

The Freethinker

Volume LXXXII—No. 6

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Sixpence

[Translator's introductory note. One of the most important and regularly recurring features in the long and chequered annals of the Roman Catholic Church, is to be found in the successive appearance of major religious orders which are specially adapted to cope with the different problems that confront the Catholic Church from age to age. Probably the most important of such orders has been and still is, the Company (or Society) of Jesus, founded by St. Ignatius of Loyola in 1534-40. But other still existing religious orders such as the Dominicans (who ran the Inquisition both in Rome and Spain), the Franciscans and the Benedictines have been historically important in different ages and each of them has had a special function to perform in connection with the then current evolution of the Catholic Church.

The most recent of these orders seems to be the *Opus Dei* ("God's Creation"), founded like the Jesuits in Spain. As noted hereafter, very little is known about this new Spanish order which, unlike its predecessors, seems to be mainly composed of laymen, perhaps inspired by the current success of Catholic Action. But it exercises considerable influence in present day Spain where it is alleged to be a serious rival to the Jesuits for predominance in both the totalitarian Spanish Church and in General Franco's present-day clerical fascist regime. It is also a growing influence in other lands, and it recently tried to establish itself in the University of Oxford where, incidentally, its Jesuit rivals have been established since 1880 when Cardinal Newman formally opened the still-existing Jesuit church in that city.

Up to the present time, it has been difficult to obtain any accurate information about this semi-secret Catholic order. Upon which account we particularly welcome the following illuminating article from our French contemporary, *La Raison*, official paper of the French Federation of Freethinkers, an article based on the researches of an Italian author, Corrado Pellenberg, in his recent book *Secrets of the Vatican*, which gives many valuable facts and figures about this latest manifestation of militant Spanish Catholicism hitherto as unknown to the readers of this paper as to the translator himself.—F.A.R.]

"Of all the non-monastic institutions currently established by Rome, the most interesting, as also the most mysterious is beyond doubt *Opus Dei*. Founded at Madrid on October 2nd, 1928, by Monsignor Jose-Maria Escriva de Balaguer, a jurist of Saragossa who later became a priest, it is a kind of Fifth Column of God, a sort of semi-monastic Freemasonry. Although it is not formally a secret society, its members do not normally publish their membership, so as to practise their normal pursuits more effectively. 'Your life should remain obscure for thirty years like that of Jesus himself' was the advice given by the founder of this Order. As a direct result of this habitual secrecy, the exact membership of

the Order remains unknown. According to one estimate, the present figure is around ten thousand and it is also possible that the halo of mystery which surrounds it may have given exaggerated estimates of its power. But no one notwithstanding, can doubt that this power is real, particularly in Spain."

Key Posts

Members of the *Opus Dei*, declares our authority, have occupied key posts within the Spanish State and within all the vital organs of the Spanish nation.

"The members of this semi-secret militia, of this General Staff, half laic, half religious, work honestly and perseveringly and excel

in all the activities that they undertake. They occupy a leading position in Spain, a role that has naturally aroused much criticism. There is at present, much cause to believe unfortunately, that numerous liberal Catholics [names omitted by translator—F.A.R.] are forbidden either to publish their works or to teach on account of the implacable hostility of the *Opus Dei*."

Vows and Modifications

"The members of this Order take all three fundamental vows as in all authentic monastic Orders: obedience, poverty and chastity, which however, are subject to particular modifications and adaptations in view of their special situations and functions. The vow of obedience is primarily an interior one, in particular a complete acceptance of the precepts of the Church and of those that may have a special bearing upon the particular functions of this Order, since the kind of obedience that involves a rigid control of its individual members is often impossible in existing conditions. The vow of poverty consists in 'the use of worldly goods controlled by a superior' following the most recent definition of the (Roman) Congregation of Religious Orders [which makes rules for all monastic orders—F.A.R.]. In fact, the members of the *Opus Dei* are bound to live a sober and moral life which however, must always be on the level of their social rank and functions.

"No economy is allowed which would place them on a level inferior to that which normally appertains to their appropriate social milieu. If it should happen that their emoluments come to exceed their actual needs, they donate their surplus to the Order; if, contrarily, they earn too little to live upon a reasonable level, the Order comes to their assistance and makes good the deficit. The oath of chastity does not include [i.e. invalidate] marriage, and married couples remain free to perform their conjugal duties, a state of things always enjoined by the moral theology of the Catholic Church. It is not permitted to apply for membership of the *Opus Dei*. The Order itself, upon the suggestion of its individual members, approaches possible candidates and asks them to become actual members.

"These modern Templars [author's reference is to the also semi-secret medieval Knightly Order of the Templars

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

What is "Opus Dei?"

Translated by F. A. Ridley from the French Freethought paper
La Raison, January, 1961

—F.A.R.] who have to hide their current membership of the *Opus Dei*, are under instructions to adapt themselves to the utmost extent of their power to their social milieu even if this compels them to make moral sacrifices.

"The 'Protector' of the *Opus Dei* is Cardinal Tedeschini. [Every religious Order has a 'Protector' at Rome to look after its interests, usually a Cardinal or some highly-placed ecclesiastic—F.A.R.] Its founder, Mgr. Escriva is its supreme President, and its other leading positions are distributed as follows:—General Secretary, Don Alvaro del Portillo; General Procurator, Don Pietro Cascidro; Councillors, Don Severino Monsa, Dr. Riccardo Riemann, Dr. Numo Gíneo Ferreira and Bernardo Fernandez; Prefect of Studies, Professor Guilano Herranz, General Administrator, the legal advocate, Giociahino Alonso. The International headquarters are at Rome, at number 73 Viale Bruno Buozzi.

Piety—An Obsessional Neurosis

By OTTO WOLFGANG

"BEING MASTER OF MY THINKING, I possess ideas; whereas most people are possessed by ideas" wrote Max Stirner, the founder of Anarcho-Individualism. One generation later, Freud defined religion as "a universal obsessional neurosis":—

One might venture to regard the obsessional neurosis as a pathological counterpart to the formation of a religion . . . and religion as a universal obsessional neurosis . . . It is easy to see wherein lies the resemblance between neurotic ceremonial and religious rites; it is in the fear of pangs of conscience after the omission, in the complete isolation of them from all other activities (the feeling that one must not be disturbed), and in the conscientiousness with which the details are carried out.

(Freud: *Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, New York, 1950)

In fact, religion pretends to permit of a communication with super-terrestrial agencies provided certain rites, inhibitions, restrictions, observances and tabus are strictly observed. According to Freud,

Two components are found in every Obsession: (1) an *idea* that forces itself upon the patient; (2) an associated emotional state . . . A sharp distinction between "obsessional acts" and "ceremonials" is not to be expected; as a rule, an obsessional act develops from a ceremonial . . . The neurotic ceremonial consists of little prescriptions, performances, restrictions, and arrangements in certain activities of every-day life which have to be carried out always in the same or in a methodically varied way. (*Ibid.*)

In the *Dictionary of Psychology* by H. C. Warren (San Francisco) we find the following definitions of Obsession:—

(1) the presence, pathologically, in an individual of a persistent and irresistible idea or emotion or urge; (2) (hist.) the presence in an individual of an evil spirit who controls his activities; (3) (psych.res.) the possession or control of a person by an intruding personality believed to be organized from dissociated elements of his own personality, but often assumed to be a discarnate personality or other spirit.

If therefore—as they always do when cornered—priests and believers give as argument and proof of the existence of God that they know because they have experienced his presence, this is just the hallucination of a neurotic. Says Professor James Drever (*Dictionary of Psychology*) in the Penguin Reference Books (1958):—

Obsession: a persistent or recurrent idea usually strongly tinged with emotion, and frequently involving an urge towards some form of action, the whole mental situation being pathological.

Genuinely, an obsessional type is governed by anxiety arising from a guilt complex; religion, however, is generally a Secondary illness, whose fear complexes have been

"In Italy, this Order operates upon a much more restricted scale than in Spain. On account of its secretive character, it is difficult to state with certainty who actually belongs to it. People are mentioned like the son of Segni, Italian Prime Minister immediately after the war, and of various high officials in the administration of university professions and Bank Directors.

"There are at present, branches of the *Opus Dei* in at least thirty countries and their principal activities are concentrated upon the Universities. Six years ago they opened a hostel for students at London and an attempt is being made just at present, to open one in Oxford. [So far, Oxford University appears to have refused the necessary facilities—F.A.R.] I have also heard rumours that the *Opus* works even more secretly than usual upon the farther side of the Iron Curtain, very particularly in Poland."

induced through indoctrination by parents, educationalists of the ancient type and other servants of reaction. In his *Mental Health Handbook*, Ian Skottowe writes:—

Obsessionalism [is] a tendency to create and be dominated by self-imposed rituals, to experience a sense of being compelled to do or not to do something, or to experience both at the same time, often with mounting anxiety . . . Narrowness of outlook, rigidity, inflexibility.

An on page 99 he writes:—

Obsessions are intrusive thoughts—not inherently bizarre as they are liable to be in schizophrenia—which cannot lightly be shaken off. Many normal persons experience them from time to time. They are common symptoms in several mental illnesses, for example depression . . . anxiety neuroses. When, however, they are (only) predominant . . . then a state of obsessional illness (obsessional neurosis) may be said to exist. In obsessional illness the obsessions commonly take the form of *phobias* (irrational fears), *doubts*, morbid preoccupations (sometimes over the bodily functions) and *ruminations*, often on abstract topics . . . When obsessions lead to senseless compulsive acts (unnecessary counting or playing with numbers, touching of lamp-posts, avoiding lines on the pavement) or rituals, the condition is said to be obsessive-compulsive. When obsessional illness lasts for a long time, *chronic tension* . . . becomes firmly established and may be seriously disabling. Such states are extremely resistant to treatment.

Rather than protect our Sacred Cows, we ought to prevent the spread of the obsessional neurosis of religion.

THE BRADFORD COLOUR BAN

THE ANNOUNCEMENT that as from February 4th the Locarno Mecca ballroom in Bradford was to withdraw its ban on the admission of coloured men without partners is a victory over colour discrimination in which the Bradford Branch of the National Secular Society played an important part.

Although students from Bradford and from Leeds University held demonstrations and picketed the dance hall, the proprietors refused to change their policy. But when the Lord Mayor of Bradford (a Labour man) decided to hold the Civic Ball at the Mecca, the Bradford Branch of the NSS called a protest meeting at which Mr. F. J. Corina made an outspoken denunciation not only of the Mecca policy but of the Lord Mayor's decision, which he said was an insult to thousands of citizens by appearing to link the city officials with the colour policy of Mecca. Mr. Corina publicly said what many were thinking, and it reached the national Press headlines, creating comment far beyond the city. Protests were also made by the Branch to the local and national managements of the Mecca.

The official Mecca reason for withdrawing the ban was that it was "never intended to be permanent", but it is curious that this was never mentioned during the five-month struggle, and our Bradford colleagues incline to the view that the attack on the Lord Mayor made his position untenable, and wiser counsels have now prevailed. Whatever the reason, the Mecca change of policy is welcome, as it is now in line with the tolerant attitude of Bradford as a whole, where "race" feeling and incidents are remarkably rare despite one of the largest coloured populations in Britain.

Confucius

By ADRIAN PIGOTT

(Continued from page 36)

TO PUT IT BRIEFLY, Confucianism stood for a rationalised social order, based on personal culture and a good family life. It also aimed at political stability by introducing honest governors and officials, and it sought to abolish the civil wars by advocating general harmony and friendliness and employing an ethical and persuasive approach rather than force. It was a secular attitude, i.e. with interest in *earthly* relationships, and it was not concerned with mysticism or immortality. Confucius encountered many obstacles, and he was too outspoken to become a success as a politician. (Once, when asked by an arrogant ruler for advice in the art of government, Confucius bluntly replied, "First of all, you must learn how to govern yourself.") Except for one year when he was successfully in charge of the city of Chung Tu, he never got further than being considered a highly esteemed schoolmaster for budding politicians. But he contrived to get many of his promising pupils placed into official positions from where they were able to carry out his sensible theories.

In short, Confucianism is practical humanism. It is a refreshing change from the mysticism and superstition which have crept into so many religions. His sayings leave us with the gratifying feeling that everyone is in a state of potential growth and progress—because he believed that everyone possesses the laudable desire to improve himself and the next generation. His mission was to direct this human energy into the correct channels through good living. ("By nature, all men are born very much alike—but, through their habits and education, they grow further and further apart.")

As an ethical teacher, Confucius ranks with Buddha, Jesus and Muhammed, but he differs from them in that he concentrated upon giving secular advice. Moreover he has not been deified. He was 2000 years ahead of his time as a pioneer of common sense, and he swept aside current superstitions and emphasised the necessity for sincerity and honesty. His great and subtle wisdom is not fully understood by Westerners—yet his position in the world is unique. He stands alone in history as the only man who has moulded the minds and manners of a very large nation for twenty-four centuries. He enabled the Chinese to live simply, honestly and correctly at a time when Christendom and Islam were engaged in warfare, intolerance and massacres.

He also made an impact upon Europe. Soon after the discovery of the sea-route to China (via the Cape of Good Hope) travellers began to bring back copies of his theories. He thus had considerable influence in humanising European thought and Leibnitz and Voltaire both approved of his ideas, the latter keeping a picture of the Chinese philosopher on the wall of his study.

The welfare of the common people was his central theme and he looked far beyond the narrow confines of his native China. He had the astonishing intelligence to realise in 500 BC exactly what thinking people are just beginning to realise in 1961 AD, viz. that World Brotherhood and international agreement is the only answer to the troubles of mankind. ("Within the four seas, all men are brothers.")

He made an especial appeal to millions of the lower classes by his justifiable promise that "Men are created

equal in goodness of heart, and they can rise to become real men like the good 'dukes' Yao and Shun". This ray of hope accounted for the fascination that he gave to millions of humble Chinese peasants who saw their first opportunity of rising in the world. Confucius rightly believed that a nation of good sons and brothers would be an orderly and peaceful nation: and that, if a person could apply the Confucian theory of reciprocity, he could place himself in the position of others—thus enabling him to understand their difficulties. It is amazing to think that the first secularist was a pioneer in these civilising theories as long ago as 500 BC. At that time, "the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome" had hardly developed.

The ambition of the Master was the education of young men in benevolence; so that they could develop into what the reformer termed "Ideal Man", or "Manhood-at-its-best". He then planted these promising young men into official positions whence they were able to propagate his theories, and thus introduce law and order. He rightly believed that the example of these cultured young men would stop civil wars and misery, and would introduce an orderly government into Shantung province. He was not to know, of course, that his kindly theories would endure for twenty-four centuries and would eventually influence the whole of the vast territory of China—and even improve Europe, "via" Voltaire.

For eighty generations, the mandarins and honest officials (who had been trained under Confucianism and who were selected for their ability rather than for their ancestry) provided examples of excellence to hundreds of millions of the lower class Chinese. The peasants were entirely illiterate, but they were logical enough to copy the examples of good behaviour provided by their educated superiors. As a result, these humble and worthy people transferred into their modest homes and lives the virtues of Confucianism—greatly to their own family happiness and advantage.

Here follows a selection of the simply-worded recommendations which Confucius made for the evolution of "Ideal Man". (In contrast to "Ideal Man", Confucius called an ignoble or selfish person a "Petty Man".)

"Ideal Man does everything possible to help the poor—but nothing to enrich the rich."

"Ideal Man is a person who desires perfection in himself and transfers it to others. Ability to convey culture from oneself to others may be called the secret of Ideal Man."

"First of all, Ideal Man sets a good example; then he invites others to follow it."

"Ideal Man develops the virtues in others. Petty Man does just the opposite."

"Ideal Man must practise five things — humility, magnanimity, sincerity, diligence and graciousness."

If you are humble, you will not be laughed at.

If you are magnanimous, you will attract many to you.

If you are sincere, people will trust you.

If you are diligent, you will be successful.

If you are gracious, you will get along well with juniors."

"Ideal Man is sparing in words, but is prodigal in deeds."

Confucius set immense importance upon the healthy condition of family life, preferring this to superstition and vague religious dogmas. The first principle of his teaching was the encouragement of a noble character in any person (whether student or prince). He believed that,

(Continued on next page)

This Believing World

The serial broadcast of Sir Edmund Gosse's famous autobiography, *Father and Son*, will certainly not be enthusiastically welcomed by good Christians, for it is a scathing and contemptuous exposure of the Christian religion as envisaged and practised by a Fundamentalist fanatic — Philip Gosse. Though this gentleman made a name for himself as a naturalist, writing books and giving lectures, his peculiar brand of Victorian religion made it hell for his son — though, strange to say, he never gave up Christianity. His father may well have been wrong in details — but true Christianity must stand unshaken!

★

Whether the late Hannen Swaffer was as thorough a believer in Christianity as he was in Spiritualism we do not know, but we do note that at the memorial service held for him at the church of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, instead of the usual solemn faces "laughter broke out during the service", according to the *Daily Express* (January 25th). But the really amusing thing in this account is the word "Spiritualism" to which he devoted his life does not occur. We are told about his being "one of the greatest journalists of our time", but not a word about his devotion to Spiritualism — and his excessive credulity. Such is posthumous fame!

★

If you want a bus stop — pray for it! Nothing will move a stony-hearted Transport Council like prayer — at least, that is what some nuns in Leeds think. They want a bus stop outside an old people's home, and as this has been refused, the nuns think God Almighty will force the Council to give it to them. Well, it's a great opportunity for the Lord to show his power — but what will the nuns feel about it if he fails "to move the city hall mountain"? We give it up.

★

A well known Divorce Court judge, Mr. Justice Wallington, has just died and the event might well have passed unnoticed but for the fact that he was a stout Roman Catholic and, as such was no doubt the best person in the world to adjudicate on divorce for Protestants according to the authorities. We think this wonderful impartiality should be extended. What about insisting on determined Freethinkers giving religious lessons in Roman Catholic schools? Or Calvinists conducting the marriage service in Roman Catholic churches? The possibilities are endless, and we hope will be earnestly considered by our impartial authorities.

★

The very religious gentleman who writes the pious "uplift" every Saturday for the *London Evening News* recently pointed out that the Roman governor Festus thought Paul, who had come before him, quite mad — and reading some of the twaddle scattered about in the Epistles, we can only say how right he was. The *Evening News* writer, admits that "the pages of history are peppered with God's lunatics" — some medical writers have even contended that "our Lord" was one of them — and he adds that "the Old Testament has striking examples of . . . great prophets [who] were written off as crazy". How true this is — and with what justice!

★

Naturally, the "Evening News" writer does not believe that OT prophets were crazy, only that "in our own day people tend to be suspicious of religious enthusiasm", and "even distrustful of such a movement of the spirit as the week of prayer for Christian unity". But we cannot help wondering why Christians don't adopt the Buddhist pray-

ing wheel which can waft dozens of prayers in one turn of the wheel to Almighty God. This ought to be far more effective than single prayers for unity.

★

The Kenya National leader, Mr. Jomo Kenyatta, is of course a good Christian, and he hopes (according to the *Daily Express*, January 29th), to revise the Bible directly he gains power. His principal objection is that Angels are always depicted white, while the Devil is "invariably black". Mr. Kenyatta is absolutely right. Why should the Devil always be shown black? Sceptics like ourselves may of course retort that shovelling coal to keep the fires of Hell eternally burning and smoking is a dirty business, and no doubt if the Devil and his associates were thoroughly scrubbed they might begin to look passably white.

CONFUCIUS

(Continued from page 43)

when benevolence had enabled anyone to attain "Manhood-at-its-best", the "Ideal Man" would confer upon Shantung province the benefits of peace, prosperity and orderliness. Events proved him correct.

To Confucius, the self-awakening of a good person in society commences with him being a creditable unit within his narrow family circle, governed by understanding parents.

Then it widens out.

In due course, the well behaved child grows up and becomes a useful influence upon his village. Rising in the scale, he may become an honest official who can administer his province with integrity — thus conferring great benefits on the people. In his final perfection, he becomes an "Ideal Man" who disregards class and race distinctions and who develops into a valuable influence in a very wide sense.

The essence of Confucianism lies in his emphasis on the formation of charitable relationships towards others.

Inside the family he recommended love by parents towards their children, "Filial piety" by children, in return. Friendliness by elder children towards younger children.

In the world the same reciprocity and kindness between older and younger adults and friends. By juniors, loyalty to superiors. By superiors, tolerance and consideration towards juniors.

And, to every adult, ran his immortal "Golden Rule" — "What you do not wish to be done to yourself, do not do to other people".

For twenty-four centuries, Chinese culture and good behaviour has rested upon the worthiness and solidarity of family life which Confucius advocated. During this long period, there were many times of stress in China — famines, invasions, floods and droughts — yet the merits of Confucianism enabled the Chinese to surmount these terrible ordeals. Invaders such as Huns, Mongols, Tartars and Manchus were absorbed into their worthy way of life. The Confucian basic idea of "filial piety" and good family life envisaged the whole gigantic nation becoming one great family over which presided the Emperor as a benevolent father. This is a generalisation, of course. Not every emperor was an "Ideal Man", and various dynasties had their day of success and then faded away — to be superseded by a new vigorous one. But Confucianism survived for century after century, with its emphasis upon benevolence.

Virtue is to love men.

Wisdom is to understand them.

(To be continued)

THE FREETHINKER

103 BOROUGH HIGH STREET, LONDON, S.E.1
TELEPHONE: HOP 2717

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.

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Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

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North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead)—Every Sunday, noon: L. EBURY.

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, Paradise Street). Sunday, February 11th, 6.45 p.m.: C. BLYTH, "Origins of Race Prejudice".

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Tuesday, February 13th, 7.30 p.m.: DR. JOHN LEWIS, M.A., "Blaise Pascal—Mathematician and Philosopher of Unreason".

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, February 11th, 6.30 p.m.: FILMS, "Close-up on Kuwait" and "Journey from the East".

Marble Arch Branch N.S.S. (The Carpenter's Arms, Seymour Place, London, W.1), Sunday, February 11th, 7.15 p.m.: F. A. HORNIBROOK, "My Sixty Years of Freethought".

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Education Centre, Broad Street), Sunday, February 11th, 2.30 p.m.: REV. J. W. TYSON, "Revivalist Meetings do not further the Cause of Religion".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, February 11th, 11 a.m.: MRS. MARY STOCKS, "The Habit of Reticence".

Tyneside Humanist Society (100 Pilgrim Street, Newcastle, 1), Wednesday, February 14th, 7.30 p.m.: ROY CAIRNCROSS, "The Democratic Challenge by Francis Williams".

Notes and News

THE ELASTIC WALLS of the Carpenter's Arms, Seymour Place, London, will no doubt be stretched to the full on Sunday for the meeting of the Marble Arch Branch of the National Secular Society. The speaker, as will be seen above, is the incomparable F. A. Hornibrook, the Branch President, who will be recounting "My Sixty Years of Freethought". What a wealth of experience the title conjours up, and how appropriate that Sunday should be the eve of Mr. Hornibrook's 84th birthday.

ELEVEN HUNDRED young Mormon missionaries "are to intensify the drive of the Church of the Latter Day Saints to establish itself in Britain", according to *The Observer* (28/1/62). They will be equipped with street maps, "conversion kits" and "tape-recorded sermons", and they intend to "talk with housewives and run baseball teams for children in order to get people talking about God and religion". The following day the *Daily Telegraph* (29/1/62) reported that the Mormons want to extend their

£600,000 temple at Lingfield and erect a separate chapel. "They also want to divert the A22, the London-Eastbourne road, for 300 yards in a curve past the main gates to provide a lay-by and service road". Alternatively, "they will ask an inspector of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government at a public inquiry at Oxted on Thursday (1/2/62) if they can make a car park on a heath opposite, and dig a connecting subway to the temple gates". These Americans certainly "think big", and money seems no object.

MEMBERS OF THE Geology Department at Manchester University have cleaned and reassembled the fossilised skeleton of a 14 ft.-long plesiosaur, a marine reptile discovered at Robin Hood's Bay near Whitby, nearly two years ago. Dr. F. M. Broadhurst, Lecturer in Geology, who described it is a "fantastic find", was with a group of students on the foreshore during an Easter visit in 1960, when the snout was seen. "Excavation work took three days", he said (*The Guardian*, 29/1/62). "The main body of the reptile was preserved in extremely hard rock and had to be unearched by stonemasons using pneumatic drills". The skeleton is thought to be about 180 million years old, and is almost perfectly preserved.

THE VATICAN has urged Brigitte Bardot not to be so provocative, reported the *Daily Herald's* Rome Correspondent, Leslie Childe (26/1/62). The appeal was made through the weekly magazine, *Osservatore della Domenica* which, according to Mr. Childe, declared that the sensation Miss Bardot causes wherever she goes leads to the suspicion that she is "really something out of the ordinary, a mistaken creature in a mistaken life".

TEN DAYS EARLIER, the *Daily Telegraph* (16/1/62) reported that the Central Preparatory Commission for the Ecumenical Council had warned that Christian modesty and chastity were being attacked by means of "fashion, theatrical shows, the Press, contests, amusements and new styles of living". It was almost as though the commandment "Thou shalt not commit adultery" were considered obsolete, said this Commission of celebrities, leaving the way free for "every outburst of the passions, not excluding those of an unnatural kind".

SANDY JENKINS tells us that conditions are particularly difficult at the moment for Freethinkers in Belfast. They have never been easy, of course, but "owing to the terrible unemployment problem . . . many would-be supporters are lying low because so many jobs and works are dominated by Presbyterianism and Roman Catholicism". Mr. Jenkins himself has been warned several times about his militant freethought, but has never taken any notice, and has "got away with everything". Perhaps others might show similar defiance: they will have to sooner or later.

MR. JENKINS also sends us an item from the personal column of the *Belfast Telegraph* (15/11/61) which we print in full: "Sincere Christian lady (40s) wishes to meet sincere Christian (well-to-do) Gentleman with home; state religion; all replies treated in confidence". Sincerity, it seems, is not enough.

WE HAVE HAD a special request from an African student who must remain anonymous, at present in England, for copies of Joseph McCabe's "Little Blue Books", which he intends to translate into several African dialects. This is a very worthy project and we hope readers will respond by sending these books (which are of suitable length) to this office.

The Reliability of the Gospels

By Dr. EDWARD ROUX

The Reliability of the Gospels by James Martin. London. Hodder and Stoughton, 1959. 119 pages. Price 4s. 6d.

THE WRAPPER DESCRIBES this as "a trenchant and authoritative presentation of the reasons for believing in the reliability of the Gospels as first-rate historical evidence". The reviewer feels that the book contains much that may fairly be described as question-begging.

In his introduction the author says that there are some who feel that what is important is "the teaching which the Gospels contain—the example and the ethic, the lofty ideal of living which the pages portray—and this being so, the value of the documents is quite independent of their historical accuracy or inaccuracy. Even if Jesus were discovered never to have lived at all, little difference would be made". This is the view of Unitarians, but it is not shared by James Martin, who believes that "Christianity is a historical religion and its validity is inseparable from its historicity".

No one would deny that Christianity arose in a historical setting, if by this we mean that we can roughly date the time when Christians first appeared on the historical scene. But it is false, as the author does, to put Christianity in this respect on all fours with Islam, which originated in the doings of a historical character, Muhammed. Though the prophet of Islam has miraculous deeds attributed to him (he paid a visit to heaven and then returned to earth), we have little difficulty, if we are not Muslims, in discounting these impossible adventures as mythological accretions. Similarly, though Plato was said to have been born of a virgin, we are quite prepared to accept him as a real person. In the case of the Jesus story however the mythological elements are so numerous and pervading that it becomes next to impossible to sort out fact from fiction, and the non-mythical portions, i.e., those not involving supernatural happenings, are incapable of verification by evidence apart from the Gospels themselves, which are, on the face of it, special pleading by interested Christians.

The "Jesus problem", as the historical critic sees it, is to discover whether or not Jesus was a historical character, and, if he was, how much we can learn of his personality, his life and his teaching. This problem does not exist for the author of this book. For him there is no problem: Jesus existed without a shadow of doubt; he was born of a virgin, performed miracles, preached certain definite doctrines, was betrayed to the Jewish authorities, was executed by the Romans, rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. All Mr. Martin is concerned to discover is whether these "events", all of which he assumes could have happened, were correctly recorded in the Gospels. The method of proof, which is no proof at all, consists in assuming that certain things happened and then claiming that if they did they would be handed down to posterity in certain ways. It does not occur to him that religious writers could think up impossible events, put them in writing, and so hand them down to posterity.

We are told that "from the time that the Resurrection appearances came to an end and His Church was launched out into the world, Jesus' followers kept alive their memory of His deeds and sayings by constant repetition among themselves . . . For some decades this perpetuation was carried on mainly in oral form, although there was early writing down of parts of the tradition. But as

time went past and more and more of the original eye-witnesses died, the need was felt for putting the story into some kind of official form. It was to meet this need that our four Gospels came to be written". (Question-begging is of course implicit in the use of capitals for pronouns referring to Jesus. One wonders how many Christian apologists realise this.)

This naive argument reveals no knowledge of the lines which independent criticism of the Gospels has taken. For many critics the Gospels do not appear to be attempts at writing history as it would be understood today. They seem to consist very largely of religious polemics aimed at converting non-believers to the Christian faith or refuting hostile views. They record "events" that could not possibly have taken place in the real world: water turns to wine, dead men become alive, a fig tree withers when cursed, etc. It was long ago pointed out by Bruno Bauer that the credibility of, for example, Mark is rendered suspect simply by a reading of his Gospel, which is a record of fantastic and incredible events. If a witness in court is found to be unreliable about certain parts of his evidence the rest of his evidence becomes suspect, unless there are other means of checking it.

Where are the alleged "early writing down of parts of the tradition"? Are we to find them in the Epistles attributed to Paul? If we examine these writings, admitted for the most part to be earlier than the Gospels, we find little or no evidence that the writer or writers know anything at all of the Jesus story as told in the Gospels.

We learn on page 33 of *The Reliability of the Gospels* "that Q was a document of earlier date than Mark, containing very old material, some of which may well date back to notes taken during the actual lifetime of Jesus". This again is a gratuitous assumption. Q is described as "consisting mainly of the sayings of Jesus". Would it not be more accurate to say "of sayings attributed to Jesus"? Many, if not all of these sayings are to be found in the Old Testament and in later Rabbinical literature. A living Jesus who knew his Hebrew literature might well have repeated them. But how are we to say?

We are asked whether it is "credible that the Christian Church, with its unique doctrine and practice, could have originated at all apart from the facts narrated in the Gospels? . . . If these facts are not substantially true, how did the Church manage to grow?" We may counter this by asking how the Roman Empire ever came into existence if the story of Romulus and Remus being suckled by a she-wolf was not substantially true. But this perhaps is not quite fair.

Christianity may well have begun with the worship of a saviour god, the symbolic eating of whose flesh conferred immortality upon his devotees, and to have competed in its early stages with numerous other mystery stories. Examples were the cults of Mithra, of Attis, of Dionysis and of Osiris. Must we assume that the mythologies of these other cults were also "facts"?

All ancient and some modern religions, e.g. Mormonism, have their myths, and in some cases it would not be difficult to show that a particular myth was vital to the success of a particular religion. What is important is that devotees should accept the myth at its face value. In the case of the Mormons, they believe that Joseph Smith had a direct revelation from God and that the Book of Mormon is genuine: that is all that matters.

Christianity differed from its rivals mainly in two respects, and these may have contributed greatly to its success. Its god had somehow become identified with the Jewish Messiah, a national redeeming god who had many unique features. Also its god, unlike the others, was said to have died only recently. It was thus possible to assign his death to a definite time and place. Jesus may thus in fact have been a historical person (or persons!). The possibility of some messianic pretender having founded the cult cannot be ruled out. This would make Jesus a quasi-historical character. Unfortunately we do not have enough evidence to settle this question in one way or the other. (Either the Jesus story is quasi-historical or it is pure myth. We cannot accept it as pure history unless we are prepared to abandon in this particular case the ordinary canons of historical criticism.)

A point strongly argued in the penultimate chapter is that the apocryphal Gospels (which are said to have originated in the second century) contain much obvious nonsense, whereas the canonical Gospels do not. This is urged as proof that the latter are factual. Examples from the apocryphal Gospels are quoted. Jesus, when he was six years old, went with a pitcher to draw water. But the pitcher got knocked against another and was broken. So Jesus "spread out the garment which was upon him and filled it with water and brought it to his mother" (Gospel of Thomas). Again, in the Gospel of Peter, the elders keeping watch at the tomb "saw three men come out of the sepulchre, and two of them sustaining the other, and a cross following them. And of the two they saw that their heads reached unto heaven, but of him that was led by them it overpassed the heavens".

It is interesting that some people who have been taught the Bible from earliest infancy regard it all as "gospel" truth, but are sceptical of tall stories from other sources. What stories could be more fantastic than those of the Gadarene swine, the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, the walking on the water, or the ascent into heaven? But these are in the canonical Gospels; so they cannot be either myth or nonsense!

The author says finally: "There is such good reason for taking the Gospels as substantially true to history and so little reason for thinking otherwise that we must agree with E. F. Scott that 'their evidence would hardly be challenged if they were concerned with some other hero of antiquity, and it is only because they recount the life of Jesus that they are viewed suspiciously'."

Surely the boot is on the other foot. If we find a story all hedged about with fantastic happenings we are fain to regard it as fiction. We can think of heroes of antiquity like Arthur, Roland, Tell, Hamlet, Lear. One of the reasons why the stories of these heroes are regarded as mainly fictitious is that miraculous things occur in them. These heroes however are not in quite the same category as, for example, Hercules, Mithra or Prometheus. These latter are considered to be purely mythical, the former as perhaps only partly mythical. The problem in Christology is whether to place Jesus in the first or the second category.

Christians like James Martin are not aware of this problem. They would be willing to dismiss the story of Hercules as a fairy tale and to take a critical view of the stories of the Knights of the Round Table. But this critical view vanishes when they are faced with the Gospel stories of Jesus, which any well-educated and critical non-Christian would regard as fantastic.

CORRESPONDENCE

MR. BENNETT REPLIES

In his animadversions about me, Mr. F. H. A. Micklewright touches on our differences in the South Place Ethical Society. He says I am an exponent of ethical religion. I don't apologise for that. The ethical life has always seemed very important to me, and until such time as it ceases to be important to the ethical movement I shall be glad to associate myself with it. I cannot say the same for humanism in its modern framework. As I argued in a recent article, it has no really vital meaning, and I think it lacks inspiration.

Sex is never far from the thoughts of Mr. Micklewright. I take it he is an advocate of pre- and extra-marital liaisons. All right. Some will agree with him, others will not. But I contend that it is wrong of him to use an Ethical Society platform for the propagation of such a point of view *as though it were the official opinion*. The ethical movement obviously means something to me that it doesn't mean to Mr. Micklewright, and I find it hard to forgive a man who takes liberties of this kind.

My critic also makes a point about my hostility to anti-clericalism in the South Place *Monthly Record*, yet how differently have I written in *THE FREETHINKER* on the Virgin Birth! Truth to tell, they are different journals with a different purpose. The *Monthly Record* is concerned to advance the case for right living without the support of a supernatural creed. It isn't necessary in the advocacy of such a case to make gratuitous cracks at clergymen, which is one of Mr. Micklewright's favourite pastimes. If I take him to task on this he doesn't like it and charges me with the inconsistency of anti-clericalism in *THE FREETHINKER*. Yet let me say I have never pretended to believe in any theological faith on any platform. *FREETHINKER* readers know me as a rarely militant writer. I have, indeed, been criticised for my mildness! Yet in the Virgin Birth article I admit I have been more uncompromising than usual.

I cannot go into the question of the Golden Rule now. I have no recollection of its ever being impugned before. If Mr. Micklewright wants to impugn it perhaps he would say exactly what his criticisms are. I will reply to them! G. I. BENNETT.

OLDEST READER?

In the January 26th issue, W. E. Thorne thinks he may be your oldest subscriber, as he started to read *THE FREETHINKER* when he was fifteen. Well, I started reading it when I was between ten and eleven. The first issue I saw had a cartoon depicting "Moses raising the wind", so if you have that old back number you may verify my statement. I am now 84. The cartoon was so funny to my mind that I took it to school (St. Joseph's Roman Catholic School, High Street, Deptford) and let some of the boys see it. But the teacher (Dan Reardon) caught me and I got "two of the best" on my hand.

Probably Mr. Thorne has been a more regular subscriber. I had to miss the paper sometimes as my work (building trade carpenter) took me away from home to different parts of the country, but I always got *THE FREETHINKER* where possible. Since retiring from work I take it regularly, and I wish it all the success it deserves.

FRANK LAMON

(Birmingham Branch, National Secular Society).

[The cartoon, "Raising the Wind", was in the Christmas number of *THE FREETHINKER*, 1889.—Ed.]

AN EXAMPLE

R. Bossomaier is concerned that *THE FREETHINKER* has been adopting an increasing number of causes recently, including that of taking an attitude against the Government's Immigrants Bill. The General Secretary of the National Secular Society explains the position briefly, but I hope that Mr. Bossomaier will also look again at the histories of some of the forerunners of our movement, and see how they often espoused a number of different causes.

As January 29th marks the 225th anniversary of Thomas Paine's birth, may I take him only as an example of what I have

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in mind. When he first went to America, and started writing in Philadelphia in 1775, he wrote advocating a number of reforms: Paine was the first to arraign monarchy, the first to advocate international arbitration, the first to attack duelling as being both criminal and stupid, the first to put forward rational ideas of marriage and divorce, the first to protest against cruelty to animals, the first to demand justice for women, and the first to suggest national and international copyright. Moncure Conway described the *Pennsylvania Magazine* during the period that Paine edited it as "a seed-bag from which this sower scattered the seeds of great reforms ripening with the progress of civilization".

Elsewhere at that time Paine published an essay against Negro slavery, and what was so novel in this was that, unlike others, Paine proposed plans for the immediate emancipation of the slaves in his typically detailed and thoroughly practical manner. Some fifteen years later he was still urging the "abolition of the infernal traffic in negroes", and advocating that the Negro peoples had themselves to take an active part in the leadership against slavery. All this formed the spade-work for his other writing—and was linked with it; his pioneering essay against slavery refuted the conventional arguments from the Scriptures that were being used by reaction to support it.

Paine has long since died, but we are alive, and I hope shall be active in the types of causes he would have taken on his shoulders. In my view the Immigration Bill is only a few degrees less bad than the slave trade, considering we have advanced nearly two centuries. Can we echo Paine's philosophy, "The world is my country and to do good, my religion", and at the same time support the racism of the Immigration Bill?

CHRISTOPHER BRUNEL.

TOO LATE?

The appointment of John W. McCormack as the new US Speaker is, to say the least, disturbing. More and more Roman Catholics are wielding power in America.

Mention must be made of the appointment of John McCone as the new chief of the Central Intelligence Agency. He is described by *The Observer* of 21/1/62 as "a zealous Roman Catholic and an ardent anti-communist crusader".

The needs of the Inquisition and the ideal of the Roman Catholic religion are truly in good and capable hands and, being a native of Mauritius, I know what it is like to be in the claws of Roman Catholicism. Unless the freethinkers of the world start a vigorous campaign against the greatest of all tyrannies, tomorrow might be too late. "A PESSIMISTIC FREETHINKER".

US COMMEMORATIVE STAMPS

In the January 1962 issue of *Stamp World*, a monthly publication for stamp collectors, it is indicated that the US Post Office department might at present be considering the proposal for the issuance of a commemorative stamp honouring Cardinal Gibbons of Baltimore. Numerous communications to the Stamp Advisory Committee were sent in, to this effect.

PAPERBACKS

A Dictionary of Biology (Penguin Reference Book) 3s. 6d.

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Referred to by Mr. Wolfgang this week.

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A Woman Doctor Looks at Love and Life by Dr. Marion Hilliard, 2s. 6d.

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If such a stamp is eventually approved, it then becomes apparent that the US Post Office is sponsoring a religious motive on a stamp, and to offset this the Post Office should, in all fairness and impartiality be ready to issue a postage stamp of a more anti-religious theme.

The likely candidate to offset Cardinal Gibbons can be Colonel Robert G. Ingersoll, the famous humanist and freethinker.

There seems little reason why organisations such as yours could not advise your members and friends of this fact so that the Stamp Advisory Committee of the Post Office Department in Washington can therefore receive enough letters advocating the above mentioned candidate so as to give our proposals serious consideration. It has often been assured in Stamp collectors' magazines that the Advisory Committee considers all proposals sent to them. None is discarded.

What can impress this Committee would be numerous letters and they will have to consider the question if they do not want to be labelled as partial and biased. The more proposals are sent in, the better the chances.

If you feel this proposal has any merit, please make it known. Who can tell? If fairness and impartiality are adhered to, we may have one of the greatest freethinkers commemorated in a lasting manner.

L. TUKUMS (Canada).

EDUCATIONAL CONFERENCE

May I use your columns to give notice of an Educational Conference to be held at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, on Easter Saturday and which should be of interest to secularists.

Organised by the United Kingdom delegation to the World University Roundtable (not to be confused with the "society") the conference will cover plans for the establishment of a college in Britain devoted to the free inquiry into and dissemination of Philosophic, Psychological, Religious, Cultural and Scientific knowledge generally.

Free from sectarian tie or prejudice the organisers invite participation from those involved in liberal education in its diverse aspects.

Further information can be obtained from the undersigned upon receipt of a stamped addressed envelope.

CHARLES WILLIAMS MARSHALL,
28 Waterhouse Moor, Harlow, Essex.

FREEDOM'S FOE: THE VATICAN. By Adrian Pigott. Illustrated. Price 3/-; postage 6d.

A SHORT HISTORY OF SEX WORSHIP. By H. Cutner. Price 2/6; postage 6d.

THE BIBLE HANDBOOK (11th Edition). By G. W. Foote and W. P. Ball. Price 5/-; postage 8d.

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