unforgivable sin of interpreting the world "as coming into being without God" and it is their "purpose to prove that God does not exist": they regard religion as the opium of the people. Half-consciously, half-unconsciously aware of the inadequacy of its creed, the Church dare not let such ideas reach the ears of its flock. What a haunted existence: haunted by the fear of reality!

Though a materialist, I am not a dialectical materialist, and there is much in the philosophy and in the history of Russian Communism that I can't approve—indeed, that I have publicly condemned. But it has no monopoly of

political guilt. I condemned Russian intervention in Hungary as I did British action in Suez, and I now condemn American interference in Cuba. The difference between Mr. Budenz and me is that, whereas I urge co-existence, he urges war. I want Americans and Russians to live together: he is presumably prepared to die in fighting Russia. Not the least of my concerns is that I may get killed as well and, as playwright Mr. Arnold Wesker said when arrested for sitting down in Whitehall, "I want to live". These are not political issues, they are issues of human survival or extinction. Mr. Budenz doesn't treat them politically, but as a crusade. He calls on Americans to place themselves under "the patronage of St. Joseph, the patron of the war on atheistic Communism", and *The Faith* prints this in bold type.

Archbishop Enrique Perez Serantes of Santiago, Cuba, also condemns "an openly irreligious politico-social system", and also turns to a Pope for definition. This time, though, it is "the very wise Leo XIII", who called Communism "a deadly virus that passes like a serpent through the vitals of human society, bringing it into the greatest danger of destruction". And the Archbishop regrets that the "wise principles of the most eminent sociologist of modern times, the great Leo XIII" have not been put into practice. Had they been, "the fate of workers and of management, which nearly always has not understood workers, would long ago have been different". The Archbishop, in fact, shows much more understanding of the social conditions that give rise to Communism, than does Mr. Budenz. Moreover, he recognises that "Ideas are not destroyed by salvos of cannon, nor can they be bought with gold", and the war he refers to would seem to be an ideological-social one rather than a physical crusade. I am not absolutely sure about this, for some of his language is ambiguous, but certainly his attitude is less hysterical than Mr. Budenz's. The Archbishop wants orthodoxy, of course. Lukewarm Catholics, he tells us, "have never helped and now are still less help". Neither are those "who are Catholics in their own way, free Catholics". No, it is all or nothing. And the thought of secular education, "denying the child and the adolescent their innate rights to scientific religious instruction" (sic) horrifies him. After schools come divorce and God knows what!

Another Archbishop, Cardinal Camara of Rio de Janeiro purports to reveal a Communist eight-point programme "to subvert the Church in Latin America" by infiltration which, as Mr. Archibald Robertson remarked in *The Humanist* (May 1961) has now become a dirty word, at least when applied to the Communists. From these three New World warnings, and from other articles in *The Faith*, there emerges a picture of humanity doomed to disaster should Communism not be crushed by "the soldiers of Christ". It is no part of my job to defend Communism, were I so inclined. The issue, I repeat, is much broader. And finally, I cite Bishop Sheen in evidence. The modern soul, he says, "has touched bottom after three centuries of pragmatism and liberalism . . . There is no more middle ground; no more no man's land of false tolerance wherein nothing is false, or where there is no day and there is no night".

Not just Communism, note, but "pragmatism and liberalism". Note, too, the "false tolerance". There is, I think readers will agree, some poisonous stuff in *The Faith*.

## This Believing World

From the masterly summing up in the *News of the World* on spooks by the staunch defender of the "after life" in Summerland, Mr. Charles Beatty, we gather that "three-quarters of all letters about ghosts" to the newspaper were "level-headed accounts of direct experiences". Among them was only "one call for help"—what can we do when "the victim is the ghost also"? And the dreadful thing is that Mr. Beatty didn't know!

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Nor could he say much about the six British soldiers "who fled for miles when confronted by an 8ft. figure with the face of a goat and a smell like nothing on earth" except that such "awkward customers are rare since sorcery and black magic went out of fashion". But is it true that black magic and sorcery have gone out of fashion? The New Testament is full of it for surely expelling real devils out of a sick person, and forcing them into pigs is "black magic"? In any case, quite a number of parsons believe in Spiritualism which helps to keep belief in spooks well to the fore in Christianity.

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A story recorded in "The People" supports the reincarnation of an Egyptian queen who died 3,000 years ago, and who is now safely back as Miss Beryl Wright of Notting Hill Gate. Moreover, the man she is to marry, Mr. Ted Sterret is convinced that he is the well-known Egyptian pharaoh Akhenaten, the Egyptian queen's husband. What is always so intriguing about these convinced reincarnationists is that in their former lives they are so often of pure royal blood. They are kings, queens, princes, ministers of state, top-ranking generals, or chief high priests. Rarely—if ever—are they cowherds, slaves, or kitchen dish washers.

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Moreover, ancient Egypt appears to be the favourite country of nearly all reincarnations in the grand old days of its splendour. We can't recollect any reincarnationist who came from a Highland hovel, or was first born in an Irish slum. Still, it is a very comforting thought that you were once so high in the land and so powerful, even if you are these days obviously a very ordinary person.

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We are delighted that a determined effort is about to be made to get His Infernal Highness back in to the new Church of England catechism from which he was not so long ago rather unceremoniously kicked out. We never have championed in these columns a pale pink Christianity, and abhor attempts to dilute the only Christianity which "our Lord" ever stood for, and which included a real Devil, real Angels, and a place called Hell with a temperature exceeding that of the sun. Congratulations to the Convocation of Canterbury which has the courage to fight for the Devil's return.

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It is astonishing how even a broad-minded cleric like the Bishop of Southwark is under the delusion that the "conventional church window, like many a hymn, has done much to give people a false idea of Christ". What exactly is a true idea of Christ? Who has even had it? Our Popes? Dr. Stockwood claims also that they—the hymns and the windows—have encouraged people "in the notion that religion is divorced from reality". Well, isn't it? How many intelligent people now believe that God Almighty resides and has resided from eternity "up there"? Is that the belief of the Bishop?

## The Role of Freethought Journals

By ARTHUR O'HALLORAN  
(New Zealand)

SOME TIME BACK a writer in the *Liberal* chided agnostic liberalism with devoting "an inordinate amount of space to the sorry records of religion". He regarded this as about "as daring, sporting and brave as shooting ducks in a tub". Whilst I agree with the writer of the article that rationalists and liberals should be actively supporting organisations demanding the cessation of nuclear testing and opposing the lunacy of re-armament (should not Christians be doing the same?) and that they should be found assisting progressive crusades in general, surely the *raison d'être* of rationalist organisations and their journals is to wage battle against the supernatural, to oppose the spurious claims of the clerics, to advocate and uphold a system of secular education, and to fight for retention (and if need be, the extension) of religious freedoms—which right of course would include the privilege of rejecting any and every brand of theocracy without let or hindrance.

Yet despite the spread of rationalism in our day everywhere in the Western World we see the Roman Catholic hierarchy demanding money from the taxpayers to finance its own religious schools. Over the radio, day in, day out, clerics call for a return to the "Faith of our Fathers"; veiled (and sometimes not so veiled) attacks are made on the "evil of materialism" or on "Godless Communism"—with the right of reply denied. Only a little while ago, on our state-owned broadcasting service, I heard a local cleric say with gusto and aplomb that "the most important thing in the world was the fact of Jesus Christ in the hearts of men", blissfully ignoring the much more evident fact that there are countless millions who pay homage to other faiths and other millions who reject the supernatural in toto.

Today we see the press, with its regular religious column, its special feature articles written by clerics, its readiness to publicise the activities of church leaders, aligning itself with "our Christian way of life". In line with this spurious spirituality we see the big emporiums whipping up a roaring trade exploiting the Babe of Bethlehem theme in the hectic days preceding Christmas.

It does seem to me that the role of freethought lies, basically, where it honourably and usefully trod in the past. The stupidities, bigotries, falsities of religion call for militant rejection. If religion has been humanised by secularism and liberalism, much of its clamp on the march of progress and enlightenment still remains. Until Catholic bishops give up issuing orders on how their flock are to vote; until the Papacy abolishes the *Index*; until the Church and its bishops cease to denounce birth control as a deadly sin; until the Catholic Church and the Billy Grahams and other fundamentalists renounce the cruel stupidities of hell fire theology; until Christian politicians stop implementing a ruthless apartheid policy; until padres and chaplains stop "blessing" guns and battleships and go off the pay rolls of military establishments; until the hypocrisies of prayers to open parliament or cabinet meetings go by the board; until politicians who are not Christians have the courage to affirm agnosticism or atheism; until "In God we trust" and such humbug is removed from postal stamps; until all this and much more come to pass there will remain a need for militant rationalism. The oft told crudities, shams of religion, the "dirge of sad yesterdays" will call for many a re-telling.

[Reprinted from the American Freethought paper, *The Liberal*].

# THE FREETHINKER

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## TO CORRESPONDENTS

LEON SPAIN (USA): Letter forwarded to Dr. Duhig. Thank you for appreciation of THE FREETHINKER.

## 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 N.S.S. (Marble Arch), Sundays, 12 noon: MESSRS. F. A. RIDLEY, D. H. TRIBE, C. H. CLEAVER and G. F. BOND.

Sundays, from 4 p.m.: MESSRS. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER, C. E. WOOD and D. H. TRIBE.

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Pierhead).—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

Humanist Group of S. W. London (Mulberry Lodge, Barnes Common, S.W.13—PRO 7938), Sunday, May 14th, 8 p.m.:

M.R.A. Speaker: "Moral Re-Armament".

North Staffordshire Humanist Group (The Guildhall, High Street, Newcastle-u-Lyme), Friday, May 12th, 7.15 p.m.: A Meeting.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1), Sunday, May 14th, 11 a.m.: DR. JOHN LEWIS, M.A., "You Can't Change Human Nature".

## Notes and News

DR. A. M. RAMSEY, Archbishop-Designate of Canterbury, said in his farewell Presidential address to the York Convocation "that the translators of the New English Bible had achieved a new, scholarly grasp of what the Greek really meant, and had conveyed this to a degree which their predecessors in English versions had missed" (*The Guardian*, 3/5/61). C. W. Dugmore, Professor of Ecclesiastical History in the University of London had his doubts, however, because the Greek text used for the translation is unnamed. "The student of the Greek Testament cannot use this translation as he could use the Revised Version", Professor Dugmore said (*The Times Supplement on the Bible in English*, 27/3/61), "since he is never certain when the translators have selected 'the reading which to the best of their judgment seemed most likely to represent what the author wrote' (p.vii)" and they admit that "their judgment is at best provisional" (p.viii).

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ON MARCH 30TH, *The Universe* reported that "The Legion of Mary has opened an information centre on No. 1 platform at Euston railway station, London. British Railways had a hut specially erected for them". On April 11th, the Secretary of the National Secular Society wrote for information to the Station Master at Euston. "Do I understand from this", he asked, "that the cost of

erection has been borne by British Railways? Has any rental agreement been reached?" Although he enclosed a stamped-addressed envelope, no reply has yet been received.

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MR. S. GUSTAVUS STEPHEN, President of San Juan (Trinidad) Branch of the National Secular Society, recently spent six weeks on the neighbouring island of St. Vincent with his daughter. The island was lovely, he tells us, but the people he came in contact with were all "God-intoxicated". Indeed, says Mr. Stephen, "God seems to be getting much more than his share in prayer from these simple, superstition-saturated people".

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IN COMPANY with a lot of other people, including the majority of MPs, we recently received a document allegedly "setting out the Mau Mau oaths and ceremonies, which are of a bestial, disgusting and disturbing nature". It was sent by *The New Daily* as part of a campaign to prevent the Government from allowing Jomo Kenyatta, "the prime organiser of the Mau Mau campaign of intimidation to become Chief Minister of Kenya, in which capacity he would attend Prime Ministers' Conferences in this country and Her Majesty the Queen would be asked to receive him". Certainly a number of the "oaths and ceremonies" were disgusting, though their documentation was far from satisfactory and, assuming their authenticity, there was no indication of their diffusion. We note, too, that Mr. A. Fenner Brockway, MP, informed the House of Commons on May 2nd that "There is no evidence whatsoever that Jomo Kenyatta was responsible for the obscene and indecent oaths in this document".

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AS MANY LONDON readers already know, the Pioneer Press has now opened its shop at 103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1, for the sale of new and secondhand books. While virtually all the new ones (at present anyway) are Freethought, through purchases and generous gifts of private libraries, we have included many scientific philosophical and literary volumes. The varied nature of this secondhand collection, has attracted a good deal of attention from passers-by, and it is hoped to keep it regularly replenished. Readers who have suitable books available are asked to write to the Manageress, The Pioneer Press, at the above address stating price.

## SPANISH EX-SERVICEMEN'S LETTER TO US PRESIDENT

The following letter has been posted to the President of the United States of America, Mr. J. Kennedy.

SIR,  
The Spanish Ex-Servicemen's Association of Great Britain represents a part of the 250,000 Spaniards still living in exile from the Franco dictatorship of Spain. Our membership is composed of men who served in the British forces during World War II and previously fought on the Republican side in Spain. We keep close touch with the Spanish Government in exile and have contacts with Spaniards, both abroad and in Spain itself. The enclosed pamphlet will give indication of the political prisoners still held in Franco's jails<sup>1</sup>.

From our many sources of information we are confident that the great majority of our fellow-countrymen inside Spain as well as all those scattered abroad would welcome your support with arms and economical means to overthrow the Franco dictatorship.

We have read with delight that your government always will be prepared to support any struggle against dictators.

We remain,

M. ESPALLARGAS,  
President.

A. ROA,  
General Secretary.

(210 Bravington Road, London, W.9.)

<sup>1</sup>"*Franco's Prisoners Speak*," 32 pp.

[n.b. *Franco's Prisoners Speak* was reviewed in THE FREETHINKER on January 20th, and is obtainable from The Pioneer Press—see back page.—ED.]

# “The Greatest of all Mysteries”

By H. CUTNER  
(Concluded from page 143)

THE GREAT MYSTERY—and of course the Great Proof of the Resurrection—lies in, what became of the body of Jesus after it was put into the grave? When the Apostles and the various Marys came to see their dead Saviour the next morning (or whatever is meant by such phrases as “When it was yet dark” and “at the rising of the sun”) they found the tomb empty. At least, the body of Jesus had disappeared, though, as we are told, they did not find an “empty” tomb. In fact what they actually saw is difficult to find out. According to Matthew, they found an Angel; Mark says, a young man; Luke insists there were two men, while John (writing according to Mr. Schofield “about” 60 years afterwards) claims that there were two Angels. Needless to add, there was no difficulty whatever in identifying the Angels, though Matthew says they were outside the tomb, while Mark, Luke and John declare they were inside it. The Precious Word here has not clarified the Mystery.

But the fact remains that the body of Jesus was not in the tomb, and therefore “within a few weeks the whole city was ringing with the news”. Here, Josephus is not dragged in as the great historian of the time, for he knew nothing whatever about the Empty Tomb or the city “ringing with the news”. The “ringing with the news” bit is from the journalistic imagination of Mr. Schofield.

But surely the “Empty Tomb” is just as much part of the story of Jesus as the Red-Headed League is an integral part of Conan Doyle’s famous story of the way Sherlock Holmes foiled a bank robbery? The Gospel writers had to describe a “Resurrection”, so they were obliged to invent the story of an “Empty Tomb”. You can’t have one without the other. To put it another way, the Empty Tomb is produced for us as evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus, and the Resurrection is given as the reason for the Empty Tomb. This is what logicians call “arguing in a circle”. But it never fails to convince people like Mr. Schofield, and most of his readers. And even if the circular logic has not convinced them, the city “ringing with the news” will.

Mr. Schofield knows also all about the “notorious Temple police” which was, it appears, “a formidable body experienced in every kind of investigation”. I have never come across a scrap of evidence for this statement. The Index to Josephus gives (in my edition) about 15 references to Temples, but not a line to the Temple Police. In fact, the word “Police” is not in the Index. Still, it reads well to talk about them. It does the same for the “terrible” scourging Jesus got, alas, not from the Jews, but from the Romans. “Roman scourging was a frightful ordeal”, for “not many victims recovered properly from their wounds”. This, combined with the nailing to the Cross and with a spear wound in his side makes mincemeat of the story which often gets publicity that Jesus did not die on the Cross but recovered, and thus got away from the tomb. Mr. Schofield dismisses it with contempt, and for once I agree with him.

The “unchallengeable fact” which even more than the Empty Tomb proves the truth of the Resurrection (according to Mr. Schofield) is that “the Church was founded in Jerusalem in the few weeks after the Resurrection”. There is of course not a particle of evidence for this silly statement except the Book of Acts, a perfectly worthless piece of fiction. But if one accepts Acts, or indeed any statement in the New Testament, why try to bolster up the

story of the Resurrection with anything else? If the New Testament is all the evidence we require, all the journalistic articles in the world are quite unnecessary.

The truth is very simple. Religions are not made in a night, so to speak, or in a few weeks. People are not Jews one day, and the next fully-believing Christians. The story of Paul, which is generally produced to show such a statement is wrong, is nonsense. Whatever he is supposed to say of himself—that he was a Pharisee, that (according to Mr. Schofield) “he wrought havoc among the Christians until he suddenly swung round”, is just puerile. There is nothing in the so-called writings of Paul which show even an elementary knowledge of Judaism as it was practised in Roman times. Whoever wrote the Epistles originally was a Gnostic, but they have been so badly “edited” that in the Authorised Version at least, a good part of them is quite unintelligible. In fact, it actually is a boast of the translators of the New English Bible that they have made Paul at last intelligible! But have they? Can anybody make Gnosticism intelligible? Most of Paul’s “Letters” are hopeless and they are certainly not the work of a Jew.

Mr. Schofield blandly tells us that “Christianity is set securely on a historic basis”—that is, if words have any meaning at all, the Virgin Birth, the various miracles, the Devil stories, as well as the Resurrection, are all historical. Nothing could be further from the truth. There is not a scrap of *historical* evidence for anything in these New Testament stories. In spite of all that we have found in the way of archaeology in Palestine, no one has discovered one word or record about any of the Bible heroes. As far as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, or Samuel, is concerned, history is completely silent. History is equally silent about Jesus, Paul, Peter, John, and all the other New Testament heroes. Neither in literature nor in archaeology can we find anything about them.

Any mention of Jesus in say, Tacitus, is of no more value than any mention of Osiris. Christians would tell Tacitus, if he asked them, that they believed in Jesus crucified in Jerusalem. Egyptians would tell him that they believed in Osiris put to death by Set. The evidence for Jesus and Osiris is equally empty.

A new religion does not in these days, at least, require a miracle-working Saviour. Joseph Smith with his Book of Mormon had no difficulty whatever in convincing his immediate friends that he had “restored” the true Church of Christ—just as some early “Christians” had no difficulty in proving that the new Church they were forming was an improvement on the old Jewish Church. They “pinched” the Jewish Scriptures (in Greek) but it took centuries before their own writings were gathered together in a “Canon”; and nobody, even at this day, knows why and how the present collection was selected. Who were the experts who settled the matter, and what were their qualifications?

Mormonism (without a Saviour) managed the trick in twenty years or so, and not only is it now a flourishing concern, but the Mormons have their own city, and can send out their own Apostles to convert the world. And they are more or less “united”.

The “historical” basis of Christianity rests not only on the appalling ignorance of the early converts, but also on a credulity that surpasses all understanding. Even at this day, Christians in charge have to make pathetic

appeals to their flocks to "believe" something in which it is totally impossible to believe. Mr. Guy Schofield's Easter article in the *Sunday Dispatch* is a case in point. If there had been any *historical* evidence whatever for the Resurrection, the article need never have been written.

Still, Easter and Christmas provide good copy for religious journalists, and it will take perhaps centuries before their articles will no longer be needed. Religions do not easily die even in a thousand years.

## Bible Origins

By M. C. BROTHERTON (Commander R.N. Retired)

ALL THE OLD original holy manuscripts written on scraps of papyrus by no-one knows whom disappeared early, but two complete books written on vellum or parchment (Codex) appeared during the fourth century. These, I believe are still in existence, written, presumably, in decipherable Greek characters. It was not till the end of the fourth century that of the various much disputed versions of the Christian Scriptures then extant, a selection came to be more or less agreed upon by the well meaning but scarcely erudite Christian Fathers, for what was eventually to be called the New Testament.

For instance, the Apocalypse of John was accepted by them because this scribe convinced them that his information came to him direct from God. But Peter's Apocalypse was rejected because he failed to convince them as to his Authority. It is not known how, when or from where the four-fold Gospel canon originally came though there is reason to believe that it originated somewhere in Asia Minor. It is thought that only one by one did they come to be accepted by one or other of the more important Churches, such as Rome or Antioch, and so were all eventually accepted as genuine. One collection of Pauline epistles turned up dated from the beginning of the second century. I don't think it is now known what language they were written in.

In 1740 Muratori published his famous "Fragment" of the canon. It was written in Latin; probably dating from the end of the second century. The writer of this fragment acknowledges a collection of holy Scriptures consisting of four Gospels, the Acts, two Apocalypses (John's and Peter's) 13 Pauline Epistles, 2 of John and one of Jude. Another list of writings was ratified as being of Divine origin by Pope Gelasius in A.D. 393; another being issued as "final" in A.D. 692 (written in Syriac?).

The combination of the New with the Old Testament, inherited from the Jews, led, of course, to a lot more hotly disputed opinions as to how much was to be accepted as the "Holy Word of God" and what was to be rejected as mere legend. There was, presumably, no acceptable criterion by which to distinguish one from the other. Disputes about the origin of these Holy Scriptures and their authenticity went on for more than a thousand years, and it was not until the 18th century that a really serious, systematic and scholarly exegesis appeared.

Between the fourth and the fourteenth century many thousands of old manuscripts appeared, written in fairly comprehensible Greek characters, and also in Latin, African Latin, Hebrew, Syriac, Coptic, Sahidic(?) and several other old Near East dialects. All these multitudinous and often contradictory versions of different collections, each, of course, with its own personal errors, omissions and editorial embellishments, had to be translated into some kind of sense, sorted out, compared, its origins traced as far as possible and the collection as a

whole evaluated.

It quickly becomes evident to the honest student of religions that many versions of our Holy Scriptures included such important miracles as Virgin Births, Resurrections and pre-Christians codes of ethics which then formed part of the folklore of the Near East and some African peoples which had obviously originated (quite unknown to these worthy scribes) in the teachings of the multitudinous missionaries, handed down by word of mouth from one generation to the next, of Buddha, Zoroaster, Mithra and other gods, many centuries before Christ. Thus many of these—to us—vitaly important miracles, came to be included in our New Testament and ascribed to Jesus, the at-that-time "new" god.

The first Bible printed in England was in 1538, considerable masses of more or less conflicting versions being then necessarily rejected. Our "Authorised Version" came out in 1611, followed in 1881 by the "Revised Version" which was received without enthusiasm; most people being shocked by the liberties taken with the previous translation. (*Encyclopedia Britannica* p.534).

This extremely abbreviated précis, taken largely from the overwhelming quantities of information and conjecture—I would like to stress the word conjecture—contained in the *Encyclopedia* gives us some sort of idea of the most incredibly haphazard and hotchpotch evolution of the collection of scriptures for so many centuries disputed, translated, juggled with, re-translated, which now constitute our New Testament, and some idea of the extent to which our latest re-translation can be relied upon for the salvation of our immortal souls.

At the present moment a considerable dispute is going on in Rome (*Sunday Telegraph*, 17/3/61), between the Jesuits, "translating" in accordance with the instructions given by the Pope in 1946 and another powerful Catholic sect which wants the "translation" to be made to conform with its own particular outlook. All this, and my own précis reminds me forcibly of the old Italian saying "*Traduttore—Traditore*", i.e. Translator—Traitor.

A very small but significant example of this dishonest juggling might be offered here. The good old "Blessed are the meek, they shall inherit the earth" has been twisted in the recent translation to mean something quite different, the important thing being not so much to tell us what Jesus is said by some scribes to have said, in his Aramaic, but to save our Bible from as much adverse criticism and ridicule as possible without scandalising us too much.

## Points from New Books

By OSWELL BLAKESTON

ST. ALDHELM OF MALMESBURY habitually spent his nights with a girl lying on either side of him. It was, the saint declared, a way of showing his powers of resistance to the temptations of the flesh. If any neighbours ever imagined that the saint might take occasional advantage of the proximity of the young ladies, their evil thoughts were simply an added penance for the holy man and helped him to earn extra merit in heaven!

This quaint piece of hagiology comes from a book which is most amusingly and extravagantly illustrated with plates and which is packed with curious and erudite facts, *The Philosophy of the Bed* by Mary Eden and Richard Carrington (Hutchinson, 30s.). For instance, the authors tell us that neither Philip VI nor Charles VI could persuade the Bishops of Amiens to renounce their "droit de seigneur" which permitted them to initiate virgin brides into the pleasures of the bed chamber.

Whenever the authors reveal their own opinions in their text, they show an admirable humanism. For example, they write: "As the idea of civilization gradually infuses the minds of men it has become less fashionable, even in such strictly non-combatant zones as Cheltenham and Tunbridge Wells, to encourage the flower of the nation's youth to face a savage death in some muddy corner of a foreign field. The twisted corpse may indeed turn to a richer dust, but then again it may not, and by infinitely slow stages we are beginning to feel that a man must be judged by the grandeur of his life rather than the futility of his death. There is also the fact, which cannot be comfortably ignored, that Cheltenham and Tunbridge Wells are themselves likely to be in the forefront of the next battle. This has had a dramatic and salutary influence on the conventional point of view".

Again, who can fail to be moved by the ethical beauty and humanity of the following: "Both men and women have often taken leave of the world with the names of their lovers on their lips, and this somehow seems to be more becoming than pompous pronouncements about God, redemption, and immortality. What, for instance, could express with greater poignancy the romantic influence of love on the mind of a woman than the last words of Voltaire's friend Madame de Fontaine-Martel. She asked the time, and a friend told her it was two o'clock in the morning. 'Two o'clock, two o'clock!' she repeated in a whisper. 'How wonderful that at this hour one is sure than someone somewhere is making love'."

I feel that this touching quotation deserves another from a recent book which I have already recommended to freethinkers. Christine Billson's remarkable *You Can Touch Me* (Scorpion Press, 15s.). Mrs. Billson writes: "We stopped on the mountain and there I gathered twenty-three different kinds of flowers. I could not give them to my mother, so, instead, I sat down on a rock and wrote her a postcard. Then we ate our bread and cheese, and I silently thanked my mother for making me."

It will be no surprise to readers of this paper to be reminded that the men of religion can be less exalted than the non-believers; yet I do urge everyone to read Peter Schmid's brilliant *India: Mirage and Reality* (Harrap, 25s.), to see just what a heavy dose of religion can do to a country. Mr. Schmid finds that the "saints" of India discuss one another like film stars. And surely it is shattering to find that a stranger not only wants to tell you his life story—as strangers so often do—but also wants to begin it 15,000 years ago and recount a panorama of reincarnations! Otherwise, the doctrine of contempt for worldly transience has left India with a terrible lethargy which deprives even suffering of its political dynamism. It will take many generations, Mr. Schmid is convinced, before a new India can recover from religion and her people escape from unnecessary suffering.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### QUESTIONS FROM AMERICA

It is quite apparent that the Catholic Church "bugs" you. Is it because you recognise the fact that she has always opposed intellectual arrogance? Is it because she knows it is too easy for men to indulge in the ego-satisfying pursuit of using their puny minds as divine instruments upon which to toodle whatever cacophony comes into their heads without regard for rhyme or reason?

SYLVIA ALEXANDER (USA).

### HOW MANY?

How many of your readers protested to their MPs over the preferential treatment given to ministers of religion in respect of the rating of their dwellings? I pointed out to ours (Sir R. Pilkington) that people who desired to support the clergy could easily fill their collection bags, and that it is palpably dishonest to compel others to support them. Unbelievers of all shades

should combine in opposition to this part of the Finance Bill.  
W. E. HUXLEY.

### CONSISTORY COURT

At Digwell, Herts, a group of artists appearing before a Consistory Court, for what offence is not quite clear from your correspondent's letter (28/4/61), lose their case and are charged costs. At Southwark, London, an elderly clergyman is charged by a woman with a series of offences against her. Trial, judgment and sentence are in the hands of one man. Without proof or any real evidence this clergyman is condemned solely on the word of a self-confessed adulteress, for presumably she could have kept away from the presence of a man who offered her these—presumably—insults. So on the word of such a woman and in similar medieval circumstances, a man's life is ruined and his future a blank. I fail to see why the case of the Digwell artists would have been a "better" example of the antiquated and utterly undemocratic character of the ecclesiastical court, as Robert Dent suggests. The vicar, like the artists, has no "right of appeal", short of dragging the whole sordid affair again before another court. A real "Carrollian" situation. "I'll be judge, I'll be jury", said the wicked old fury, "I'll decide the whole case and condemn you to death".  
Mrs. G. MATSON.

### APARTHEID

Please allow me to remind Mr. Henry Meulen that one of the National Secular Society's Immediate Practical Objects calls for the "abolition of all privileges based on hereditary, racial and colour distinction, fostering a spirit antagonistic to justice and human brotherhood". As apartheid is essentially such a privilege, the NSS must oppose it. Mr. Meulen says, "Critics of apartheid tend to base themselves on the principle that Africa belongs to the blacks"; the fact is rather that advocates of apartheid base themselves on the principle that (South) Africa belongs to the whites. It would be wiser (i.e. more prudent) he says to leave aims like the one above to specialist societies. Fortunately, principles come before prudence in the NSS. S. M. CAINES.

### SO NOW WE KNOW!

To impart atheism, to say that there is no God and that the Bible is a fairy story, strips us of all the restraints which enable a human being to live a decent and honest life. This forensic gem was uttered by learned Counsel in the Central Criminal Court (*The Times*, 3/5/61).

So know, Mr. Editor, you and I and your readers know where we stand. What villains we all are! "NORTHERN LAWYER".

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