

# The Freethinker

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RECENTLY I HAVE BEEN LUCKY ENOUGH to come across some of the lucubrations of an American gentleman called Herbert W. Armstrong, whose mission on earth is to present the Most Convincing Proof that the Bible is True ever given to the world. So powerful is his proof, so unanswerable are his Arguments, that he is always ready to send on request to anyone his magazine *The Plain Truth* without payment, Absolutely Free. I am not quite clear why in spite of two applications, I have not yet received *The Plain Truth*. Perhaps my unfortunate reputation as an unholy infidel has preceded me!

However, I have a pamphlet of his which certainly will take a lot of beating as a production of a printing press. Whether the arguments with which it is filled have any validity at all depends perhaps on the intelligence of its readers.

## Prophecy

Mr. Armstrong begins with a horrid split infinitive, but otherwise he is quite clear. He asks, "Have you ever stopped to really *prove* whether or not the Bible is *divinely inspired* by a Creator?" In either case, Mr. Armstrong tell us

I am going to give you the proof. And I am going to tell the skeptics how to disprove the Bible, if it's *not* inspired, and how to disprove the very existence of God, IF THERE IS NO GOD.

Throughout his sensational "proofs", he is very lavish with italics and capitals, even more so than with "arguments"—or what he would call "unanswerable" arguments. We can leave on one side his italics and capitals and go right into the heart of the matter. His brilliant discovery is Prophecy!

Of course at one time, Prophecy was the very Gibraltar of proof that the Bible was the Inspired Revelation of Almighty God. The work of a Christian gentleman called Keith on Prophecy (it had over forty editions) was almost as much, and as widely, read as the Bible itself. And Prophecy was the bed-rock of some of the early Christian apologists like Justin Martyr for instance. Jews who have been converted to Christianity have on the tips of their tongues dozens of prophecies of "our Lord" from the Old Testament which they trot out as soon as they can find any other Jew to hear them. Personally, I have always thought that these days Prophecy was no longer depended upon by Christians in support of their faith; certainly the calls to Christ on radio and TV rarely use it. The bishops, eminent business men, devout ladies and laymen, who speak for the BBC on religion much prefer to paint Jesus as a kind of super-Sunday-school superintendent than to point out how he was prophesied in the Old Testament hundreds of centuries before he was born.

## Ezekiel

Mr. Armstrong however is of a different opinion. He doesn't bother about Jesus at all. His great stand-by is Ezekiel, for that famous prophet "prophesied" the des-

truction of Tyre nearly 300 years before it happened. How could this be if God himself had not inspired Ezekiel? How can any "skeptic" answer this astonishing proof of the Divine Inspiration of the Bible?

Mr. Armstrong pours out his scorn on anybody attempting to do so on page after page. Of course, he knows perfectly well that "many skeptics" claim that the prophecy wasn't written in 585 BC before the destruction of Tyre.

He insists that "there is *ample proof* of it"—but takes good care not to share that ample proof with us.

Now the only proof that a prophecy has been fulfilled is to prove that it wasn't written *after* the fulfilment of the prophecy but

*before*; and as far as Ezekiel is concerned, nobody knows when his book was written nor by whom, nor in what language. Like all the books of the Bible, it has been given a name, and that is all we know about it. Moreover, even if Ezekiel were written at the date given in our Bibles, what is the evidence that it was not later tampered with—or edited and re-edited? What Mr. Armstrong should have done was to prove that every word, nay, every comma, exactly as we have them in the book of Ezekiel now is *literally* the same as when it was first written. And of course he does not do this. He depends entirely on readers who will never check his statements—or even read Ezekiel for themselves.

## Nebuchadnezzar

A very good idea of Ezekiel as a prophet and writer can be found in the Encyclopedia Biblica, the tone of the writer of which is essentially that of a believer, though no doubt a little "rationalistic". Some of its damning admissions I will give later.

Here it is necessary to give the wonderful prophecy which proves beyond any doubt whatever that Ezekiel was inspired by God when he prophesied that Tyre would be destroyed. The Authorised Version gives us:

... I will bring upon Tyrus [Tyre] Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon, a king of kings from the north, with horses, and with chariots, and with horsemen, and companies, and much people

... With the hoofs of his horses shall he tread down all thy streets: he shall slay thy people by the sword, and thy strong garrisons shall go down to the ground ...

And so on. (Ez. 26, 7-11.)

Nothing is clearer than that, according to Ezekiel, Tyre would be destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, as he is more commonly known. Did he then destroy it? Certainly not. History records that he completely failed. He tried for thirteen years to subjugate Tyre, and then retired.

But Mr. Armstrong is not so easily beaten as that. It appears that Ezekiel added,

And they shall make a spoil of thy riches ... they shall break down thy walls ...

Who then are "they"? Some of us might have thought this was perfectly clear. "They" referred to the horses and chariots and assaults on the city. Nothing of the kind, almost shrieks Mr. Armstrong with his capitals and italics. God had said that he could bring "many

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

## How to Prove the Bible True!

By H. CUTNER

nations" against Tyre (26, 3). Therefore poor Neb was bound to fail. "They" must mean "many nations"; and so Mr. Armstrong points out that it was Alexander the Great (332 BC) who destroyed Tyre—which is historically true.

#### Alexander

Unfortunately the great Alexander is not mentioned in the Bible, and it was Mr. Armstrong's job to tell us why? If Almighty God knew that Tyre was to be destroyed and *who* was the destroyer, why did he not "inspire" Ezekiel to tell us so? Moreover, Isaiah also had a prophecy about Tyre—"And it shall come to pass in that day, that Tyre shall be forgotten seventy years . . . after the end of seventy years shall Tyre sing as an harlot . . ." (Is. 23, 15). Perhaps Tyre singing as an harlot put off Mr. Armstrong, but he says nothing about it. He evidently did not like a prophecy from Isaiah as much as one from Ezekiel. However, let us admit that after all Tyre was destroyed.

Anybody who studies the history of all these ancient races knows perfectly well that destroying an enemy town and capturing slaves was their pastime through the centuries. They were always boasting about it. Even the growth of modern civilisation appears to be useless against "war-mongering", the heads of states constantly threatening other states with "We are bigger and better armed than you!" Ancient cities didn't have much chance against the ruthless hordes of savages with their chariots hurled in huge numbers against them. And the Hebrew prophets were always telling—it was after all their jobs as witch doctors—their people what would happen to them if they did not do as they were told. Unfortunately, their predictions were more often than not unfulfilled, and this was obviously the case with Ezekiel.

The Encyclopedia Biblica article on this prophet does not hide how little we know of him; so it is plentifully filled with the words "possibly" and "probably". What else could the writer do? Here are some of the sad admissions which the erudite Mr. Armstrong so safely ignores:—

"Seinecke fixes the date of the book [of Ezekiel] at 164 BC." (No wonder that the destruction of Tyre could be "prophesied" if this is so!)

"Specific predictions . . . may be regarded at later insertions."

"The MT [the Massoretic Text of Ezekiel in the Hebrew Bible] is in bad condition. It is full of scribes' changes and additions, and in some places unintelligible."

"The prophet's youth was probably spent in the temple at Jerusalem . . . whether [he] then received specific literary training we do not know."

In fact, the whole of this important article on Ezekiel is packed with "uncertainties" of all kinds. The various critics appear to have disagreed among each other exactly as they do now about the "authenticity" and "credibility" of the Gospels.

As I pointed out earlier, we simply know nothing about the *writing* of Ezekiel—not even what language he used. That additions could have been made at any time before what is called the Hebrew Canon and the Massoretic text were settled is obvious.

Tyre was destroyed of course; but it was not destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, and the whole tenor of the prophecy about his destruction of Tyre shows that it was probably wishful thinking at the time it was written, and nothing else.

The Bible is packed with unfulfilled prophecies as a study of the chapter in Foote's *Bible Handbook* will prove. When Mr. Armstrong and people like him can deal with that chapter and annihilate it, will be time enough to talk about Biblical prophecy, which in these days is contemptuously rejected by many intelligent Christians.

## Moses in the Mud

ON SEPTEMBER 30TH, 1337, in the lower Bavarian city of Deggendorf, all the Jewish inhabitants were murdered because they were alleged to have perpetrated a crime against the Church. And as Catholic chronicles tell us, a wonderfully lovely little child appeared at that time. Each year the Roman Catholics celebrate their miracle feast, and all participants in the festival are bound to go to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, where they observe twelve pictures illustrating the events of 1337. The captions beneath the last two paintings, which date from about 1450, state that "The Jews were exterminated by the Christians out of a zeal pleasing to God. God grant that our country will be for ever liberated from this infernal rabble".

How, according to Catholic tradition, this massacre "pleasing to God" came about, has been related in the *Deggendorfer Gnadenbüchlein* ("Booklet of Mercy of Deggendorf") by the Benedictine friar, Benedict Braunmüller, revised and adapted by the archivist of the Benedictine abbey of Metten (in the district of Deggendorf), the Rev. Father Wilhelm Fink, and re-edited in 1960 by the printing office of Joseph Northaft.

The monastic historians, Braunmüller and Fink, accuse the Deggendorf Jews in 1337 of scratching the Holy Host with thorns, piercing it with awls, and battering it with hammers on an anvil, then throwing it into a heated oven. During this torture, blood flowed out of the Host, and the beautiful child appeared.

The two authors of the *Deggendorfer Gnadenbüchlein* decline to judge between truth and fiction, and it is impossible for us now to discern the true reasons for the murdering of the Jews at Deggendorf. It cannot be denied, however, that the Deggendorf Christians drew considerable profits from the despatching of their Jewish fellow-citizens. They plundered Jewish dwellings and got rid of debts owing to the Jews.

Only two German periodicals with small circulations have taken offence at the Deggendorf Miracle Festival to commemorate the events of the year 1337, viz. the *Werkhefte Katholische Laien* ("Writings of Catholic Laïcs") an anti-clerical, left Socialist periodical, and the *Materialdienst* ("Reviewing Office") of the Evangelical Institute of Confessional Knowledge which is read by a few hundred German Protestant clergymen. According to the views of the *Werkhefte*, the history of the Miracle of Deggendorf, "has been invented, is lying and a bad form of legend-making". The 14th century rumours of violation of the Host are of the same nature as the rumour in the Streicher period that in the consulting rooms of Jewish physicians, chaste German virgins were systematically dishonoured.

Whilst the *Werkhefte* demands that the Church of the Holy Sepulchre should be utilised for other purposes and that the Miracle Feast should not be commemorated in the future, the Evangelical critics will be satisfied if the Deggendorf tradition is freed from its anti-Semitic association. It should no longer be equated with "that Jew-hating which has so heavily weighed on our people".

In the Protestant paper, attention is especially drawn to the facts that: in the new edition of the *Gnadenbüchlein* of 1960, there are still hostile references to the Jews. In the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the instruments of the violation by the Jews of the Host, the thorny twigs, awl and anvil, are regularly exposed and the Jews are reviled as "godless, inhuman", and abused as "infernal scum".

(Concluded on page 348)

# In the Steps of J. M. Robertson

By F. A. RIDLEY

IN THE RATHER melancholy month of October, this year an unusually bright and Summer-like month for one traditionally known as the month of the falling leaf and of the dying Autumn, I visited the ancient and famous land of Scotland. After a brief sojourn in the (largely Irish, in distinction from Edinburgh) city of Glasgow I paid another brief but extremely enjoyable visit to the West Coast of Scotland at Saltcoats to stay with my old friends, veteran Freethinkers, Socialists and Pacifists, ex-Provost (of Saltcoats) and County Councillor (Ayrshire), James Reed and Mrs. Annie Reed, the latter a veteran of the recent anti-Polaris demonstrations at Holy Loch.

Opposite this part of the Ayrshire coast, an area immortalised by the birthplace of Robert Burns (at Alloway, near Ayr) lies the beautiful Island of Arran, a geological "Mecca", mountainous, wild and rugged but thinly populated. Though approximately the same size as the Isle of Man, which has a population around the 100,000 mark, Arran's population is given in the current issue of the Encyclopedia Britannica as barely 5,000 in all. Quality however, is not necessarily the same as quantity; for Arran, this wild, beautiful, and so sparsely-inhabited island, has produced at least one man of authentic world-stature as writer and scholar, John Mackinnon Robertson, probably the most outstanding Humanist and Freethinker to have been produced by the English-speaking races in the last century or so.

The compendious Encyclopedia Britannica does not deign to include even the briefest biographical notice of this most encyclopaedic of modern English-speaking critical and versatile scholars. When one has to add that there is no mention of him in Mrs. Margaret Knight's recently published *Humanist Anthology*, one is forced to recognise that it is not only in religious circles that "a prophet is not without honour save in his own country".

Unfortunately, for such is the ingratitude of posterity in Scotland as well as in less enlightened lands, the same undeserved oblivion has befallen Scotland's greatest Humanist scholar among his ain folk. For there is no apparent monument to Robertson in his native Isle of Arran or in its diminutive metropolis, Brodick, his birthplace, nor is the small house in which the great scholar was born marked by any distinctive plaque which might serve to indicate to an oblivious posterity that the Isle of Arran, like other and larger islands, is capable of producing great men.

To add insult to injury the only biographical fact that I have read in dictionary articles on Arran, is that it was the birthplace (in the 19th century) of Daniel Macmillan, the founder of the well-known publishing firm and, incidentally, the grandfather of the present Prime Minister, Mr. Harold Macmillan, that devout Christian and indefatigable grouse-shooter. But about John Mackinnon Robertson, born in Isle of Arran in the year of Our Lord 1856, not one word! In fact as will presently appear, very few of the present inhabitants of Brodick appear ever to have even heard of their most distinguished fellow-citizen.

The melancholy fact soon became apparent when, on a bright and sunny day, I landed on the shore of Arran with the blue sea and sky mingling happily in the background and the cloud-capped summit of Arran's most conspicuous peak, Goatfell, towering over Brodick Bay and over the straggling village clustered around its base, I landed in a party of three, the other two being Mr. Owen

Kelly, curator of the South Ayrshire Museum, Kirkgate, Saltcoats, and Mr. James Patterson, a former resident of Saltcoats, presently domiciled in Los Angeles and on holiday in his land of origin.

Like those other pilgrims, the Three Wise Men, who sought the birthplace of the Messiah, so we modern pilgrims set diligently to work to find the birthplace of that Messiah's most formidable critic, and I have to confess that our task proved to be much more difficult than was that of our evangelical forerunners. Not only was there no providential star to guide our footsteps (since it was mid-day we could not have seen it anyway) but the citizens of Arran's Lilliputian capital appeared to be totally oblivious even of the existence of their distinguished fellow-citizen. I will confess frankly that had it been left to me to discern our goal, I should have returned to the mainland and, in time, to London, with my object unachieved and with the melancholy news that, whilst J. M. Robertson seems actually to have been born somewhere in Arran, yet the actual whereabouts, like that of Muhammed's coffin, must remain forever unknown.

However, the decision very fortunately, was not left to me. Confronted with this difficult task of tracking J. M. Robertson's footprints to his natal door, my learned friend, the distinguished archaeologist, Mr. Owen Kelly (himself a native of Arran) rose to the occasion in no uncertain manner. In brief, he set to work with the pertinacity of a trained bloodhound, and after several false scents, he eventually struck a true one, finally locating the historic birthplace in a small, inconspicuous-looking house under the towering shadow of Goatfell and immediately facing the sea across which the Scottish mainland is clearly visible.

This is not the place, nor have I the appropriate technical knowledge to attempt any adequate analysis of John M. Robertson's manifold contributions to modern scholarship in the several fields (*viz.* political theory, Shakespearian criticism and of course Christian origins, etc.). Undoubtedly this self-taught scholar with no official academic background (like his great Humanist contemporary, Herbert Spencer), was a very great man; certainly one of the greatest of modern Humanists and Freethinkers and despite the, we hope, only temporary oblivion into which his historic reputation seems to have fallen, surely one of Scotland's greatest sons also.

It would, of course, be sheer blasphemy anywhere north of the Tweed (or anywhere where Scots foregather), to say the greatest, since it is well-known to every right- (as also left-) thinking Scotsman that the priority amongst Scotland's sons belongs nowadays almost canonically to another Scot born within sight of Arran, the immortal Robert Burns ("of Scotland's Sons renowned the most" as all patriotic Scots are reminded annually on Burns's Night) surely also a great Humanist and a great Democrat as well as a great poet. And neck-to-neck for the position of runner-up in the Scottish Hall of Fame run those two stout knights, Sir William Wallace and Sir Walter Scott. But surely there is an assured place in Scotland's pantheon of Immortals for her great scholar and Humanist author, John M. Robertson. We trust that when, if not before, we get our Secular State, an appropriate memorial will mark the modest dwelling where our great Freethinking Humanist was born beneath the towering crags of Arran, looking across the sea to Scotland.

## This Believing World

As we all know, many sections of the Church of Christ—or the Churches of Christ—have always vigorously denounced gambling; so it is most intriguing to read the heading of an article in the *Daily Mail* (October 20th)—“The Man Who Gambled with the Church’s Money” with a portrait of the gambler, Sir M. T. Eve. For seven years, he and another gambler, Sir M. Warren, who are, we are told, “two brilliant lay financiers”, have been “juggling” on the Stock Exchange, and the result of their efforts has resulted in nearly doubling “the Church’s capital assets”—not at all bad for the followers of a penniless carpenter-God who often had nowhere to lay his head. The “assets” have now reached the “record figure of £16,000,000”.

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All this gain came from shrewd selling and buying in land and industrial and commercial concerns, though the pious financiers banned shares in breweries. Perhaps they also banned shares in companies making playing-cards, and running theatres. In spite of the fact that “our Lord” changed water into wine—very good wine—and the Churches have to use it when they perform the Mass—that is, the changing of bread and wine into the actual body and blood of Christ—they have often frowned on anybody having a glass of beer at the local. So breweries have not shared in the Church’s gambling. However, curates and vicars are having their wages put up, and everybody now is happy.

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The Salvation Army head, General Kitching, has graciously admitted that some of our Sunday laws are quite obsolete, and should be changed to suit our more modern conditions. In this, he will come into violent contact with the Lord’s Day Observance Society thus providing blatant infidels with still more ammunition on the divine problem of “unity”. Still, we are glad to find the S.A. coming into line with Freethinkers, without having had to submit to the Christian persecution, the Christian imprisonment, and the Christian fines, which breakers of our infamous—and silly—Sunday laws had to suffer in the past. Strange how often Christians have had to learn elementary justice from Freethinkers!

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Lest we forget, here is the New English Bible version of Matthew 5, 3 given by the *Daily Sketch* recently—no doubt as an inspirational text—“How blest are those who know that they are poor: the kingdom of Heavens theirs”. Needless to say, it differs from the better-known and more famous translation in the AV—“Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”. Lest any disgruntled Christian may think Heaven is after all rather too far away, Matt. 5, 5, hands over another prize—“Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth”. So now the poor, and the poor in spirit among Christians have both Heaven and Earth for their very, very own!

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A “deaconess” wanted to preach at a United Nation Day service and was banned by the Bishop of Oxford on the grounds that this kind of thing might become general. “It is not the custom” he said, “to allow women to preach in the Church of England”. Naturally, “an angry young mother” objected to this “sex discrimination” and she was going to fight this ban “both as a woman and a member of the Church of England”. But there will be no need to fight it, for the lady, Sister Margaret, will be allowed to preach after all.

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Still, there is just a weenie snag in the case. The deaconess

will be allowed to address the congregation only after the special prayers, and only from the lectern and not from the pulpit. To allow a woman to use the pulpit would make all good Churchmen squirm. Still, there is one consolation for them. Not only must no women occupy a pulpit, they must not minister Holy Communion either. It would be sheer profanation. Yet all people, all of them, are one with Christ—thank God!

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So at last we have the Archbishop of Canterbury backing up not only a Special Day of Prayer, but backing up Prayer every day so that everybody will be doing God’s Will. He considers Prayer is exciting, and of course Dr. Ramsey knows how very pleased God will be, and how it will help God to give us Peace. So pray, pray, pray and Peace is bound to come. And this sheer twaddle was broadcast on radio and TV!

### MOSES IN THE MUD

(Concluded from page 346)

In Deggendorf itself there is no intention of removing the anti-Jewish pictures and inscriptions from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Moreover, *The Gnadenbüchlein* is still sold for the price of one mark. And a local newspaper, the *Deggendorfer Zeitung*, encouraged a revival of the play of the Deggendorf Miracle of Mercy, *The Holy Miracle*, which was published in 1926 with the imprimatur of the Bishop of Regensburg.

The author of this Miracle play (edited by the Abbot of Metten, music by Max Kanzlspurger) is a Benedictine monk, Gallus Ritter. In his drama, the soul-shepherd Ritter indicts the Jews as sons of a devilish band, poisoners, Jewish vassals and a pack of scurvy Jewish dogs. In the second scene of the third act, a Deggendorf councillor speaks these lines:

Now, I speak German and say frankly:

It were better if your Moses had been drowned in the mud of the Nile

And Abraham, Isaac and Jacob too,

The world would have been rid of that Jewish mob.

The pious Deggendorfers do not, of course, perform the drama in a spirit of anti-Semitism. They just hope, as the Review puts it, that their show will increase the effect of the Feast of Mercy.

[Translated from the German magazine *Der Spiegel* by J. G. Rausch.]

### NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

WEDNESDAY, October 18th: Present: Messrs. F. A. Ridley (Chair), Arthur, Barker, Cleaver, Ebury, Hornibrook, Johnson, Mellroy, Mills, Mrs. Ebury, Mrs. Venton, the Treasurer (Mr. Griffiths) and the Secretary. Apology from Mr. Tribe. The President and Mr. Johnson reported a successful trip to Glasgow where the local Society had now appointed a new Secretary, Mr. J. Dempster, and where Mr. Ridley had addressed a good meeting. Marble Arch Branch financial statement was before the meeting and the Branch officers were thanked and congratulated. New members were admitted to Edinburgh, Glasgow, North London and Sussex Branches which, with individual members made 12 in all. A motion from West Ham and District Branch was referred to Messrs. G. W. Foots & Co. Ltd. Possible venues for the Annual Dinner were considered. Humanist Council report was given by the Secretary. Mr. Tribe was appointed to represent the Society at the NCCL Conference on Immigration. A letter from the Home Office on adoption was noted. Pamphlets and propaganda were discussed at some length. Condolences were expressed on hearing of the death of Mr. C. E. Ratcliffe. Mr. Ebury handed over the usual North London monthly contribution of £5 to the Building Fund. The next meeting was fixed for Wednesday, November 22nd, 1961.

### NEXT WEEK

### WHAT IS ISLAM?

By Dr. PADRAIG KRINKILL

# THE FREETHINKER

103 BOROUGH HIGH STREET, LONDON, S.E.1

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THE FREETHINKER can be obtained through any newsagent or will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates: One year, £1 17s. 6d.; half-year 19s.; three months, 9s. 6d. (In U.S.A. and Canada: One year, \$5.00; half-year, \$2.50; three months, \$1.25).

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

Details of membership of the National Secular Society may be obtained from the General Secretary, 103 Borough High Street, S.E.1. Members and visitors are welcome during normal office hours. Inquiries regarding Secular Funeral Services should also be made to the General Secretary, N.S.S.

## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### OUTDOOR

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

London Branches (Marble Arch), Sundays, from 4 p.m. MESSRS. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER, C. E. WOOD, D. H. TRIBE, J. P. MURACCIOLE.

(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. (Platt Fields), Sundays, 3 p.m.: Messrs. G. H. MILLS AND G. A. WOODCOCK.

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

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Midland Institute Cinema, Paradise Street), Sunday, November 5th, 6.45 p.m.: J. M. KUDAHIL, "Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament".

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Tuesday, November 7th, 7.30 p.m.: BARBARA SMOKER, "Return to Belief", by Yvonne Lubbock.

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, November 5th, 6.30 p.m.: COLIN MCCALL, "Militant Atheism: Is it Outdated?"

Marble Arch Branch N.S.S. (Carpenters' Arms, Seymour Place, London, W.1), Sunday, November 5th, 7.15 p.m.: "DAVID TRIBE, "Revivals and Revivalists".

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Education Centre, Broad Street), Sunday, November 5th, 2.30 p.m.: C. B. JOHNSON, "Teacher's Pay".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, November 5th, 11 a.m. MAURICE CRANSTON, M.A., "The Moral Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre".

## Notes and News

THE PLAQUE to Charles Bradlaugh at 29 Turner Street, Stepney, London, E.1, which is to be unveiled by Mr. Anthony Wedgwood Benn on Wednesday, November 8th, at 3 o'clock, bears the description, "Advocate of Free-thought". The ceremony, we remind readers, will be followed at 4 o'clock by a reception, organised by the Humanist Council, in the Members' Dining Room in the House of Commons. Tickets, five shillings each, are available from the Secretary of the National Secular Society, 103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1. The nearest underground station to Turner Street is White-chapel.

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IF WE WERE ASKED to name the best all-embracing introduction to religion, we should probably choose *Man and His Gods* by Homer W. Smith. It is not so well known here as it should be, but it is now available in paperback

for twelve shillings (Universal Library). This may sound a lot, but the book has 500 pages and has been described by the *New York Times* as "the twelve volumes of *The Golden Bough* rolled into one". Homer Smith is Professor of Physiology at New York University College of Medicine, and his book is invaluable to Freethinkers. It has a foreword by the late Albert Einstein, who read it with "intense interest".

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OUR GOOD FRIEND, Dr. D. A. Rickard, of Cleveland, Ohio, USA, has produced Christmas cards this year with—as he puts it—"not Santa Claus, but Santa Charles, the real saint of Freethinkers". It is, of course, Charles Darwin, and Dr. Rickard quotes from the *Autobiography* (with original omissions restored) as follows: "Thus disbelief crept over me at a very slow rate, but was at last complete. The rate was so slow that I felt no distress, and have never since doubted even for a single second that my conclusion was correct. I can indeed hardly see how anyone ought to wish Christianity to be true for if so the plain language of the text seems to show that the men who do not believe, and this would include my Father, Brother and almost all my best friends, will be everlastingly punished. And this is a damnable doctrine".

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IN HOUSTON, TEXAS, it is now possible to "Dial-a-Saint", number MOhawk 7-8383, and to hear a message like this: "Too many of us have never learned the love of solitude in today's busy world. Our hero for today, St. Bruno, rebukes our ceaseless activity in the midst of people" (*Time* 20/10/61). After that comes the commercial, reminding the listener that the service is provided by George H. Lewis & Sons, funeral directors.

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"FROM THE POINT of view of the rationalist" said Maurice Richardson in a book review in the *Daily Herald* (23/10/61), "Professor Horton Davies is almost too charitable—especially, perhaps, to Moral Re-Armament". Mr. Richardson was reviewing Professor Davies's book, *Christian Deviations* (SCM Press 5s.) and found it fascinating. The growth of American-based sects such as the Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses (whose monthly, *The Watchtower*, has a circulation of three million copies) and Seventh-Day Adventists is quite startling, and is connected (as Mr. Richardson noted) with the American businessman's obsessive fear of Communism. "As with the Moral Re-Armers there is no shortage of funds", the reviewer ended, so, "Watch out for your intellectual liberties".

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INCIDENTALLY, the latest full-page Moral Re-Armament advertisement (*Daily Express*, 16/10/61) gave the momentous last words of the late Frank Buchman: "Why not let God run the whole world?" But we thought He did!

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WHEN Maudie Littlehampton of the *Daily Express* is in form she is perfect, and thanks to the brilliance of her cartoonist-creator, Osbert Lancaster, she is very often in form. The other day she was speaking to a Frenchman at a cocktail party. "Dites-moi, cher Hippolyte", she asked, "does the general still hear his voices, or does God now come through on a direct line?"

★

WE WERE PLEASED to learn from the September issue of *The Rationalist*, organ of the Rationalist Association of South Africa, that two members of the Association were married on September 2nd. They were Miss Betty Lurie, Honorary Secretary, and Mr. Hannes van Niekerk. We wish them every happiness.

# The Emperor Extraordinary

By WALTER STEINHARDT

SAUL K. PADOVER, the American historian, has placed us in his debt with his biography of Thomas Jefferson. Previous to that he wrote the life of the Austrian Emperor, Joseph II (1741-1790), the son and successor of Maria Theresa, the post-mortem of a failure—or almost a failure. For, irrespective of any historical impact Joseph's endeavours may have had upon European enlightenment, his period must be of considerable interest and fascination for Freethinkers of any nation. He has, in fact, been variously called, the Revolutionary, the Liberating, the Enlightened, the Wise and the Passionate Emperor.

He was the utter opposite of his phlegmatic, superstitious, deeply religious, Jesuit and Pope-loving mother. She was wasteful and imperious to her peoples' unspeakable sufferings. She upheld and strengthened the suppressions of the unholy trinity: Crown, Aristocracy and Roman Catholic Church. Philosophically, her son could be compared with his cleverer rival, Frederick II of Prussia, but happily without the latter's unscrupulous contempt for his subjects. Joseph's life was, in fact, largely dominated by his passionate and self-sacrificing care for the under-privileged.

When a boy, the sensitive prince had the good fortune to be taught (apart from the usual irksome clerics and obdurate militarists) by a Professor Martini, a scholar of the Austrian enlightenment. From him, Joseph learned of rational arguments against a Church he soon loathed. It put a seal to his early anti-clerical inclination.

Luckily married (at the age of 19) to the beautiful and intelligent Isabel of Parma, he began writing long memoirs, his "political dreams". He speculated on the reforms to be introduced after his accession: taxing of the aristocratic idlers, revisals of salaries of noble retainers, cutting down the vast sums spent at Court, etc. "I despise all who buy titles of nobility" he remarked when meeting the notorious Casanova. The quick-witted Italian agreed and challenged "And what does your Highness think of those who sell them"! It appears, the young Habsburg had no reply.

Within three years, Joseph's marriage ended through Isabel's death by smallpox (1763), and he remained inconsolable for the rest of his life. Two years later he became co-regent and submitted further documents listing reforms that were immediately to be implemented. Here are some:—foundation of new universities, secularisation of certain religious foundations; conscription of young nobles "to improve their character"; use of army for public works; introduction of religious toleration; drastic revision of censorship (freedom of the press); no prosecution on grounds of personal morals. All this should take place in one great sweep, not piecemeal. The programme was truly revolutionary and his outraged mother promptly overruled it. "Nothing can be more ruinous" she wrote to him, "than your persistence in religious toleration. It is the greatest disaster that ever afflicted the monarchy. Look at the Protestant lands, asylums of dissolutes and criminals. Look at England . . . What is necessary is our good, true religion, unalterable laws, subjection to the Holy Church. Give up your false arguments and evil books and save your soul". And she continued cruelly to suppress Protestant heretics, as this was best for their immortal souls. During this time, the dreaded "Black International", Ignatius Loyola's fanatical Society of Jesus, suffered a number of defeats in some European

countries. Finally, Pope Clement XIV, in his infallible wisdom, abolished the order, calling the Jesuits "men abandoned by God". In this controversy, too, mother and son stood in opposite camps. Reluctantly, she signed their prohibition.

Joseph travelled extensively. When visiting his sister, the ill-fated Marie Antoinette in Paris, he met some of the great minds of the enlightenment: Rousseau, D'Alembert, Diderot, Gibbon, probably also Jefferson, but not (in fear of his mother) Voltaire. In November, 1780, Maria Theresa died. All her life she had ardently, if not morbidly, submitted herself to the Church. Yet, ironically, Pius VI refused her the full burial services usually granted to Catholic monarchs—because she was a woman.

Joseph was now the ruler of Central Europe. The hopes of those subdued physically and spiritually were kindled to urgent anticipations of relief. He immediately and enthusiastically busied himself to change the sorry affairs of the realm. Apart from the traditional opposition of Church and nobility, his officials were slow, lazy and dim, and difficult to bestir. It is revealing to note the diverse subjects upon which he requested information. They ranged from conditions in poor-houses to the sale of contraceptives, from treatment of unmarried mothers to observance of toleration edicts. He wrote many hundreds of excellently composed letters. He travelled long distances throughout his domains. And he was always in haste and impatience as if foreseeing that precious little time was left for him.

He abrogated the brutal punishments of the penal code, including the death penalty. He forbade duelling, and struck witchcraft off the list of crimes. He allowed marriages between Christians and non-Christians. To the despair of the clergy, he declared marriage a civil contract. The Jews were given rights of citizens. For the first time, they became soldiers in a European army. Joseph even gave them a separate (non-Christian) form of the oath of allegiance. Equality before the law became the maxim of a new criminal code. Serfdom was declared void within a year of his coming into power.

Unfortunately, not all of his reforms had the desired effect. The freeing of writers from censorship for instance, released a flood of obscene tracts and salacious cartoons under such lusty titles as "Nun's Letters", "Bawdy Houses", "Viennese Housemaids" and "Mamma wants me to enter a Monastery". When the Pope announced his visit to Austria, more serious and critical publications appeared, asking: "What is the Pope? A Parson? A Bishop? The Devil?" The Archbishop remonstrated, but Joseph told him bluntly: "You don't have to read what you don't like!"

In November, 1781, he dissolved over 700 monasteries, reducing the number of monks and nuns from 65,000 to 27,000. He confiscated their amassed property, but made allowances for the old and infirm. The rest of the money was allocated for schools, charitable institutions (he was greatly concerned with the blind and deaf), hospitals, etc. Now the Pope protested sharply. But for Joseph, the days of Canossa had gone long ago. To all protestations, he replied with irony and contempt. The Pope even came to Vienna in person, trying to warn him that disobedience and lack of reverence towards the Vicar of Christ entailed mortal dangers to his immortal soul. Joseph remained

irritated and unimpressed. The visit was a fiasco. "Hasten, hasten everything that brings nearer the happiness of my people", remained his maxim during the 10 short years of his reign, but as he lay dying, he knew that he had failed. He was assailed from every quarter. The peasants complained of lack of land, the prelates hated him for his religious reforms, the aristocracy for his equalitarianism. Democrats objected to streaks of despotism in his law-giving; the monks loathed him for the dissolutions. His large army and futile wars kept prices and taxes raised.

The lazy civil servants croaked at the whips of his diligence. He had hardly a friend in his own domains, and with the exception of Catherine II, Europe's monarchs despised him. Even some rabbis tried to thwart his legal assimilations. Desperately ill, in great pain, lonely, childless, bitterly frustrated, he died in February, 1790, only 49 years old.

History records few monarchs for whom Freethinkers can possibly entertain much admiration, but Joseph II of Austria is surely an outstanding exception.

## The Scourge of God

By COLIN McCALL

THE THOUGHT OF LEPROSY fills us with horror. There is probably no disease that is more feared, even today, by those who know nothing about it. There seems to be some doubt whether the Old Testament use of the word is accurate, but its Hebrew connotation, "scourge of God", has certainly affected our attitude to leprosy. It is a scourge "which has, until recently, been little understood although universally feared", as Robert G. Cochrane, M.D., F.R.C.P., remarks in his enlightening little pamphlet, *Leprosy: Its Challenge and Hope* (The Mission to Lepers, London, 1s.).

As Technical Medical Adviser to American Leprosy Missions, Inc., and Adviser on Leprosy to the Ministry of Health, London, Dr. Cochrane is obviously well qualified to write on the subject. But he is also a fervent Christian (formerly Director of the Christian Medical College, Vellore) and his religious theories are less reliable than his medical facts. Let us take the latter first.

Leprosy, as Dr. Cochrane says, is a disease, not a social stigma. It is caused by a bacillus, *Mycobacterium leprae*, which was discovered by the Norwegian, Professor Armauer Hansen, in 1872 and announced two years later. The disease is not hereditary, though a mother can pass it on to a child through skin-to-skin contact, and indeed, "while there may be other factors in the acquirement of leprosy, by far the most important is close contact with an open or infective case". Yet, "perhaps as high a figure as ninety per cent of the whole human race is naturally immune to the disease", and "the number of persons who have acquired leprosy from working among the victims of this disease is negligible". Moreover, contrary to the popular conception, it can be argued that "leprosy is not a highly contagious disease and that certain factors are necessary for an individual to acquire the disease". And Dr. Cochrane tells us that international epidemiologists are giving much attention to these factors.

Certainly it is now "possible to prevent the great majority of mutilations in leprosy because much of the deformity is due to secondary causes". Leprosy attacks nerves, particularly those nerves which convey the sense of feeling, and when feeling has been destroyed a person is liable to injure himself without knowing it. Of course, feeling cannot be restored, but the patient can be alerted against the danger of injury. It is not surprising that physiotherapy and orthopaedic surgery play a large part in the care of leprosy patients, but operations may be necessary in cases of deformity (such as "foot-drop") and plastic surgery can remove disfigurements. Dr. Cochrane sums up the present position of the therapy of leprosy as "highly satisfactory" and, though no "miracle" drug has yet been discovered, he mentions several that have been used effectively.

If the disease is not treated, however, the results can be terrible.

The skin becomes wrinkled and like tissue-paper, the eyes affected by leprosy lose their sight, the hands and feet become deformed, bone is absorbed and only bent or mutilated stumps remain, the throat may be affected and a tube has permanently to be inserted to prevent suffocation; in fact, it is this last stage that caused the remark of one of the early pioneers in the study of the disease describing the ravages of advanced leprosy—"sans eyes, sans nose, sans everything".

### And:

it is being realised that, of all the mutilating diseases—particularly in the underdeveloped countries—mutilation by leprosy is probably the second greatest cause of deformity after poliomyelitis.

To these people, as Dr. Cochrane says, "our love and compassion must be extended", and I have no doubt that the Mission to Lepers is doing wonderful work (I personally know a married couple in a colony in Hong Kong). What I find distressing are Dr. Cochrane's efforts to reconcile leprosy with the love of God. After describing the ravages of the disease, he thinks it "well to remind ourselves that in the eyes of God it is the redeemable and indestructible soul of man which is of value". Then, having dealt with the ways in which surgery can be effectively used in the treatment of leprosy, he exclaims:

Let us give God grateful thanks for the way He has given us knowledge in these matters, for now it can be claimed that the dread of deformity and mutilation of leprosy can be very largely banished from the patient's mind. Think what that means in terms of the relief of human suffering.

I am always surprised when a medical man writes like this, though I should be used to it now. It is, of course, an emotional rather than intellectual attitude, and I know that no argument on my part would be likely to change it. The doctor obviously can't see how absurd—and cruel—it is. But does he never think of all the leprosy sufferers in previous ages, who were deformed and mutilated before God gave us "knowledge in these matters"? Surely he must. As a Christian, then, he must presumably take what comfort he can from thoughts of the sufferers' "redeemable and indestructible" souls. It is cold, as well as irrational comfort, but it no doubt suffices for him.

For, although I am sure that Dr. Cochrane is humanly and medically compassionate, his religion brings out the worst in him. He writes of leprosy, not only as a disease to be fought, but as an "opportunity for Christ"; "one of the most effective spiritual weapons in building up His Church in pagan lands". "Leprosy work", he says, "when it is associated with the preaching of the Gospel of Christ, is one of the most powerful spearheads for the Gospel, and has been used in the establishment of many truly independent Churches that we see today in Thailand, Korea, Africa, and in other parts of the world".

The intrusion of this ulterior motive illustrates the immoral influence of Christianity. I believe Dr. Cochrane's motives in fighting the scourge of leprosy are completely generous and sympathetic. It is his creed that makes them appear expedient and brings an informative and moving pamphlet to rather a distasteful end.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE CHURCH?

"This Believing World" (THE FREETHINKER, 20/10/61), refers to the Penguin book *What's Wrong With The Church?* by the Rev. N. Earle. It will no doubt be of interest to Freethinkers that the Rev. Earle was until recently quite a regular speaker on Friday lunchtime at Tower Hill, so when "This Believing World" poses the question "Is Mr. Earle out of touch with Freethinkers?" my answer is no! Tower Hill is consistently educated every Thursday by National Secular Society speakers Messrs. Ebury and Barker, therefore Mr. Earle has quite a hectic hour or so answering questions put by Freethinkers, Unbelievers, and the like.

Incidentally, I do not think that Mr. Earle is a Hell fire merchant, and I can remember him once describing the Jesus of the Bible as a great Agnostic, a healthy sign I feel in a clergyman.

D. CAREY

### THE CURSE OF TUTANKHAMEN

I doubt very much whether the theory of the "pharaoh's curse" will be "shattered" by Mr. Steele's disclosure that it is nothing but myth. Recently I had an article published in a monthly journal in which I rejected the reality of the "curse". Needless to say this did not stop some readers maintaining that "there was something in the story".

The concept of the "curse" was brought into being after the deaths of certain people associated with the work on the tomb of the Pharaoh Tutankhamen, those who still spread the story being apt to forget that many who took part in the work are still very much alive. But despite the fact that the "curse" is nothing more than myth, there is a little substance behind the story of a "curse". The tomb was of great importance to the ancient Egyptian, and he feared that others might usurp his spirit's eternal dwelling, hence some tombs were inscribed with warnings against re-use; this, stretched a little, could be where the story of the "curse" originated.

R. W. MORRELL.

### CATHOLIC ACTION

Paul Varney has recommended that attacks on the Roman Catholic Church should not be exaggerated—and that the proper targets to assail are certain reactionary Romanists, high and low. It is quite true (as he suggests), that Catholic Action is only one facet of Romanism; but it is a very powerful one—sufficiently potent to have undermined France to surrender. This almost enabled Hitler to destroy civilisation. I suggest that no sensible person can dismiss this deadly papal weapon as airily as Mr. Varney is prepared to dismiss it.

He is, to some extent, correct in saying that "millions of Roman Catholics fought against Hitler"—but this is a deceptive half-truth. If Hitler had not been hoisted to power by the Vatican, it is doubtful whether World War Two would have occurred; and, in any case, far more non-Romanists than papists fought against Hitler. This provides yet another historical example of how the knavish tricks of the Vatican political plotters have been confounded (at the cost of unlimited human misery), by "Jews, heretics and infidels".

I agree with Mr. Varney when he says that all of us are conditioned by science today; but this undeniable fact is not generally accepted in Roman Catholic circles. If the Holy Father and his clergy were to be told that "religion today is a reflex of the discoveries made by science"—Mr. Varney's words—I am sure that these clerics would be "Not amused"!

For centuries, since the days of Galileo, the Vatican has usually opposed science and the material progress of mankind. However, there are gratifying signs today that the scientist is overcoming the priest, and that common sense is beginning to prevail against mysticism and superstition.

ADRIAN PIGOTT.

### MR. MACFARLANE AND THE MODERATOR

Mr. Macfarlane seems to have the wrong approach, as well as a lack of knowledge regarding the principles of the Reformation. The purpose of the Reformation was the bringing back of Christianity to the purity of its original idea. Luther, like every reformer that had risen since the year 1000, fought the Roman Catholic Church, not because it demanded too much, but because it demanded too little. Luther, Calvin and Knox had as much time for freethinking as the Pope himself. Calvin had the freethinking doctor Servetus burnt. Therefore to say as Mr. Macfarlane does, that rationalists are the spiritual heirs of the reformers, is a very grave mistake for anyone to make who calls himself a rationalist or freethinker. And Mr. Macfarlane seems to forget that the Moderator of the Church of Scotland has views far more in accordance with the Roman Church than with humanists and rationalists.

R. SMITH.

### EMMETT McLOUGHLIN

I do want to say how much I appreciated Emmett McLoughlin's

"Letter to Roman Catholic Priests", which you printed on October 20th. It was devastating, yet so reasonably argued. This is, of course, Mr. McLoughlin's great merit; though he suffered a great deal under Roman Catholicism, he is so moderate a man that he writes without malice—more in sorrow than in anger, as it were. But he knows the Roman Church so well, from the inside, that he is able to expose it more effectively than any other writer I know. Once again my congratulations on printing the "Letter". I hope readers will ask for Mr. McLoughlin's two books, *People's Padre* and *American Culture and Catholic Schools* from their libraries.

ROBERT DENT.

[The above is typical of many tributes to Mr. McLoughlin's "Letter".—ED.]

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