

The Freethinker

Volume LXXXII—No. 40

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Sixpence

IN A RECENT ARTICLE, I endeavoured to summarise (with becoming reverence) an illuminating book by an American Catholic author (of whom I had never previously heard), Father John Ireland Gallery. The subject matter of this volume—published in 1960—is ostensibly the descents made to our planet in recent centuries by the Virgin Mary, the Mother of Christ and (as she has been most aptly styled) the Fourth Person of the Trinity—a description that may well be verified by some future infallible papal decree which will, so to speak, recognise and confirm popular belief. However, in supposing this, we are looking forward into the theological future, whereas, contrarily, Fr. Gallery's learned narrative is concerned with the past; with, precisely the visits of Our Lady to this planet throughout the past four centuries. From 1531 when she confirmed the Spanish Conquest of Aztec Mexico (1519-21) by Cortez, by appearing to a Mexican Indian at Guadalupe, down to a recent (as yet officially unrecognised) appearance in Belgium in 1933.

In the course of his comprehensive narrative, Fr. Gallery, whose book (as I have previously noted) has obtained the official *imprimatur* of the Church which guarantees both its basic orthodoxy and substantial "accuracy", does not content himself with merely repeating the facts. He adds his own comments as a critical historian. Indeed to a mere sceptic like myself, it appears quite incredible that any author could combine such incredible credulity with regard to his subject matter, alongside such an undeniable talent for historical research and for collecting and arranging his historical data, as this author habitually displays.

Mariolatry and Catholic Theology

According to the current theological system of the Roman Catholic Church as officially endorsed by Rome, the Blessed Virgin whilst Queen of Heaven by express permission of her divine son, is *not* a goddess yet, but is merely the most exalted of mortals. Whilst Catholic theology officially endorses Mariolatry to the present extent of recognising three dogmas about Mary, viz., the Virgin Birth which is shared by both Greek Catholicism and by at least some of the Protestant Churches, and by Roman Catholic dogmas of the Immaculate Conception (viz. that the Virgin alone amongst mortals was conceived without Original Sin at her birth) and her bodily assumption into Heaven (variously dated by Catholic authorities at between 30 and 45 AD) there exists a vast and ever-growing crop of religious speculations about Mary which are not currently elevated to the level of Articles of Faith to be accepted under pain of excommunication here and eternal damnation hereafter. To this certainly luxurious superstructure, with outstanding examples of which Fr. Gallery's heavily documented narrative is solely concerned, belong all without exception of the celestial descents made by the august (but not yet divine) space traveller that he so painstakingly records. For up to the present time, none of these widely-

publicised terrestrial appearances of the Virgin has been canonically established as a dogma. And this applies even to the three most famous of all such modern visitations, Guadalupe (1531), Lourdes (1858), and Fatima (1917). Every Catholic author who records such alleged apparitions, is canonically obliged to preface any observation of the Virgin's miraculous descents by explicitly declaring: "Conformable to the Decree of Pope Urban VIII, 30th October, 1625, the author declares that all things recorded in this book rest on human authority. They are all related subject to the approval either already given or yet to be given by the Church which alone can pronounce on their miracu-

lous or supernatural character".

Mariolatry and "Development"

Under which comprehensive heading, Rome can accept or reject any miraculous appearance of the Virgin that may or may not fit in with its policy at any given time: in accordance with the famous theory of the "development" of Christian doctrine first explicitly expounded by Cardinal Newman in 1845. One must again recall that none of Mary's apparitions, whether recorded by Fr. Gallery, or by anyone else, has been elevated to the rank of a dogma and thus exempted (as all dogmas, *ipso facto* are) from the jurisdiction of Rome. Future Popes could at any time they wish, drop even Lourdes or Fatima like the proverbial hot brick. Contrarily, they could equally, if they thought it desirable, record a fresh visitation of the Mother of God possibly even outside the present office of THE FREETHINKER in Borough High Street, London, S.E.1.

Our Lady of Fatima

Our most recent historian of Mariolatry records a considerable number of celestial Marian descents the past four centuries, to all of which the Vatican has accorded varying degrees of quasi-recognition, but only two, Lourdes and Fatima, are really world-famous, though Guadalupe might be added as far as the Americas are concerned. Both Lourdes and Fatima have, so to speak, earned their keep and world-wide recognition, but the rest have only more or less local standing. Lourdes proved to be a most valuable auxiliary to Pope Pius IX and his Papal Party who, at the time that the apparition appeared to Bernadette in 1858, had just succeeded in establishing the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, which even that doyen of Catholic theology, St. Thomas Aquinas, had explicitly rejected. It will be recalled that the Virgin declared to Bernadette: "I am the Immaculate Conception". Over and above which special service, Lourdes gave a tremendous fillip, plus vast financial profits to Catholicism, then fighting tooth and nail for survival against the free-thinking legacy of the French Revolution. The apparition of Lourdes was, in Fr. Gallery's own antithesis, Mary's answer to Lucifer—then precisely the revolutionary spirit unleashed by the second French Revolution in 1848. In a similar fashion, Mary's Mexican apparition in 1531 no doubt assisted powerfully to consolidate the then recent

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

Mariolatry

By F. A. RIDLEY

Spanish Conquest of Mexico by converting the still Pagan Aztecs to the Catholic ideology of their Spanish conquerors. (Cortez was still alive in 1531.) Whilst—as our virulently anti-communist author falls over himself to emphasise—Mary's apparition at Fatima in 1917 represented the most important of all her apparitions, since there she foretold and denounced the rise of Atheistic Communism which the Vatican has come to regard as public enemy number one of Christianity in this 20th century. In which precise connection our author even records the eulogistic opinion that: "The visit of Our Lady to Fatima in 1917 could be considered by our Lord the most important since He took her bodily into Heaven about [sic!] the year 45 AD".

Certainly the Virgin of Fatima, even more than her opposite number at Lourdes, has proved extremely useful to Rome in recent years. Originally recognised, no doubt, as a useful ally to recover the then "Masonic" republic of Portugal to the bosom of Holy Church (a task now accomplished by the pious, Jesuit-trained, Dr. Salazar). Our Lady of Fatima who predicted the Russian Revolution (or so that last surviving witness to the apparition was to declare many years later), has now become the world-wide symbol in the Holy War between Rome and the great atheistic revolution of our times between (in our author's own words), "Mary and Lucifer".

RELIGIONS OF PRISONERS IN VICTORIA (AUSTRALIA)

The following figures are of the religions of prisoners received during 1959 and are taken from the *Reports of Director of Penal Services for the Year 1959 and Half-Year Ending June 30th, 1960:*

	Males	Females	Total
Church of England	3,228	238	3,466
Roman Catholic	4,687	421	5,108
Presbyterian	770	50	820
Methodist	464	66	530
Baptist	69	5	74
Salvation Army	92	13	105
Other Protestants	99	11	110
Jew	11	2	13
Buddhists, Confucianists, etc.	10	—	10
Other Persuasions	248	—	248
No Religion	557	2	559
Totals	10,235	808	11,043

From the figures above, the percentages of Roman Catholic prisoners received by the State penal institutions for the year 1959 were: Male 45.7, Female 52.1, and the total 46.2. More than half the female prisoners admitted were Roman Catholic.

If the Roman Catholic percentage of the population in the State of Victoria is taken as approximately 26 per cent, it would appear that the ratio of the percentage of prisoners to the percentage of population is 1.8 to 1. For the remainder of the community the ratio of prisoners' percentage to the percentage of population is .7 to 1. Thus, for the year, 1959, the Roman Catholic section of the State of Victoria supplied twice as many prisoners per head of population than the rest of the population.

What is the cause of this disturbing position? Figures in England and earlier figures for Victoria all show a similar position. Is the Roman Catholic education system responsible? How could a government even consider subsidising schools that turn out twice their share of law-breakers?

[Reprinted from *The Rock* (Australia), July 12th, 1962.]

ELEVEN MONTHS LATER

Nothing comparable to this has been known in European history since the demise of the Holy Roman Empire. In political form, the modern economically-based Common Market is very different from the medieval Holy Empire, but is it really so very different in essential content?—October 13th, 1961: F. A. Ridley in *THE FREETHINKER*.

Five of the six Common Market countries are essentially Roman Catholic in government and culture, and the proposed federation is clearly regarded as virtually a resuscitation of the Holy Roman Empire.—September 13th, 1962: Letter in the *Birmingham Post* from Lord Alexander of Hillsborough and other members of the Protestant Reformation Society.

Christian Truth v Scientific Truth

By JOHN CHRISTOPHERS

THE MOST UNFORTUNATE feature of any society is the way that religious beliefs are passed on from generation to generation, by the means of upbringing, education, and even by law. Once a socially-dominant religion is well embedded in the mind of the individual, it receives daily confirmation from his daily contact with manifestations of the faith. The unfortunate indoctrinated person gets the impression that his religion is a universal truth!

To doubt the prevailing faith is difficult, necessitating as it does, being an "odd man out" in society. The sceptic is rather like a sane man living amongst a race of lunatics, by whom he is regarded as abnormal! Thus a religion may thrive as long as its followers are sufficiently numerous and its power sufficiently strong.

Throughout the history of Christianity, scientific knowledge and the rational attitude have been enemies of the faith. When Christianity arose, it did so no doubt, because of the sincerity of its first converts, later helped by fraud (e.g. the many Gospels, Epistles, etc.), but the final clamber to the seat of power (and a long reign over the minds of men) was accomplished by violence.

The victims of that violence were the educated people, who either doubted the "truth" of Christianity or who simply spread knowledge to others. One symbolic early instance of Christian violence, was the murder of Hypatia, a Greek woman mathematician, at Alexandria. Hypatia's sin was that of trying to keep alive Greek learning, which, with its scientific bias often led to clever criticism of religion. Here is a quotation from the *Encyclopedia Britannica* relating the murder:

St. Cyril, the advocate of unity, was a man of fanatical zeal. He used his position as patriarch to incite pogroms against the large Jewish colony in Alexandria. His chief claim to fame is the lynching of Hypatia, a distinguished lady who, in an age of bigotry, adhered to the Neoplatonic philosophy and devoted her talent to mathematics. She was "torn from her chariot, stripped naked, dragged to the church, and inhumanly butchered by the hands of Peter the Reader and a troop of savage and merciless fanatics: her flesh was scraped from her bones with sharp oyster-shells and her quivering limbs were delivered to the flames. The progress of inquiry and punishment was stopped by seasonable gifts". After this Alexandria was no longer troubled by philosophers.

The effect of this murder, typical of the Christian attitude towards those who would not fall into line, was to stifle all opposition. One can appreciate the reticence of other Pagan scholars when such penalties were threatened. And the era of Christian rule that ensued has earned the title of the Dark Ages.

With the Renaissance, however, the struggle of learning and the spirit of inquiry, with superstition and ignorance, was renewed. And Christianity's position of dominance has never been the same since. The Copernican theory was expounded, and demonstrated by Galileo with the aid of his telescope. Forced to recant, though he was, his demonstration remained, though the fate of Galileo had a similar effect to the murder of Hypatia. Much scientific work was frightened out of existence, particularly in Italy. But it was pursued elsewhere, and notably in England. Progress was slow, but by the time of Darwin it was sure. With the coming of evolution, went religion's last chance.

SOB STUFF

That good ol' Route 66 orchestra started to sob as well. And the pretty little lady decided she had better go and see a priest. The sanctimonious, hand-clasping old priest spewed out some script-writer's tastelessly electronic "Christianity". And me? Well, I just switched off.—Dennis Potter on an ITV programme (*Daily Herald*, 13/9/62).

Meeting Joseph Lewis in New York

By WALTER STEINHARDT

DURING A RECENT VISIT to the USA, I had the privilege of meeting Joseph Lewis and his wife at their beautiful and spacious home in Westchester County.

Joseph Lewis is America's most outstanding militant Freethinker, and his prominence dates from the early twenties. Born in Montgomery, Alabama, the young Joseph's sentiments were stirred deeply when a yellow fever epidemic struck mercilessly his home town, and the effect is still vividly engrained in his mind. At the early age of nine, his mother was compelled to withdraw him from whatever meagre schooling he had received, as she could no longer bear the cruel whipping that her sensitive child had to endure at the hands of a fiendish teacher. When between twelve and fourteen, his older brother brought into the house a "jumbo" volume of Robert G. Ingersoll's lectures. Soon he possessed his first book by Thomas Paine. Joseph grew consequently towards Free-thought, admirably supported by his mother, of whom he speaks with great affection.

Ingersoll impressed him deeply and abidingly, while I doubt if Paine ever had a more ardent admirer and one more keen to give him his rightful historic place as a father of the American nation and mentor of her independence.

Joseph Lewis erected two statues to Thomas Paine, one in Paris in 1948, the other in Morristown, NJ, in 1950. "It is my cherished wish to erect one yet in his homeland, preferably London", Mr. Lewis told me. "The speech of dedication has long been ready in my mind".

In 1919 he attended a meeting of the Freethinkers Society of New York. His contribution to the debate so impressed the group, that the presidency was offered to him. His first lecture was on the theme, "The Bible and Nemesis of Mankind".

The loss of his first child in an epidemic, deprived him for some time of all zest to continue public work, but about this time, he met Margaret Sanger, the great American-birth-control pioneer, who asked his help to distribute her books *What Every Girl Should Know* and *Woman and the New Race*, which had been published by Brenhano. Soon Mr. Lewis became a successful publisher himself, building up a large scale business. He sold his interests only two years ago, and now devotes even more of his time to the cause nearest to his heart. I asked him about unity among Freethought organisations in America, and he regretfully admitted that this is a goal as yet unfulfilled. The apparent revival and strength of religious life in America, he called sham and shallow; to a great extent purely social conformity. "One sign that the post-war surge of the faith is declining, is the fact that religious leaders find it impossible to attract enough youths to the vocation". He is sure, that the work of Freethinkers is much more successful than can be measured in mere numbers of members of societies.

While I was in the USA, a television debate took place in the well-known Long John Neville programme on WOR, the theme being the decision of the US Supreme Court in respect of prayers in schools. The three participants were men of religion. Yet one of them had the courage and fairness to demand the participation of Joseph Lewis in order to balance such discussions and give non-believers a chance to have their case stated in public.

He has appeared on a number of sound and television programmes in various states, including the "Bible-belt"

of the South. His most outstanding successes were probably the Mike Wallace TV show interview and his part in Betty Furness's "At Your Beck and Call". They caused quite a stir and, because of his forthright attitude, much wrath among the faithful. A flood of letters poured into the stations, condemnatory and appreciative. Some members of the press complimented him. One, Jack Bell, wrote: "Joseph Lewis is an Atheist, but he believes in doing good and practises what he preaches".

Mr. Lewis's study in Purdy's is quite absorbing. On the walls are inscribed photographs of the famous he has known—often intimately. Here are Edison, Shaw, Luther Burbank, Einstein, Clarence Darrow, Ernest Thurtle, Bertrand Russell, Margaret Sanger, Helen Keller, Herriot, etc. Ingersoll's daughter, Maude, was a close friend. She gave him a number of her father's letters and manuscripts. Joseph Lewis's correspondence with Edison and Helen Keller is particularly interesting. With the latter he shares a love of Shakespeare. Copies of Paine's first editions are part of his library treasures, but his most valuable possessions are original letters of the great liberator. It was an intense sensation for me to hold these in my hands. Apart from the many pamphlets, his editorship of the *Age of Reason Magazine*, Presidency of the Freethinkers of America, the countless articles, letters of protest or encouragement, he has written about 15 books of which the more important are:—*The Ten Commandments*, *The Bible Unmasked* (over 15 editions), *Atheism and Other Addresses*, *Ingersoll the Magnificent*, *Spain: A Land Blighted by Religion*, *Thomas Paine, Author of the Declaration of Independence*.

He has, on quite a few occasions, been involved in long and costly libel and other court actions, in connection with his Freethought work.

His challenges of the Rev. Jack Coe, the faith-healing fake and hell-fire preacher are well remembered in Florida. "Does anyone think for one moment that, if Jesus heals, he would pick out a charlatan and fraud like Jack Coe to perform his deeds?"

Joseph Lewis's style is easy and free from ambiguity. The orator speaks through his written lines. Although inclined to repetition, he holds one's attention by alternating penetrating observations with lighter homilies.

He always returns to Paine. I am not qualified to assess his claim that Paine rather than Jefferson was the author of the Declaration of Independence, but one gathers that few follow him along this path. The Declaration was nurtured by the spirit of the enlightenment, then reaching its zenith. It was the eloquent expression of historical conditions prevailing at the time and place. What really mattered was that a people acted, as the young Americans did, on and after July 4th in Philadelphia and the 13 colonies. The individual authorship is of little importance. Even if it could be shown beyond doubt that Paine was the author, the bigots would never forgive him for writing *The Age of Reason*.

All this should not distract from the value of Joseph Lewis's constant endeavour to obtain the recognition America and other nations owe Paine to this day.

The hours spent with Mr. Lewis and his charming wife passed only too quickly. I am not likely to forget their hospitality. The visit to Purdy's crowned a rewarding nine weeks' stay in "God's own Country".

This Believing World

It must have hugely interested all good Protestants to learn that, at long last, Dr. J. Heenan is now the Archbishop of Liverpool. That is what he is called in the TV Times (September 16th), and that is how he was introduced to us by Mr. H. Berkeley, MP, in the ATV programme on "The Vatican Council". We wonder who it was who appointed Dr. Heenan to the post? Was it the Vatican? Or the Queen?

★

If Britain were dominated by Rome, would the Vatican allow a hard-boiled Protestant to call himself say, the Archbishop of Manchester? Or the Archbishop of anywhere? The incident is however very significant for it proves how Rome is slowly but very surely edging out the almost powerless Church of England in the name of "tolerance" and "Christian unity". As if unity for the Church of Rome meant anything other than Roman Catholic unity. In any case, all we got on the programme was the usual boost up of the Vatican and what it is doing for Christianity.

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We have often wondered whether any "converts" have been made by TV and radio religious talks, and now we know. According to the Rev. J. G. Hunter, Vicar of St. Matthews, Bootle, writing to the *Church of England Newspaper* and quoted in the TV Times (September 2nd), a "non-church-going youngster" was so moved by a "Sunday Break" show, that he immediately joined the nearest church. To use his own words "I had a natter with God and told him 'You're the Gaffer now'". God must have been delighted.

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And the Rev. R. Salmon of St. Albans, Herts., courageously and happily declared, "I have been told of at least two people who have been converted as a result of television programmes. They are both linked up with local churches". Even if it had been only one convert, we are sure the angels in heaven would have sung heavenly hymns of joy. If, as is claimed, something like eight millions of people every Sunday look at religious programmes, to make three converts is something of an event these days—so we heartily congratulate the sponsors. One thing however does interest us. Were not these unique converts already Christians to begin with?

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We get a clear example of a Christian going back to church in the article, "Why I am going to church tomorrow", by Michael Walsh in the *Daily Express* (September 22nd). It appears his mother was a Protestant, his father a Catholic, and his wife is Jewish. With such a background, there could not have been a whisper of heresy, though he admits that "God alone knows" if he can convert his wife with his prayers.

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The Archbishop of Canterbury sadly admitted recently that the quest for "unity" is going to be a long one; but in answer to the question, can one be a Communist and a Christian at the same time, he said "No". He added that "Communism is an atheistic view of life". This is all very well, but in the book of Acts Christians are shown to be Communists—though, of course, not exactly Marxists. In any case, there have always been prominent Communists who were Christians, and indeed quite a number who insist that Jesus was a sound Socialist.

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The recent TV show on the "Origins of Man" aroused (as one might have expected) angry letters from pious old and young ladies, who quite clearly and correctly recognised that Evolution meant the death blow to Christianity. How-

ever, in the *TV Times* (September 23rd) a boy of 15 protested that it is quite compatible with Christianity after all, for "the Bible says man was formed of the slime of the earth" though there is nothing about the "slime". It appears also from his letter that Roman Catholics are allowed to believe in Evolution.

Still Unrepentant

By H. CUTNER

THERE SEEMS LITTLE NEED to answer in detail Mr. F. A. Ridley's article on "The Jews and Jesus" (September 21st) in spite of the fact that he so strongly "deplores" my "incomprehensible attitude". It is an attitude which was put far better than I can ever hope to put it by such great Freethinkers like Voltaire, Dupuis, Robert Taylor, Dujardin, Alfaric, Couchoud and scores of others in books and pamphlets which all can still read. I have never come across any real answer to them—though I admit that Mr. Ridley can quote Dr. Conybeare, A. D. Howell Smith and Archibald Robertson against me.

Whether Mr. Ridley can or can not understand what Trypho, who laughed at and ridiculed Justin Martyr's inexhaustible credulity meant, does not matter much. The translation I gave is the Christian one, and can be found in the Ante-Nicene Library edition of Justin (page 97); and all that that eminent Christian Father could say in reply was, "We have not believed in empty fables". He knew quite well what the laughing Trypho meant.

Not only did the Church not destroy the damning evidence of Trypho, but it failed to obliterate the almost similar kind of evidence Irenaeus (c. 180 AD) gave us of the age of Jesus at death—"He was an old man for old men". Jesus "at last came on death itself, that he might be the first born from the dead . . .". There is nothing here about the Crucifixion.

In his little known but brilliant work, *Anacalypsis*, Godfrey Higgins actually says, "The Church has been guilty of an oversight in letting this passage from Irenaeus escape . . .". Of course; and if similar passages impugning the credibility of the Gospels are few in number—so what? When at last the Jews emerged into Europe about 900 AD, with their Talmudic laws to keep them "apart" from Gentiles, they hardly dared to open their mouths on Jesus for fear of getting butchered by the Christians who were inspired by the hatred shown to them in the Gospels. The real "miracle" is that they survived; and in gratitude for this, they now proclaim Jesus as the greatest of all Jews, who never really became a Christian, but who has now the honour of being worshipped as a God by all fervent Christians. No wonder that at least some Christians and Jews "get together" and fawn upon each other.

The late J. M. Robertson once said at a Rationalist Press Association Dinner that he doubted if 80 per cent of Rationalists agreed with him on the Myth Theory. I can only say that my own reading over the years makes me quite certain that not only is Jesus a myth, but that there is no evidence whatever for the real existence of Peter, Paul, and John. In fact, I am a much greater "unbeliever" than I was say, twenty years ago.

If readers are really interested in Christian origins, then they must read the necessary books for themselves. I do not think it is easy even now to be "converted" to the Myth Theory except by intensive reading.

But of course even Mr. Ridley does not believe in Jesus the God, and his miracles, though we only know him through the New Testament. Outside its pages, he is quite unknown. To believe in any other kind of Jesus requires unbounded faith.

THE FREETHINKER

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

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Details of membership of the National Secular Society may be obtained from the General Secretary, 103 Borough High Street, S.E.1. Inquiries regarding Bequests and Secular Funeral Services should also be made to the General Secretary, N.S.S.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch NSS (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 NSS (Platt Fields), Sunday afternoons. (Car Park, Victoria Street), Sunday evenings.

Merseyside Branch NSS (Pierhead).—Meetings: Wednesdays, 1 p.m.; Sundays, 7.30 p.m.

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

INDOOR

Birmingham Branch NSS (Midland Institute, Paradise Street), Sunday, October 7th, 6.45 p.m.: C. H. HEWITT, "Dickens as a Social Reformer".

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Tuesday, October 9th, 7.30 p.m.: J. B. COATES, "A Humanist Looks at Religious Education".

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, October 7th, 6.30 p.m.: CONCERT, "The Curiosities", directed by George Chaplin.

Manchester Branch NSS (Wheatsheaf Hotel, High Street), Sunday, October 7th, 7.30 p.m.: A. WHITTAKER, FRAS, "The Origin of the Sun and Planets", illustrated with slides.

Marble Arch Branch NSS (The Carpenter's Arms, Seymour Place, London, W.1), Sunday, October 7th, 7.30 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, "The Vatican and Christian Unity".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, October 7th, 11 a.m.: PROFESSOR D. G. MACRAE, "G. M. Trevelyan and the Whig Idea of History".

Notes and News

FOUR OUT OF FIVE of the young people asked by the *Daily Herald* (20/9/62) if they would like to see a worker priest in their factory or office, answered no. And in the same issue, James Connor of Stonebroom, Derbyshire (age not given) recommended that vicars and curates should "tend the neglected land around the churches". The work, he said, "would do them good". It seems that Bermondsey houses and public houses aren't anxious to receive religious callers either. The Rev. Clifford Johnson's "Operation Outreach" has met with a "cold and at times hostile reception" (*South London Press*, 21/9/62). Indeed, Mr. Johnson himself has twice been thrown out of pubs. The "operation" set out to bridge the gap between pew and pavement. But, Mr. Johnson confessed, "The gap is much wider than we had anticipated". About 40 per cent of the people interviewed so far have made "an outright rejection of religion and the Church", while another 40 per cent "aren't interested enough to bother". Only about 20 per cent have welcomed the campaigners.

READERS IN THE Midlands might like to make a note that *A Subject of Scandal and Concern*, John Osborne's controversial play on the imprisonment of George Jacob Holyoake for blasphemy, will have its first stage production at the Nottingham Playhouse on Tuesday, November 13th. Turned down by ITV, the play was produced by the BBC in November 1960. Though Mr. Osborne disclaims any pretence at historical accuracy, gives Holyoake a stammer and gives us a puzzling ending, he also provides some stimulating dialogue, and the Playhouse production should be well worth seeing.

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ON SUNDAY the Leicester Secular Society starts its Winter season in the Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester, with a concert directed by George Chaplin. Then weekly meetings will be held addressed by such speakers as Mr. F. J. Corina, Dr. R. W. Kind of the Family Planning Association, and Mr. F. A. Ridley, President of the National Secular Society. December 2nd may prove a particularly interesting date, for a debate has been arranged between the Rev. Bill Matthews, vicar of Copt Oak, Leicestershire, and Mr. Harold Day of Bradford. The subject: "Is Christianity True?" Further details of the Leicester Secular Society and its programme may be obtained from the Secretary, Mr. C. H. Hammersley, at the Secular Hall.

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ALL PRAISE to the *Daily Herald* for supporting the legalisation of abortion under medical supervision. It fully deserved the tribute of a Lancashire hospital doctor (19/9/62), who declared: "At the very least this issue should again be debated in the Commons and MPs should be allowed a free vote". Mr. Kenneth Robinson, MP, who sponsored the last Abortion Law Reform Bill (which was talked out) will speak on the subject in the Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1, on Tuesday, November 6th, at 7.30 p.m., along with Dr. Peter Darby. The Chairmen will be Professor W. C. W. Nixon, MD, and Dr. Glanville Williams, FBA, and the meeting has been arranged by the Abortion Law Reform Association. Admission will be free.

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IN CONTRAST to the *Herald*, the *Daily Sketch* refused to entertain the idea of medical abortion. Indeed, the *Sketch* lately seems to have assumed the role of Vatican public relations officer with its features on brides of Christ and "miracle" cures. And on September 21st, it gave us the first pictures of the "Saracen Tower of Solitude", where the Pope has recently spent his time praying. In this lonely tower, said the *Sketch*, "the Pope concentrates on his mightiest task, reuniting the world's divided Christian Churches".

★

EMMETT MCLOUGHLIN's latest book, *Crime and Immorality in the Catholic Church* (reviewed on April 13th) seems to have upset the Church even more than his others. At any rate, it is the one that Holy Mother has done most to try to stifle. A friend was in the office of the publisher Lyle Stuart, in New York, about three weeks ago, when a telephone call came through from the *Chicago Tribune* refusing an advertisement for the book. Yet it has already sold 18,000 copies. The figure for the earlier *American Culture and Catholic Schools* is 70,000 while *People's Padre*, Mr. McLoughlin's first book has passed 300,000 in cloth.

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A TRANSLATION of Colin McCall's Views and Opinions, "A Spiritualist Critic" (July 27th) appeared in the Dutch Freethought paper, *Bevrijdend Denken*, on September 8th.

Socratic Dialogue

By F. M. PRICE, M.A.

PROBABLY MOST READERS of this journal have heard of the method adopted by Socrates in teaching his students. According to Plato, Socrates would start a conversation on some subject with a young man who, with the confidence of youth, was quite sure that he "knew all the answers". Then by skilful questioning, rather than by mere telling, he would gradually lead the youth further into the mire of contradictions until he was forced to admit reluctantly, either that his preconceived ideas were erroneous, or that Socrates had shown him that he was really ignorant of the real truth in that particular context. He is thus jolted into a realisation that he must start really to *think* all over again.

I commend this method to Rationalists in discussions on religious topics with their opponents. Here is an example (based on the Socratic method as shown to us in Plato's *Dialogues*—for it was Plato, and not Socrates, who wrote them down for posterity). It must be remembered that this religious subject is my own invention, and has nothing to do with the actual dialogues of Socrates. It is merely a typical example of what might be done in dealing with a young well-meaning Christian, who is not very well versed in the Bible, but who has accepted blindly all that he has been told by parson, Sunday School, radio, press, and all the rest of the propaganda machine. "Q" stands for the Socratic question; "A" stands for the opponent's answer. Note that abuse or sarcasm will defeat the object—it is essential to maintain bland politeness.

Q.—Do you believe implicitly in Jesus Christ?

A.—Certainly, I do.

Q.—Would you say that his sayings, according to the gospels, were inspired truth?

A.—Of course!

Q.—Was he good, forgiving and loving?

A.—That goes without saying. Haven't we been told in the Sunday School Hymn "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild"?

Q.—If that is the case, then is there any likelihood of his uttering cruel and repulsive threats?

A.—Not only no likelihood, but quite impossible.

Q.—Quite so. Now let us digress for a moment. I would ask you if you believe in a literal Hell, with its damnation, everlasting fire, and eternal torments?

A.—How can you ask it? That terrible doctrine has gone by the board long ago.

Q.—But is it not a fact that some religious people *do* believe in it?

A.—Yes; but only a very few unenlightened fundamentalists and evangelists.

Q.—Do you mean by this, that the vast majority of kindly Christians, both Ministers and congregations, have abandoned the doctrine?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Why is this?

A.—Because it is directly contrary to what we know to be the essential of true Christianity, which is *love*.

Q.—Does that mean that Jesus was the embodiment of love?

A.—Certainly. All his teachings reveal that. I am surprised that you should ask it.

Q.—Therefore, if that is the case, Jesus could never threaten us with the torments of Hell?

A.—The very thought of that is preposterous.

Q.—So there is no need for me to search the Gospels to ascertain this for myself?

A.—No need at all; I can inform you quite positively that such a revolting thing would be quite out of character, as regards Jesus.

Q.—As a favour to me, would you open your Bible and read aloud to me Matthew 5, Verse 22, last two lines?

A. (with confidence)—Certainly. Here it is: "... whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire".

Q.—Jesus did, then, threaten hell fire?

A.—Well—er—an isolated case, you know, and in my opinion not meant literally.

Q.—But is your opinion of any value since you have previously admitted that the sayings of Jesus are "true" and "inspired", and couldn't be lies? However, would you be willing to read certain other passages from the New Testament, which I select for you?

A.—Well, I suppose so; but really, I haven't much time to spend with you, and—

Q.—I shall not dream of detaining you; but here is a list—not by any means complete—of passages which I would like you to read carefully at home in your leisure time, and we can continue our talk tomorrow. Will you do this?

A. (reluctantly)—Oh, very well, if you wish it.

Q now hands him a list of reference thus:

From Matthew, 5, 30; 10, 28; 13, 42 and 50; 18, 8 and 9; 23, 32; 25, 46. From Mark, 3, 29; 9, 43, 45, and 47 (and others from Mark, Luke and John). Next day they meet again.

Q.—Have you read the passages conscientiously?

A.—Yes.

Q.—What was the essence of all of them?

A.—I must admit that *all* specified that for certain transgressions there would be "hell" or "everlasting fire", or "hell-fire", or "damnation", or "eternal punishment".

Q.—Were the passages all from the mouth of Jesus, or said by others?

A.—All by Jesus.

Q.—Do you still adhere to your confident assertion of yesterday that "it would be quite impossible for Jesus to utter cruel and repulsive threats"?

A. (uncomfortably)—I wish to be honest, and not attempt to wriggle out of this dilemma. Will you give me a week to think about all this in the light of facts which I was formerly unaware of—facts which seem to have been purposely omitted in all my previous instruction.

Q.—Certainly. Read, my friend, and think—not merely accept. That is the way of true learning . . .

Now readers, I have written enough to set you up as a Socratic questioner. Next week's conversation between Q and A you can draft out for yourselves, in the way you think it would proceed. As well as the above subject on the matter of a loving Saviour sternly threatening us with hell-fire (and don't let them fob you off with "allegory" or "poetic licence!"), I might suggest other topics which lend themselves to the Socratic method of instilling doubt into the minds of too-confident arguers:—
(a) *The Devil*. By this I don't mean the plural "devils", the term used in Biblical times to mean insanity, but one actual existing individual called the Devil or Satan: e.g. Matt 4, 1-10 (and elsewhere). (b) *Angels*. Actual beings—not poetic imagery. Dozens of references. (c) *Heaven*. An actual place, not the sense in which it is vaguely used

nowadays, as a state of mind. Here again, many references. (d) *The essential goodness of God* (as distinct from Christ). For this, to save you a laborious search through the Bible, I recommend you to read the atrocities as quoted in *The Bible Handbook* by Foote and Ball.

Further interesting topics you can doubtless think up for yourselves.

You will realise that statements by disciples or apostles, or the descriptions of weird and awful animals in Revelation, will not carry the same weight as the utterances of God or Jesus Christ. When you have mastered the essentials in a topic, try out the Socratic questioning on someone. It is instructive both to Q and to A. You may not convert him; but if you at least induce him to do a little actual Bible reading of the portions usually cunningly omitted, and to think for himself, you will have done much towards fostering (even in a humble way), the search for truth.

(Reprinted from *The New Zealand Rationalist*, July-August, 1962.)

A New Bible— Revision or Rewriting

By BRIAN R. PAMPLIN

A FEW MONTHS AGO I published a booklet called *A Draft for the Book of Creation* (The Paperback, 36 Saddler Street, Durham City, 2s. 6d., plus postage). I was very surprised and a little frightened by the publicity my little book occasioned. I gave a few press interviews and appeared on TV for a few minutes. Newspapers in many countries reported my work in several languages sometimes with my photograph. I was seriously disturbed when I read some of these accounts—for example *Figaro* reported that I had rewritten the Bible. This was emphatically *not* my intention. My booklet was designed to encourage people—especially my fellow scientists—to want to read the Bible more not less. That is why the Holy Bible heads my list of suggested further reading.

But having said that I must admit that I find many passages in the Authorised Version unnecessarily difficult. I do feel that the Bible needs editing and rewriting in the modern idiom. The recently published New English Bible does make the New Testament much more readable. And so do many other previous translations. A superb example is J. B. Phillips's *Letters to Young Churches*. But do they go far enough?

Colin McCall in his article in this journal (July 6th, 1962) comments at some length on my second thoughts about Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden, which do not appear in my account of Creation. To me Adam and Eve is a nursery story about the origin of evil. We are all puzzled that God should have created a world in which sin and suffering abound, and many people believe in a spiritual "Antigod", whom they identify as the Devil or the Antichrist. Personally I find it very difficult to believe in the Devil. Things are not perfect because God is still creating the perfect world—and we are expected to help. The delightful idea of the perfect Garden of Eden is in the future not the past. Original Sin—i.e. that inborn tendency we all experience to do wrong even when we know better—stems from our animal ancestry not from a Fall from perfection in the past.

I do not wish to have second thoughts about what I meant to say but rather to clarify what I have written. But I remain open to suggestions that my ideas are in places in error. Like other contributors to this journal I am willing to be described as a Christian Freethinker.

[Colin McCall will comment on the above next week.—ED.]

THEATRE

"Brecht on Brecht"

Readers know by now that I regard Bertolt Brecht as a playwright of genius. It is a proof of that genius, I suggest, than an anthology like *Brecht on Brecht*, at the Royal Court Theatre, London, should prove so compelling. It is true that most of the songs are inimitably sung by Lotta Lenya, widow of Kurt Weill, who set many of them to music, and that the other performers, George Devine, Barry Foster, Valerie Gearon and Norman Rossington also deserves considerable praise (more, perhaps than they have generally received from the critics). But the greatest praise must go to Brecht.

Few of these poems, songs, speeches and sketches would be known to the audience beforehand (in contrast to a similar evening devoted to Shakespeare as in *The Hollow Crown*) yet they are given without introduction, with virtually no props, in ordinary dress, and with texts in hand. And if George Tabori's selection skips lightly over Brecht's Communism, it captures a great deal of his "infinite variety". Here are the tenderness, bitterness, irony and satire, with the well-known portrait of Brecht smiling at us throughout.

"Death", he says, came to a young girl, "ashamed of himself". On the girl guilty of infanticide, he pleads: "Check your wrath and scorn, for man needs help from every creature born". But does he get it? "Does man help man?", he asks in the music-hall knock-about—terrible and terribly funny at the same time. He parodies *Romeo and Juliet* and gives us *Schweik in World War Two*. Galileo bridges three centuries, speaking on science and the scientist. And we hear a recording of Brecht himself interrogated by the Un-American Activities committee in 1947. These and many other notable items.

C.McC.

CORRESPONDENCE

NSS AND ALDERMASTON

In every society and in every group there are sectarians of Mr. Micklewright's type. Once upon a time I should have expostulated with them, but now I realise its futility. It would augur ill for the rationalist and secularist movements if all within them were similarly partisan. Rationalist and secularist though I am, I would not be associated with them if they had no window into the wider world. I have lived long enough to have settled philosophical convictions about life, and I should be happier holding my own course against the world, belonging to no organisation, than linked with men professing to be progressives but quite unregenerate.

Kathleen Tacchi-Morris, herself a secularist, belongs to my kind of company. Her type of thinking offers our best hope for the future. Bless her, may there be many like her in our ranks!

G. I. BENNETT

[This correspondence is now closed.—ED.]

BIRMINGHAM v. USSR

Referring to the proposed Birmingham Hall of Marriage, Mr. H. J. Blackham says (THE FREETHINKER, 14/9/62) "The Soviet Union hardly does better". Surely, Sir, this is hardly fair to our Russian allies. I am not sure that it does not verge on blasphemy or even *fascism*. It is well known that the Soviet Union has the best astronauts, the best potato queues, the best dancers (docile and otherwise), the best currency speculators (they must be the best; they shoot them), the best rockets, the best thieves (it seems only yesterday that Comrade Nikita was complaining that the Ukrainians had stolen half the wheat crop), and in fact the best anything you like to mention. Please, please don't let the side down. How can Mr. Cutner be able to complain that atheists are confused with Communists if you permit your contributors to be so coy? Let us have it in capital letters, please—SOVIET UNION HALLS OF MARRIAGE ARE MUCH BETTER THAN ANYTHING BIRMINGHAM CAN DO.

W. E. NICHOLSON.

[Well there you have it!—ED.]

THE "CHURCH TIMES"

Whilst I too have no wish to enter into any long argument, I think I can claim, with justification, that your reply to my letter can in no wise be deemed a reply to my request for references to the works of Thomas Paine or Voltaire, wherein either writer suggests (as stated by Dr. Blakiston) that the teachings of Jesus were to be comprehensible to all, or express views in any way comparable to those of the ex-Sister or Mr. Crommelin.

Had Paine or Voltaire lived today, I venture to suggest that both might have considerably modified their views on the "author of design of nature". They would most certainly be known as

"Bible bashers"—and one can hardly accuse either the ex-Sister or Priest of such.

I have not seen Watts & Company's edition of the *Age of Reason* but have referred to the Secular Society's edition of Paine's "great religious work". On page 176 he says "These repeated forgeries and falsifications create a well founded suspicion that all the cases spoken of concerning the person called Jesus Christ are *made cases* on purpose to lug in, and that only very clumsily some broken sentences from the Old Testament, and apply them to prophecies of those cases, and that so far from his being a Son of God, *he did not exist even as a man*—that he is merely an imaginary or allegorical character as Apollo, Hercules, Jupiter and all the deities of antiquity were". Moreover in Paine's profession of faith on page 1—quoted by you—at least two of the author's declarations of his opinion, would not, I think find favour with, at least, Dr. Blakiston.

As to Voltaire may I refer you to his *Dictionary of Theology* under the items "Deicide" "Immense" "Jesus Christ" "Lamb of God" and "Messiah" for his opinion of Jesus.

I am sorry, but I entirely fail to see how such views as expressed by both writers can in any way be argued to be in agreement with those of Dr. Blakiston quoted above.

Once again may I state that I was under the impression that the Secular Society (of which your paper is the mouthpiece) stands for militant Freethought (any orthodox Christian who believes in Noah's Ark will tell you he is a freethinker) and unless the purpose is to increase circulation at any price by attracting Christians—and both the ex-Sister and Priest would, in the present age be welcomed with open arms by these (other than Roman Catholics) I still must contend that such articles are unsuitable for a Freethought journal.

C. STANLEY.

AN INJUSTICE?

I wonder if the worthy Mr. F. A. Ridley does not do an injustice to Draper and McCabe in his article on "Islam and Modern Civilisation" (7/9/62). Certainly both of them were well acquainted with Renan's works on Averroes. McCabe cites *Averroes et l'Averroisme* in his article on the great Arab scholar in *A Rationalist Encyclopaedia*, and Draper actually gives excerpts from the *Historical Essay on Averroism* (which may be the English title of the same work) in his *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science*.

Both Draper and McCabe, too, emphasised the unorthodox contribution to Arab culture. "Throughout the Mohammedan dominions in Asia, in Africa, and in Spain", said Draper, "the lower order of Mussulmen entertained a fanatical hatred against learning. Among the more devout—those who claimed to be orthodox—there were painful doubts as to the salvation of the great Khalif Al-Mamun—the wicked khalif, as they called him—for he had not only disturbed the people by introducing the writings of Aristotle and other Greek heathens, but had even struck at the existence of heaven and hell by saying that the earth is a globe, and pretending that he could measure its size".

McCabe, it is true, said that the Koran did not preach intolerance, but he did not attribute Arab science and culture to the book. On the contrary. To quote from his *Encyclopaedia*: "it was the scepticism of early Moslem rulers, in Syria and Spain, who descended from the men who had derided Mohammed's claims, that enabled the Arabs to reach a high stage of civilisation in two generations, while the Christian nations took a thousand years".

I should be glad to have Mr. Ridley's comments.

JAMES P. MITCHELL (USA).

FIRST CAUSE

It is true, as Mr. Crommelin says (p. 280) that the first cause (why capitals?) is not supposed to be *merely* the first link in a chain of secondary causes, but nevertheless it is a first link and Aquinas tried to show how to reach it by working one's way back through secondary causes. Now, since Mr. Crommelin admits that there is no reason why such a chain should have a beginning, we so far seem to agree in that logical probability does not lead to a first cause in this direction.

Yet Mr. Crommelin appears to be trying to attain such first cause through "laws and limitations which rule the world". But, even if laws ruling the world are not of its own making this does not mean that they were "created", either out of nothing or out of something. I fail to see any logical probability pointing to this. I am also unable to understand Mr. Crommelin's assertion that the world appears to the human observer to be continually coming out of nothing. I would rather say that to the human observer the world is simply there.

If a first cause is accepted it must be considered indestructible by secondary causes but not much more can be said about it. I would even go so far as to say that the possibility of its self-destruction cannot be disproved. But in any case the rest is

human speculation and religious wishful thinking: there is no reason at all for attributing almighty power to it, much less to pretend it is morally perfect (whatever that may mean). And yet unless the first cause possesses *at least* these attributes it cannot reasonably be called God under the Christian definition of the term.

G. WAPPENHANS (Spain).

PIOUS FRAUDS

The recent article in THE FREETHINKER, challenging the claim of a miraculous cure of cancer, prompts me to relate some similar challenges. A religious tract pushed through my door a few months ago, spoke of a lady being cured of incurable cancer by "laying of hands". Having acquired her name and address, I asked for details similar to those in THE FREETHINKER. She could not supply them, but instead gave me several tracts for my salvation. Recently I queried an evangelist at East Ham Town Hall on his miraculous claims. He evaded the issue completely. A correspondent in an Essex newspaper reported a woman who was miraculously cured of cancer by faith healing. The answer to my investigation was that "the person concerned, did not want any publicity". What pious frauds they all are! T. C. OWEN.

WITHOUT COMMENT—OR EDITING!

Our boy at Sheffield University gave me some of your literature and I find it excellent. In its "Hard Headed and practical" way. But the only ones who can cure your "tongue in cheek" attitude to the scriptures in an equally "Hard headed and practical way" are Jehovah's Witnesses from the Watchtower Bible, and Tract Society, The Ridgway, London, N.W.7. Phone for Discussion, Eager to Please, No Charge.

Those contradictions early in Genesis are quite easily ironed out. However, our representative will help you immensely, especially if you enjoy being wrong. I like being wrong. I can learn such a lot that way. In fact Happy are the meek they'll get the lot and a bit more shortly, which is the proper reward offered to them by keeping a bargain. Well! I've used up this "pinched" notepaper so I wish you all the very best. M---.G---

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