

# The Freethinker

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ON FRIDAY, JULY 13TH, the *Daily Sketch* devoted most of a page to John de Borse, a middle-aged men's wear department manager in Watford, Hertfordshire, "the man who may be a miracle". Mr. de Borse told his interviewer, Doreen King, that six years ago "the doctors gave him up" when he "lay dying from lung cancer"; that, though not conscious, "his lips formed the word 'Lourdes'". That "he cried 'Lourdes' again and again", yet (rather surprisingly) the nurses didn't know what he was talking about, but that the visiting priest understood him all right, and "John de Borse was flown to Lourdes as a stretcher case, jabbed full of morphia". A week later, we are told in bold type, "he walked into a hospital ward at Hemel Hempstead carrying his suitcase".

Mr. de Borse now works, does his own cooking and housework at his flat in Hemel Hempstead, enjoys a smoke and a drink, and spends his annual holidays at Lourdes, where he is examined each time by the Lourdes Medical Bureau. "The doctors have made exhaustive checks", said the *Daily Sketch*. "And this year, the cure of John de Borse may be proclaimed miraculous". Personally I am inclined to doubt this. As far as I know there has only been one official pronouncement of a miracle cancer cure since the war—that of Mme. Rose Martin—and since Dr. D. J. West's devastating criticism of the case after examining the files of the Lourdes Medical Bureau (*Eleven Lourdes Miracles*, Duckworth, 1957) there is likely to be some reticence about pronouncing the next. This doesn't, of course, prevent egotistic Catholics from pronouncing themselves miraculously cured. The Church, indeed, makes the most of the propaganda value of such claims without committing itself in any way to the claims themselves.

## First Englishman?

Mr. de Borse believes that he is "the first Englishman to have been miraculously cured at Lourdes". When he was taken to West Herts Hospital, Hemel Hempstead, early in 1956, he was "a seriously sick man". And, "When they heard he was going to Lourdes, the doctors attending him thought it likely that he would die there. His brother [this again in bold type] made arrangements to pay for his funeral in France". Instead he "returned healthy" and was "given the £22 which had been made ready for the funeral expenses".

## Lourdes

During the flight to Lourdes, he was "in agony" and "weighed under six stone". And, in his own words:

"When we arrived at Lourdes I was put to bed in the hospital there. Later in the afternoon I was dressed and taken in a wheelchair to the blessing of the sick. But I was very ill. I was put back to bed and given morphia again. The following morning I was taken to the baths in the grotto. I was so ill that the attendant in charge of the grotto cleared the baths except for me and one other man . . . The shock of the wet cloth they put on you nearly killed me. But I didn't really feel going into the water. And I walked out unaided."

He didn't know what had happened, but he had "this

tremendous inner excitement", and when he returned to the hospital at Lourdes and was offered soup, he asked for something solid—and ate quite a spread.

Later he went to a second blessing of the sick and then had tea in a tea shop. And, although he couldn't sleep he refused a morphia injection. In the small hours of the morning he was still awake. Then:

"Suddenly there seemed to be a tremendous gale through the ward—with curtains blowing and noise. Then there was silence. The quietest silence I have ever heard. You could have heard a pin drop. I realised something had happened to me. I felt weak but quite well. I knelt down and prayed. Then I went out on the balcony. It was a beautiful night."

Before his cure he was "a bad Catholic". You know, one of those terrible types who "live only for the day" and are "very fond of a good time". But "that doesn't interest me any more." He has "no doubt at all that I have been to the gates of death, and they turned me back".

## Letter to John de Borse

Miss King, in turn, has no doubts of Mr. de Borse's sincerity, but she says that she doesn't know "the explanation". Neither do I. I am not a doctor, but I do know that far too many details are missing to make any assessment. That is why I wrote to Mr. de Borse, c/o the *Daily Sketch*, on July 16th, as follows:—

"Dear Mr. de Borse: I have just read the article by Doreen King in Friday's *Daily Sketch*. It is, of course, typical of many alleged miracle cure stories. And, to be frank, I don't believe in miracle cures.

"Now it so happens that I live in Watford, and I have a proposal to make to you. Are you prepared to let me inquire — that is, really inquire — into your case? What I mean is, will you give me details of the doctors who diagnosed the lung cancer, on what basis it was diagnosed, what tests were conducted, etc.?"

"You must be aware that, although you may have 'no doubt at all' that you have been 'to the gates of death', many other people will have very strong doubts. Even the Lourdes Medical Bureau has its doubts, as you must know. It certainly isn't prepared to take your word for a miracle cure.

"The trouble with all the many miracle cure claims that our popular papers publicise—and then generally forget about—is that vague references are made to doctors giving patients up as hopeless. The *Sketch* said in your case that 'the doctors gave him up'. Again, who are these doctors? May we have their names? Do you recall their actual words? Did one or more of them say to you: 'Mr. de Borse, I (we) give you up as hopeless. You are suffering from incurable lung cancer'? If they did, it sounds very unlike the usual practice of doctors. If they did not, what grounds have you for saying that they gave you up?"

"In short, Mr. de Borse, may we have a little precision where all is vague? I assure you that any statement you make in reply to this letter will receive full publicity in

## — VIEWS and OPINIONS —

### "The Freethinker" challenges a "Miracle Cure"

— By COLIN McCALL —

our paper, THE FREETHINKER, and if your reply is devastating you may be doing your Church an enormous amount of good. Think of the possibility of converting unbelievers. I warn you, though, that they may be a little more critical than the average reader of the *Daily Sketch*.

"A stamped-addressed envelope is enclosed for your reply. Yours sincerely, Colin McCall, Editor, THE FREETHINKER."

More than six weeks have passed, and I have had no reply. It is possible, of course, that John de Borse is on holiday—on one of his regular pilgrimages to Lourdes—and that when he returns he will immediately provide all the details I ask. If I do hear from him I shall immediately inform readers.

**The "Daily Sketch"**

Meanwhile, I should like to address a few questions to Miss King and her editor. Did it never occur to them to investigate Mr. de Borse's statements; to ask him the names of the doctors who allegedly "gave him up"? Surely such a story needs checking, and surely the *Daily Sketch* has the facilities to check it. Assuming that the doctors were named, one naturally wouldn't expect them to discuss the case with a layman. But, if the story were true, they might well corroborate it with another doctor, whom the *Daily Sketch* could nominate. Then the *Sketch* could announce the corroboration in terms like this: "A fully qualified medical man of our naming has satisfied himself that one/two/three/four fully-qualified doctors at West Herts Hospital, Hemel Hempstead, six years ago informed John de Borse that he was suffering from incurable lung cancer and that his case was hopeless. This diagnosis was based on bronchoscopy, X-rays, examination of lung tissue, etc., and was unanimous. Those same doctors subsequently examined John de Borse on his return from Lourdes, repeating the bronchoscopy, X-ray and lung tissue tests and could find no trace of cancerous growth such as had definitely been present before". The *Sketch* might also have asked for an official statement from the Lourdes Medical Bureau.

This, I suggest, is the way that a responsible newspaper should approach an alleged miracle cure. It was THE FREETHINKER'S intention, had any names of doctors been received from Mr. de Borse, to put the matter in the hands of Dr. J. V. Duhig. The *Daily Sketch* adopted its usual sensational style, headlining: "Doreen King talks to —THE MAN WHO MAY BE A MIRACLE . . .", quoting Mr. de Borse's "gates of death" remark and saying, "Six years ago plans were made to bury him. Was it faith saved his life?"

I ask Miss King and her editor, what value can be placed on the article they printed on July 13th? Do they consider that they provided sufficient information to enable a non-medical reader (or even a medical reader for that matter) to answer the question they asked: "Was it faith that saved his life"? Miss King offered no explanation, though as Mr. de Borse "strode jauntily down the High-street to catch his bus home", she remembered his words about the gates of death "spoken as a simple statement of fact". But, then, has Miss King any qualifications for investigating a claim to a miracle cure? If she has, the *Sketch* was most remiss in not giving them. Judging from her treatment of the matter, I should say she hasn't.

If we had a real Press Council in this country (in fact as well as name) this is a type of article that it might inquire into. It might decide that, cancer being such a terrible and widespread disease, causing probably more human unhappiness than any other, articles like Doreen King's are not only irresponsible, but harmful—even cruel,

because they may raise false hopes. That such hopes are false can be shown by reference to Dr. West's exposure of the hopelessly unsatisfactory basis for the only "officially recognised" Lourdes cancer cure since the war. In publicising the case of John de Borse, the *Daily Sketch* didn't even wait for a pronouncement by the Lourdes Medical Bureau.

**And Pay a Million Priests**

By A. O. SNOOK

MOONING AROUND the Hardy country recently, I paid a visit to Piddletown church, the little town being the "Weatherbury" of the Wessex novels. Several villages on the banks of the Piddle have had the moral courage to retain the ninth letter of the alphabet; Piddlehinton, or Piddletrenthide, for instance. However, Piddletown having largely fallen into the hands of the middle classes, the ninth letter has now been decently dropped and the twenty-first inserted in its place. Tolpiddle has also become Tolpudde; I propose to stick to the original names, which date back to the days of the sorely-trying Cnut.

On the occasion of my visit to Piddletown, and in accordance with my usual custom. I stood at gaze in the church porch, conscientiously reading the many notices on view. You know the sort of thing:—

Mrs. Fitzgerald-Fitzwilliam-Fitzmaurice will be responsible for altar flowers for the month of September.

Your prayers are asked for the numerous members of Our Fallen Sisters League. Donations will be gratefully received by the vicar, or Mrs. Pyddlington-Porter. (Author's Note: Mrs. Pyddlington-Porter is, of course, a distant relative of Lord Grinding-Parva, and married one of the Devonshire Bootleg-Liqueurs. Her father, Colonel Montebank, has for many years held the onerous post of joint MFH of the Kowwale Hunt.)

Will the child who left an unexpurgated copy of *Lady Chatterley* in the choir stalls last Sunday please retrieve his/her property from the Sunday-School Superintendent.

However, I fear I stray from my subject, which was intended to be a serious inquiry into ecclesiastical finance. The Quota Budget set out below also appears in Piddletown church porch, and your correspondent copied the document at some personal risk to life and limb, owing to the continual ingress and egress of Hardy devotees and holy church ditto.

**SALISBURY DIOCESE—QUOTA BUDGET FOR 1962**  
approved by the Diocesan Conference.

<i>Estimated Needs</i>	<i>£ approx.</i>
1. Grants for Clergy and Lay Workers	£13,230
2. Churches and Parsonages	£12,100
3. Needs of the Church Assembly, Central Committees and Teacher Training Colleges	£9,382
4. Religious Education and Evangelism	£8,952
5. Training Ordinands for the Ministry	£5,631
6. Diocesan Administration	£5,256
7. Miscellaneous (e.g. Clergy widows' Pension Grants)	£3,541
8. Social Work	£1,487
9. Public Relations	£930

Total £60,511

Readers of this journal will note that, according to my arithmetic, less than 2½% of the total is devoted to what are, presumably, good causes, i.e. Social Work. The amount spent on public relations is laughable, and no doubt accounts for the fact—partly, anyway—that the Church is dead but won't lie down. The Anglican Church has an annual income of well over £30,000,000. I have ascertained, by visiting other church porches, that the amount spent on social work is about in proportion to that shown above. Again, according to my arithmetic, and taking the amount spent on social services above as being probably a fair average, we arrive at the astounding fact that out of a total of £30,000,000 (I believe it is more) only

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# A Rational View of Birth Control

By EDWARD ROUX

[The following is the text of a talk given by Dr. Roux to the National Union of South African Students at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, on June 4th, 1962. It is taken from the July issue of The Rationalist of South Africa, which agreed to publish the reply by the other speaker, Roman Catholic chaplain, Father Peter Paul Feeny, if he cared to supply it. We, of course, give the same undertaking.]

I SHOULD LIKE to approach this subject as a chapter in the history of biological invention. Biological inventions deal with living things and differ from those other inventions which have produced space travel and electric light. Biological inventions when they are first introduced nearly always appear to be shocking and to raise moral issues. At first they are thought of as sinful and have to be practised in secret by the few who know their value. Finally they are accepted and often become part of established religion.

You know the story in Charles Lamb's "Dissertation on Roast Pig." You will remember how the first pig was roasted by accident when a hut burned down. Bo-bo and his son Ho-ti were the first to taste roast pork. As the secret spread, there was an epidemic of hut burnings in China. It was, of course, shameful to think of improving on the good raw meat which God had provided. In time, however, when the whole population became addicted to the new delightful food, the Chinese very sensibly decided that it was not necessary to burn your house down every time you wanted to roast a bit of pork. And eating this abominable food was no longer regarded as a sin but as something perfectly natural and virtuous.

Let me mention some other biological inventions. The wearing of clothing—fancy wrapping yourself in the skin of an animal—how horrible! The drinking of wine—eating the decomposing juice of what were once lovely grapes! The use of cosmetics—smearing the good face God has given you with nasty oils and paints. I notice Father Feeny is smoking a pipe. I have heard it said that if God had meant man to smoke he would have put a chimney in his head. May I remind you that surgical operations only became possible after men like Vesalius had dared to dissect human corpses, a practice frowned upon by law and religion for centuries.

Contraception was made possible as soon as man discovered the role of semen in procreation. It began with onanism. The Bible says that Onan "spilled it on the ground lest he should give seed to his brother".

Contraception today is still largely in the Heath Robinson stage, working with rather crude and clumsy gadgets. However, these crude methods are now giving place to more subtle ones developed by the physiologist and the biochemist. The search for the oral contraceptive has begun and already the first pills are being tried out experimentally. What is needed is something as easy to take as an aspirin tablet, which will produce sterility for a definite but limited time and which will have no harmful after-effects. I have little doubt that my fellow-biologists will eventually produce such a pill, and that in the not too distant future.

Now a few words as to why contraception should become a boon to mankind. Firstly it will and does emancipate women from the burden of bearing unwanted children, from the horror of being living incubators. May I tell you a horrible story? A well-to-do Catholic woman produced a tenth child, a Mongolian idiot. She was advised by a non-Catholic doctor to adopt contraceptive

methods, since at her time of life the probability was that future children would also be Mongoloids. She did not accept this advice. Perhaps her husband insisted on his marital rights. The eleventh child was a Mongoloid and so also was the twelfth. At this stage she reached her menopause. Her husband celebrated the twelfth birth by presenting his wife with a diamond necklace.

Secondly, contraception makes premarital and extra-marital sexual relations possible and should eliminate the unwanted illegitimate child, and also those forced marriages which happen because the girl has become pregnant, and which often end in disaster.

My third reason is perhaps the most important. The wide dissemination of contraceptive knowledge to all nations and peoples is essential if mankind is to escape the Malthusian menace. It has been estimated that if present rates of population increase continue for the next 800 years or so there will be sufficient room on this planet, including the mountains, deserts and the Antarctic continent, for everyone to stand, but not enough for everyone to lie down. Long before that stage is reached, hunger and war will have produced the downfall of civilisation if population is not controlled. Already in such countries as India, China and Japan this menace is very real. Significantly India is the first country to give official support to research in contraceptive methods. In Japan there has been an enormous increase in abortions. In France (where the sale of contraceptives is still illegal) it is said that the numbers of abortions equal those of normal births. Surely it were better if contraception were made legal and respectable.

The campaign for contraception may not succeed. It is opposed by the ignorant, the religious groups, notably the Catholic Church. However some progress is being made. Even in the Catholic Church itself, the first victory for contraception has been gained. It used to be said by the religious that sexual relations have one purpose only, namely procreation. Catholic couples were told to make love when they pleased and to leave the determination of pregnancy to God. Those who did not want any more children were advised to practise restraint (I ask you!). But many Catholic women and some men resented this. In places like Liverpool many Catholic women have in fact been seeking advice secretly from the birth-control clinics.

The Church has therefore abandoned its original position and has agreed that Catholics may use what is called the "rhythm method". This is based on the avoidance of sexual intercourse during the "danger period" which occurs about midway between the menses. This method is by no means fool-proof, owing to irregularities in the menstrual cycle. Its virtue is said to lie in its being "natural".

However the Church has now conceded the main point. Catholics who restrict their love-making to the "safe period" do so presumably because they think making love is fun and not because they want to produce children.

I have already referred briefly to what is "natural" and "unnatural" when I spoke of roast pig. We have instincts which, biologically speaking, have certain functions, all leading to the preservation of the species. Exercising these instincts gives us pleasure. But in man, as in some other vertebrates, pleasure is not always linked directly with

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## This Believing World

The Vatican is very angry that its decrees on abortion should be publicly flouted. Mrs. Sherri Finkbine's successful release in Sweden from bringing a deformed child into the world is a *crime*, shrieks the Vatican. Well, it's a good thing that this archaic relic of the Dark Ages should be flouted sometimes. More often than not our newspapers and public men are quite frightened at saying or doing anything which might "hurt" the Vatican.

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Take for example Lord Mancroft who recently took part in an "opinion" discussion on TV. His forthright views staggered another member of the team, a lady who is a Roman Catholic, and who roundly declared abortion under any pretext whatever was *murder*. Lord Mancroft vigorously opposed this in spite of his having, as he rather pathetically said, every *respect* for Roman Catholicism. It would be most interesting to know why he said this? Why do people, often differing widely from it, hasten to add they differ but *respect* Roman Catholicism?

★

In his old age, Sean O'Casey, the famous Irish playwright, is having more and more success with his plays—after suffering poverty and neglect nearly all his life, mostly because he has always refused to kow-tow to the Irish Church. Mr. O'Casey is completely anti-clerical, and his plays are banned in Ireland. He complains (*Daily Mail*, August 20th), that "the Church has an awful grip on the Irish people"—the operative word being "awful". The Church, in fact, has an "awful" grip wherever it can dominate, and we were glad to see that the *Daily Mail* did not censor O'Casey's opinion. Perhaps the Roman Catholic journalists who generally vet such opinions are away on holiday.

★

However, according to theologian Rhona Churchill of the *Daily Mail* (August 21st), "down came the barriers of hate" between Romanists and Protestants in Liverpool, all due of course to Pope John being so very anxious for "unity". Well, *socially*, Protestants and Catholics may get on with each other quite well in some districts. But theologically . . .? If the two sects really unite and become one, that will be the end of the *Protestants*. As the Roman Church holds most of the cards, why should it disappear? It has the wealth, it is based on the Bible, and won't budge an iota in its archaic theology. It is not Roman Catholicism which will disappear but Protestantism in the sacred hope for unity!

### AND PAY A MILLION PRIESTS

(Concluded from page 282)

£750,000 is spent on what may, or may not be, worthy causes. Further comment is superfluous. For the second time in this journal I propose to quote a verse of Thomas Hardy, which, I suggest, is the final word to be said on the Anglican Church, or any of its offshoots or rivals.

"Peace upon earth!" was said. We sing it,  
And pay a million priests to bring it,  
After two thousand years of mass  
We've got as far as poison gas.

### THE DEVIL

Do you believe in the Devil? And if so, how do you picture him? What is your idea of the work he does? Well of course you believe in his existence. Not every one does, but you as a Catholic know him as a real person.

The devil, let us remember, is our deadliest foe. He is the arch-enemy who is fighting against us in the most important battle of all—the battle for heaven.—Excerpts from the *Sunday Bulletin of the Redemptorist Fathers* (26/8/62).

## The Mormons at Home

The Editor of the *Mormon Church News* (7/7/62) admitted that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is having the same problem as other Churches, namely members losing interest and, when they move to new locations, failing to identify themselves with the Church, its mission and activities. That is the reason the Church has doubled its activities in recent years. In doubling its Missionary force, it hopes to overcome the leakage by apostasy and indifference at home, by building up and establishing the Church abroad.

In this procedure the Mormons have dispensed with one of the most important Revelations alleged to have been received by their prophet Joseph Smith direct from God Almighty, and found printed in their *Doctrine and Covenants*, Sections 29 and 133, commanding the Saints' Converts to "Gather to Zion".

Too many converts from foreign lands have come here in recent years and met with serious disappointment.

I do not have to go beyond the confines of my immediate neighbourhood to find families who arrived here as Mormon converts within the past decade, who have since returned to their former Lutheran, Baptist and Episcopal Church faith, or become total non-believers.

The people of England and other countries, who are contemplating affiliation with the Mormon Church, should read such books as *No Man Knows My History*, by Fawn Brodie, who incidentally is a niece of David O. McKay, present President of the Mormon Church; *The Mormons* by Professor Thomas O'Dea, who is now teaching at the University of Utah; *Mormonism Now And Then*, by G. T. Harrison, of Helper, Utah, USA. A former holder of the Melchisadek Priesthood in the Mormon Church, who filled an Honourable Mission for the Church, Mr. Harrison has a splendid letter of commendation signed by the President of the Church as a result of his Mission. He was later excommunicated, and he purports to show, and prove direct from the so called "Holy Books", and Divine Revelations, that "there is not a single new thing introduced in the Restored Church by the Prophet Joseph Smith", that his successors, have not altered, amended or abandoned.

B. L. GALLOWAY  
(Salt Lake City, Utah).

### A RATIONAL VIEW OF BIRTH CONTROL

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function. Some birds, ornithologists tell us, get a "kick" out of aerial acrobatics. Often they fly for fun and not to go places. There is the story of the otter who enjoyed sliding down a slippery bank. When he came to the bottom he walked up and slid down again.

We get fun out of eating. Must we always calculate the calories before we sit down to a meal? Why put saccharine in our coffee? It has no food value. Neither has coffee, for that matter. Why drink wine that maketh glad the heart of man? Why dance, since legs were given us for locomotion and not for rock and roll? And so I see no reason for placing our sexual instincts in quite a different category from all these other instincts. Naturally as a good humanist I believe also in the epicurean idea of moderation in all things: eating, drinking and sex. If they are overdone, they bring pain and not pleasure.

Finally, we may be told that God desires that we shall not do thus and thus. God I regard as being made in man's image. The God of the ancient Hebrews said: "Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth". He meant with Israelites, of course, since he helped his people to slay the Midianites and Philistines. Today the earth has been replenished and over-replenished, not only with Israelites but with thousands of millions of people of all races. An up-to-date God would therefore say: "My people, practise contraception, limit your family average to three children, and try in this way to ensure peace and plenty for all mankind; for this is the law and the prophets".

### RIPENESS IS ALL

Actress Jayne Mansfield said in Rome that she might become a Roman Catholic: "Religious conversion has been maturing in me for some time".—*Daily Herald* (30/7/62).

# THE FREETHINKER

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## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### OUTDOOR

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

London Branches—Kingston, Marble Arch, North London: (Marble Arch), Sundays, from 4 p.m.: Messrs. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER, C. E. WOOD, D. H. TRIBE, J. P. MURACCIOLE, J. A. MILLAR (Tower Hill). Every Thursday, 12—2 p.m.: Messrs. J. W. BARKER and L. EBURY.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Platt Fields), Sunday afternoons. (Car Park, Victoria Street), Sunday evenings.

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: 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 NSS (Midland Institute, Paradise Street). Sunday, September 9th, 6.45 p.m.: MISS MARION LARGE, "The Movement for Colonial Freedom".

## Notes and News

THE EIGHTH ANNUAL CONVENTION of the American Rationalist Association was held in the Hotel Claridge, St. Louis, Missouri from August 24th, 1962. One of the problems discussed was the furtherance of unity between Freethinking groups in widely separated places, and support was given to the POAU (Protestant and Other Americans United for Separation of Church and State). One of the speakers at the Convention was Mrs. Madalyn Murray, who lost a 4-3 decision in Maryland State Court to end Bible reading and prayers in the public (state) schools. Mrs. Murray and her son Bill have filed their case with the Supreme Court.

WRITING IN *The Montreal Star* (2/8/62), Desmond Allard summarised the evidence presented to the Royal Commission on Education for Quebec Province, Canada, under eight heads, of which the third was: "Religion must play a lesser role in education". "Some of the harshest criticisms the commission heard", said Mr. Allard, "attacked the preponderance of religious instruction and the role of the church in education, in Quebec". And he reported A. E. Rainville, a teacher with many years experience, saying that the French Canadians were "the most blasphemous people on earth and among the most church-going". Mr. Rainville attacked the over-emphasis on religious instruction in schools and advocated an approved programme of sex-education.

LAST WEEK we printed a letter from Mr. Walter Dyte, citing Christian friends who "believe in an all-loving, all-

wise God, because of evils, which would be otherwise inexplicable". There have been examples of this perverted, as well as illogical attitude, in discussions on the deformed thalidomide babies. W.E.C. of Liverpool, for instance, described his three-year-old son who "has had a great number of big operations". He is now "paralysed from the waist down and his little body is a mass of scars—and he has more operations to come" (*The People*, 19/8/62). But said W.E.C., "he has intelligence and is happy", and "We hope that one day we shall teach him that it is the will of God that he is like that".

MRS. IVY SHAW, on the other hand, thought that "Perhaps God has been very kind" (*Daily Express*, 15/8/62) when her thalidomide baby, born without arms and legs, died.

FEW OF the letters we saw on the subject expressed the fear and horror that some of the parents must surely have felt, and those that did seemed to have happy "endings". "Little Brian mended our marriage", "My baby Mandy, born armless, has brought my family great joy", are but two examples. But Mrs. Sherri Finkbine, condemned by the Vatican and facing Roman Catholic obloquy in Phoenix, Arizona, after her abortion in Sweden, reported that thalidomide mothers had written to her saying that every time she fed her baby she would wish she had decided on an abortion (*Daily Herald*, 27/8/62).

ANOTHER MATTER to worry the Catholics of Phoenix, Arizona, was the premiere of a Hollywood colour film about the life of Emmett McLoughlin, *Portrait of an Ex-Priest*, due to take place in the Sombrero Playhouse on July 15th. On July 6th, the Sombrero manager, Martin Eagan, cancelled the booking without seeing the film. He was afraid "people would think the theatre is backing the movie" and "he didn't want to become involved with the controversial film" (*The Arizona Journal*, 7/8/62). The premiere was brought forward a day and held in the Shrine Auditorium, and we learn from Mr. McLoughlin that: "The boycott, of course, made the people of Phoenix interested and instead of 500 people seeing the picture 5,000 turned out. We had the largest crowds that have ever filled the Shrine Auditorium. Even more than turned out when Kennedy spoke here during his campaign . . . The total was more than 5,000 people". Within a few days, showings had been arranged in 21 cities in California, and it is now hoped to start it circulating along the East Coast also.

"I SAY here and now, 'Ban the sex films'", wrote a Mr. Clench to the *South London Press*. He was appalled at the nudes in the pictures outside the cinemas in Charing Cross Road, and complained about what he called "a stream of filth and vice". It is only when you try to conceal the body that it becomes abnormally interesting, the paper pointed out in reply (24/8/62). "Please yourself" was its motto. But, it recognised that, "Mr. Clench has been issued with a record by the *Universe* or some RC paper, so he will go on playing it".

IN THE United States it was the turn of Catholics to be criticised for "indecenty". Recent pictures of President Kennedy, "bare chested, being mobbed by women on a California beach", were considered "disgraceful" by leading Baptist, Dr. William Ray (*Daily Herald*, 27/8/62), while a one-piece swim suit worn by Mrs. Kennedy was "improper for a First Lady . . .". It appears, said Dr. Ray, "that all decorum, dignity and decency have been thrown overboard".

# Islam and Modern Civilisation

By F. A. RIDLEY

SOME YEARS AGO, I published an article in this paper, "How Greek Science passed to the Arabs", the title being that of a book by an Oxford Orientalist, the Rev. Lacy O'Leary. I cited an essay by the famous French Free-thinker, and savant, Ernest Renan, who therein passed some critical judgments on the mutual relationships of the Muslim religion with modern science, and with modern secular civilisation in general, that I, personally, consider to be of permanent value. Not least, it may be added, when the religion of the Koran is presently faced, thanks to modern scientific expansion on a world scale, with the same species of rationalistic criticism as has faced that of the Bible in recent centuries. Renan's observations on this topic derive additional weight from the fact that this eminent critical thinker was an equally eminent Orientalist, and they have an added relevancy in this country, where British rationalists of unquestionable eminence (e.g. Buckle, Draper, McCabe), have expressed opinions on the mutual value of (in Renan's own terminology), "Islamism and Science", that are very misleading.

Broadly speaking, the view eloquently and learnedly advanced in Renan's brilliant pages, is that there has never been any historical period during which Islam was really favourable to science and to a scientific culture; a position flatly opposed to the view expressed by such Anglo-Saxon writers as those mentioned above. Contrarily, argues Renan, the Muslim religion, with its infallible Koran and its blind belief in divine predestination (or rather fatalism) has been, not only unfavourable to the growth of any really scientific or rationalistic culture, but if possible, even more unfavourable than Christianity has been. Indeed, our author comments that at the time of his essay (originally delivered as a lecture at the Sorbonne on May 19th, 1883) the major obstacle to any intellectual culture founded upon critical reason, as equally to any social order founded upon civil and religious liberty, was precisely the Muslim religion and the Islamic world.

In point of fact, Renan asserted, the only regime in Europe which professed a similar obscurantism and repression of civil and religious freedom, was the then recently deceased papal regime in the Roman Papal States (finally annexed to the secular state of Italy in 1870). And, added Renan, whilst the medieval regime of the Vatican only controlled a few not very important Italian districts, the equally medieval regime of Islam still controlled huge areas in Asia, Africa, and even in Europe where the "unspeakable Turk" still bore sway. Islam in 1883, far more even than Christianity, was the major enemy of any modern culture based on critical secular reason.

At first sight this sweeping judgment might appear to run counter to the relevant historical facts, since after all, between about 700 AD (Muhammed himself died in 632) and 1200, there was unquestionably an international and, in its way and day, remarkable civilisation at least nominally Islamic, that extended from Spain to India. It is also a fact that many good scholars flourished under the aegis of this culture, and that several critical thinkers of by no means hidebound orthodoxy, were also its contemporaries. Such names as the Persian Avicenna and the Spanish Moor Averroes attained, indeed, an international celebrity.

Renan is, of course, far too good a cultural specialist to ignore such well-known facts; nor does he deny them. What he does do, in my opinion very convincingly, is to

deny that the connection between this semi-rationalistic culture and Islam was anything more than nominal and/or fortuitous. As he aptly comments, one can no more describe Avicenna or Averroes (the two most famous individual exponents of this culture) as Islamic or Muslim philosophers than one could accurately term say, Bruno and Galileo as Catholic thinkers, or Spinoza as a Jewish one, merely because they were the products of a Catholic or Jewish environment. The Catholic Church did its best to suppress the ideas of Galileo, and the Jewish Synagogue excommunicated Spinoza. Similarly, whenever Islam has been really powerful enough to do so, it has suppressed the writings of Arab philosophers, which have long ago been proscribed by Muslim orthodoxy as heretical and impious.

Today, as in the early days of Islam, the "science" of Islam is contained in a single book, the Koran, which Allah verbally dictated to his prophet. What is in it is Infallible, whilst whatever is *not* in it, is superfluous! The only Muslim science is to carry out the divine decrees of Allah. Any genuine science to be found in medieval Muslim culture owed its inspiration to the more or less accidental re-discovery of the authentic Greek science of Classical antiquity. Its connection with Islam was chronologically accidental and, on the part of Islam itself, unwelcome. The legend propagated even by many Victorian rationalists that *vis-a-vis* the Christian Dark Ages there was a contemporary Golden Age of Muslim Rationalism, is merely an historical myth, or, as one can perhaps say more charitably, a misunderstanding on the part of some Western historians of the rather tangled evolution of Islam and, along with it, of the mixed Persian-Arabic Oriental civilisation that arose under its auspices during its early centuries.

The opinions expressed above on the subject of Islam and any secularly-inspired culture by the great French critical historian, are today of topical, hardly less than historical interest. For the present era has witnessed a remarkable political renaissance of Islam in the form of such current creations as the Arab League and the new Muslim States of Indonesia, Pakistan and Malaya. It has also witnessed the first intellectual contacts between modern scientific culture and the traditional scholastic theology of Islam which has subsisted virtually unaltered since medieval times. Already we learn that modernist movements are beginning to appear in Islam, which seek to present Muhammed as a modern ethical reformer, as the greatest teacher in human history, whilst all sorts of modern ideas are being read into the Koran as they are into the Christian Bible: ideas that would have astonished and even disgusted their original authors.

Islam is still a very powerful religion, the only "spiritual" force in the modern world than can be compared with Christianity upon anything like equal terms. Actually, its Unitarian, non-metaphysical theology would appear to lend itself much better than does the orthodox theology of Christianity to adaptation to modern scientific ideas. It will therefore be interesting to see how far Islam and science will find themselves able to live together, and how far Renan's categorical assertion of their fundamental incompatibility, originally made in the 19th century, will prove to be correct before this present century, the 14th in the evolution of Islam—has run its scientifically-conditioned (if not theologically predestined) course.

# Tricking a Scientist (1)

By H. CUTNER

*The Spiritualists.* The story of Florence Cook and William Crookes. By Trevor S. Hall, Duckworth & Co., Ltd., London, 1962. 21s. net.

ALL SPIRITUALISTS who have gone a little further than merely attending some seance or other must know the story of Sir William Crookes, one of the most eminent scientists of the nineteenth century and his support of all that Spiritualism stands for. He is trotted out whenever Spiritualists show that their claims are supported by some great men of science—as if that completely settled the problem. We unbelievers agree that some eminent men and women have certainly believed that we never really die, and that our “spirits” can be brought back from “Summerland”, or “the Ethereal World” (or whatever their present abode is called) through a medium. Comparatively speaking, they are however an astonishingly small number, and only in rare cases—like that of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle—are they ready to support their beliefs in open debate.

We Freethinkers have known the story of Sir William Crookes and his medium Florence Cook almost since it was published and have exposed it as a fraud over and over again. So have famous conjurers like William Marriot and J. N. Maskelyne; but exposing scances as a fraud is so commonplace, and has been so over the years, that no convinced Spiritualist ever takes any notice of such. Year in and year out mediums have been exposed in our national newspapers, but they bravely carry on, and they will continue to do so as long as there are people enough to want to get in touch with “spirits”. We can expose the hopeless absurdities of the Resurrection story of Jesus a thousand times, but there always remains a huge core of believers in such marvels. Christianity survives on their backs, and the story is the same with Spiritualists.

What Mr. Trevor S. Hall has done in the case of Crookes is to examine all the contemporary evidence as far as he could. Florence Cook was what is known as a “materialising” medium, and she had so little difficulty in bamboozling Crookes, that she could make him believe that a daughter of the famous Henry Morgan once a notorious buccaneer, later the governor of Jamaica (1635-1688) could “materialise” under the name of Katie King. Crookes maintained that this happened not once but many times, and he wrote *Researches in the Phenomena of Spiritualism* giving all the relevant details. It actually is a monument of credulity.

Florence Cook had practised as a medium for some years before she met Crookes, and Mr. Hall gives precise details culled from the Spiritualist magazines of the day, as well as from unpublished correspondence. This is what makes the book a fascinating record based on what really happened. Not that other critics did not know of at least some of these contemporary records, for Frank Podmore, long the active and sceptical secretary of the Society for Psychical Research, Dr. Ivor Tuckett, Joseph McCabe, Walter Mann, and many other investigators quoted extensively from them in their books. Mr. Hall's own investigations read like a thrilling detective story as he goes step by step into the making of Florence Cook into a popular medium, and the cunning way in which she inveigled a few wealthy believers in Spiritualism to help her—and the ease with which Crookes fell for her so completely. Here is what he wrote in *The Spiritualist* in 1874 recording his encounter with “Katie King”:—

Katie never appeared to greater perfection, and for nearly

two hours she walked about the room conversing familiarly with those present. On several occasions she took my arm when walking and the impression conveyed to my mind that it was a living woman by my side, instead of a visitor from the other world . . . I asked permission to clasp her in my arms . . . permission was graciously given, and I accordingly did—well, as any gentleman would under the circumstances . . .

One has only to read what Crookes wrote as in the above to see that the “materialisation” was really Florence herself, and it should cause no wonder that even a scientist could feel a few human emotions, as Crookes must have felt when he clasped a living young woman in his arms, even though he later claimed that she was only a “spirit”.

But Mr. Hall goes much further than this. His thesis is that Crookes “fell” for Florence in a big way—that he set about deliberately hoaxing everybody as to what really happened. By insisting that Florence was “materialising” somebody called “Katie King” he was able to conceal his very real “affair” with Florence—an affair which appears to have shocked Spiritualists even more than Dickensians were shocked when the truth about the affair Dickens had with a young actress, Ellen Ternan, was first published by (I think) Thomas Wright. And just as so many Dickensians still refuse to believe the latter, so Spiritualists, even with the damning evidence before them, refuse to believe that a great scientist could have an affair with a medium. Hence the angry attacks on Mr. Hall still appearing from them.

But Crookes was interested in Spiritualism some years before he met Florence Cook, for he had sat with D. D. Home and, like quite a number of other “investigators”, had been easily bamboozled. And Mr. Hall points out that in the early part of *Researchers*, etc., “Crookes demonstrated rather clearly his intolerance of criticism, and his extreme readiness to reply to it in his psychical research activities other than those connected with Florence Cook”. Some of his reactions to criticism are given by Mr. Hall, such as “The review is so full of perverse, prejudiced, or unwarranted mis-statements, that it is impossible to take a note of them all”, “This spiteful statement is utterly false”, “For six months past, false and injurious reports concerning me and my recent investigations have been assiduously circulated in scientific circles”, and so on. The colleagues of Professor Crookes as an “investigator” of Spiritualistic phenomena must have been laughing their heads off at his credulity.

In any case, it is interesting to read what Sir Arthur Conan Doyle himself wrote of Crookes in his *History of Spiritualism*:—

Without going to the length of subterfuge, he [Crookes] did unquestionably shirk the question. He refused to have his articles upon the subject republished, and he would not circulate the wonderful photographs in which the materialised Katie King stood arm-in-arm with himself. He was exceedingly cautious also in defining his position.

If Crookes did not like the photographs which were taken with Katie King, it was because he knew perfectly well that Katie looked too much like Florrie—though our premier Spiritualist journal, *Psychic News*, has no hesitation whatever in printing and reprinting them. But Crookes knew the truth, and it is not surprising to find him so “cautious”. Katie and Florrie were one and the same person. To put it bluntly, there never has been a “materialisation” of anybody at any time. We very rarely

hear of one now, the whole emphasis on spirit "phenomena" has shifted from apports, materialisations, authentic messages from people like Napoleon, Beethoven, Dickens, Shakespeare to "miracles" of healing. "Famous" healers jostle one another these days, though it is exceptionally difficult to find out anything about the patient after being "cured".

The one thing Spiritualists do not like to be known about Florence Cook is that before her many sittings with Crookes, she had been caught by a convinced Spiritualist named Volckman, when impersonating a "spirit". Volckman, who had watched Florence very carefully, was quite sure she was also Katie King, and grabbed her to make sure. Needless to say, there was an unholy row, and the gas was put out. Florence managed to get into her cabinet again, where some minutes later she was found securely bound; and every Spiritualist breathed happily. Podmore records another "grabbing" of Florence by a gentleman called Hipp, but it never disturbed any believer. But the real interest in Mr. Hall's brilliant exposure is his discovery of the "affair" between the medium and the scientist. I am sure a few details will make all our readers want to read this book—which should be bought, or asked for at the local free library. But this will require another article.

(To be concluded)

## CORRESPONDENCE

### THE COMMON MARKET

The observation of Sir Arthur Bryant, quoted by R. W. Morrell in his article on the Common Market, that we shall be in a minority if we enter the Common Market, is a trite one, since any member-country is in a minority; further, we have a system in this country in which allegedly the decisions of the majority have the power to bind the minority, and we call it democracy. We should remember that all men are brothers, and that the Common Market can be seen as a step towards a unified Europe, a confederation of states, leading eventually perhaps to an ideal world from which all national sovereignties will have been banished, under a world government.

Whilst it is true that the Common Market countries mainly comprise states that are, at any rate nominally, Catholic, I do not think there is sufficient evidence to justify construing the Common Market as any real threat to civil liberty in the sphere of opinion on religious matters. Furthermore, if we go in we can act counter to this predominant weight of Catholicism, and would make the prospect of "a reactionary body which could gain control of the Market" less likely. That there are people who would undoubtedly like to see the Common Market used as a means for furthering the interests of international Catholicism is no doubt true, but it is doubtful whether they will get anywhere with their dreams in the present sceptical climate of opinion. Surely to a "freethinker", Protestantism is scarcely less obnoxious than its parent; and indeed there is more tolerance shown towards the expression of militant atheist opinion in some Catholic countries, like France and Belgium, than is the case in Protestant Britain. The menace of Catholicism will exist to be fought against whether we are inside or outside a "Catholic" society, and provided we are not living in a fascist dictatorship we might as well grapple with it at close quarters as from afar. Talk about our being dominated by a Catholic Europe has mostly been whipped up by the Beaverbrook newspapers in their determination to use every argument to try to persuade the British people to stay out of an organisation which they envisage will be detrimental to Commonwealth trade. Religion is hardly an issue at all in discussing the pros and cons of our proposed entry into the European Economic Community. NICHOLAS TOON.

### NSS AND ALDERMASTON

Might not the slogan on the National Secular Society Aldermaston banner ("Atheism—Secularism—Freethought") be justified on the simple grounds that it was informative? One often has to define "secular" for the benefit of inquirers, and the banner did this. S. R. BRENNAN.

### WHEN?

I am often amused at the facial expressions and the surprise, when one casually says, "I am an Agnostic". My lifelong hobbies have been horticulture, a keen interest in anatomy, and a love of opera. Friends and acquaintances invariably remark, "You can't be an Agnostic, you love flowers; you give away flowers and garden produce and you sing without charging a fee.

But when will Christians realise that this is not unusual?

F. H. MARSH.

### THE "CHURCH TIMES"?

Upon reading the articles by Mary C. Blakiston and P. de la Cherois Crommelin in the August 24th issue of THE FREETHINKER, I thought that I had mistakenly purchased a copy of the *Church Times* or some such periodical, as to me, such articles would be much more at home there than in a freethought paper.

The lady (still apparently a firm believer in the Gospel Jesus and his fishermen followers) is convinced that she knows the "Saviour's" teachings, although other theologians will insist that such teachings were the opposite to those as stated by the ex-Sister Blakiston.

It is certainly novel to expect that members of the Secular Society should accept the idea that all religions are good as they honour God! It is all very refreshing to learn that the Christian religion, taught, we are told by Jesus (who gave all such teachings in parables so that they could not be understood by laymen lest at any time such laymen might be converted and their sins forgiven them—Mark 4, 11-12) was to be comprehensible to all.

So far as the ex-Father is concerned he is quite as dogmatic as most Christians and, in my opinion quite as irrational in his statements. If a "true" God exists there is no need for him to be outraged and insulted by any absurdities of religious dogma. "He" could soon put a stop to any such.

Both the articles are strangely like *Fifty Years in the Church of Rome* by Father Chiniquy which I recently read. While deriding his former beliefs the author still retained all the absurdities of the Christian religion. In my opinion Atheism is not only the best, but the only way to attack this outmoded belief in gods—of any sort. C. STANLEY.

[We hope that THE FREETHINKER will always find space for the expression of unorthodox religious views. Mr. Stanley's rather doctrinaire attitude would exclude the writings of Paine and Voltaire from our pages.—ED.]

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