

The Freethinker

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VIEWS and OPINIONS

The Evolution of a Miracle

By F. A. RIDLEY

ONE OF THE major characteristics of Christianity has been its effective combination of religious superstition with political power. This has, in particular, characterised the Roman Catholic Church, though not exclusively so, since Calvinism has also shown markedly theocratic tendencies. In this present period, when Rome is fighting for her very life against the incoming tide of Atheism, all the overt manifestations of the Vatican assume, sooner or later, a political form. This is so perhaps most of all with regard to the miraculous appearances of the Virgin Mary, Rome's most important celestial visitor. The most significant miracle announced by the Catholic Church within this present century, the apparitions of Our Lady of Fatima—June to October 1917—represent perhaps, the finest example of the effective functioning of the miraculous in the service of the current political aims of Rome.

In 1917, upon the 13th of each month between June and October, the Virgin Mary appeared to three Portuguese children then engaged in the biblical occupation of tending their sheep. Various miracles are alleged to have followed these manifestations, most notably, the sun seems to have celebrated a kind of ritualistic dance in honour of the Blessed Virgin.

Our Lady of Fatima

If, in conformity with a materialistic view of the historical process, we endeavour to place the Fatima apparitions in their appropriate context, we find ourselves faced with this situation. After many centuries of feudal monarchical absolutism and of clerical domination, Portugal in 1910 experienced what the Marxists describe as a "bourgeois" revolution: viz. the rise of a commercial class accompanied in the political field by economic and political liberalism and in the sphere of ideology, by religious toleration accompanied by the rise of a strong anti-clerical movement against the dead hand of the medieval Church (incidentally in Portugal a sub-species of Iberian Catholicism of the most primitive and credulous kind). However, the liberal revolution which had got rid of the monarchy (King Manuel fled to England) and disestablished the Church, proved to be premature, and the Church plotted incessantly—and eventually successfully—against it, with the support of the vast mass of the population which still consisted of illiterate and superstitious peasants. It was in this social and cultural atmosphere, in a medieval land suddenly precipitated into the modern world that the miracle of Fatima occurred, and its immediate reception was interesting. As far as the illiterate masses of Portuguese peasants were concerned, Our Lady seems to have—if we may use appropriate commercial phraseology—registered an immediate hit.

But—and this is an important point to note—Fatima was *not* a clerically initiated miracle, as is made perfectly clear even by that devout exponent of Mariolatry, Fr. J. I. Gallery, who points out (in his *Mary versus Lucifer*, recently reviewed in these columns) that even the

local priest originally regarded the apparitions as probably diabolical in origin! The miracle did not find immediate favour in the eyes of the Portuguese hierarchy. It should of course, always be remembered that apparitions of the Virgin were "two a penny" in medieval lands; the real "science" of Mariolatry consists in the often difficult task of separating the "genuine" minority of miracles from the majority of bogus ones. The case of Fatima clearly represents a case of the miracle

being imposed on the Church by the people, (as for that matter, does the original cult of Mary itself, for even St. Thomas Aquinas rejected the Immaculate Conception). In point of fact, Fatima represents a quite relevant argument against the superficial theory that miracles—and for that matter, the religions which produce them—are always created by priests in the first instance. Actually the Church has found it necessary to lay down strict rules, summarised in a Bull of Pope Urban VIII for the investigation of all alleged apparitions of Mary, etc. Though as we shall now see, a politically intelligent priesthood—and who has more experience in political matters than the Vatican?—knows what to do with them when once accepted by the credulous faith of the mediocally-minded masses. It is actually the successive popular acceptance of the miracle by the Portuguese masses, and its later manipulation by the Vatican hierarchy for ends quite unforeseen by its original devotees, that constitutes the Fatima apparitions as the most interesting as well as important of modern miracles.

According to Fr. Gallery, the name "Fatima" derives from a captured Muslim lady of that name, who married her Christian captor during one of the interminable medieval Crusades. However, it must not be forgotten that Fatima, the only child of the Prophet Muhammed, represents the nearest equivalent of the Virgin Mary in Muslim theology; a fact noted by Fr. Gallery. Some connection between the Muslim and Christian cults is not, perhaps, impossible.

Our Lady of Moscow

In its origins, then, Fatima was a local, purely Portuguese, miracle; one that originated amongst a still medieval peasantry and one that was only reluctantly and slowly accepted by first, the Portuguese hierarchy and ultimately by Rome. As a worldly-wise institution, Holy Church is well aware that too obviously bogus miracles are apt to be eventually a liability rather than an asset. As a *bona fide* Portuguese miracle, Our Lady of Fatima, no doubt helped to promote that Catholic revival which eventually, in 1926, led to the counter-revolution that got rid of the Masonic, liberal and anti-clerical republic and (since 1928) has installed in its stead, the wholly Catholic and clerical-fascist regime of that pious ex-pupil of the Jesuits, Dr. Salazar. Thanks—at least partly—to our Lady of Fatima, Portugal is again the faithful daughter of Holy Church, as in medieval days.

However, this notable achievement of Our Lady was

not the end of this affair. For she was soon destined to fame far beyond the boundaries of Portugal and in lands of which Our Lady's original peasant audience had never even heard. Our Lady of Fatima was destined to undergo a sea-change into Our Lady of Moscow, the divine voice that warned mankind against "atheistic Communism"—in the present view of Rome, the super-heresy of this century. For Our Lady of Fatima appeared in 1917, and 1917 was the year which saw the Russian Revolution that created "atheistic Communism" as a world power. As Fr. Gallery bitterly comments: "Before 1917 the Communists were simply a handful of plotters in basements, on the run from the police and living from hand to mouth".

Twenty-One Years Later

However, 1917 *et seq.*, soon changed all that. When by 1938, twenty one years after the initial apparitions of Fatima, Lucia dos Santos, the last surviving witness of Fatima, wrote down her memories of the Vision at the command of the Bishop of Leiria (who no doubt received his orders from Rome) the world had changed—and so had Our Lady! For by 1938, atheistic Communism had become both the major rival and the chief bug-bear of the Vatican, superseding all previous heresies. Moreover, in 1938 the world was on the brink of World War II, which from one most important angle, represented the last and greatest of the Crusades: the holy war against Bolshevism. In 1938 accordingly, the Virgin assumed a new role—one far more useful to the Church: the role of the celestial prophethood of the red peril.

According to Lucia (then a nun in a convent in Coimbra) Mary, in 1917 specifically and in detail, predicted the Russian Revolution. Here is a divine voice *before* that revolution in the Summer of 1917: "If they listen to my requests, Russia will be converted and there will be peace. If not, she will scatter her errors throughout the world provoking wars and persecutions of the Church. The good will be martyred, various nations will be annihilated".

Here, clearly, Our Lady of Fatima is no longer concerned primarily with Portugal. She has now assumed a world-wide role as the prophethood of Communism: of the world-wide supreme heresy and antagonist of the Catholic Church in the mid-20th century.

The Evolution of a Miracle

In the whole course of ecclesiastical history, there can have been few better examples of the evolution of a miracle than has been the case with the apparitions in Fatima. The relevant facts will be found in Fr. Gallery's book, but I fear that its pious author would vehemently dissent from my conclusions! Born originally from the credulity of the rustic population of a still medieval land; born of primitive superstition, the miracles of Fatima, demonstrated itself to be the fittest—in the Spencerean sense—to survive amongst a crop of similar miraculous appearances. It is not after all, every day that sees the sun dance a fandango! Taken up by the Catholic Church after some initial hesitation, the miracle was first used in its land of origin to restore the traditional clerical regime to power in clerical-fascist Portugal. Dr. Salazar is probably today Portuguese dictator by grace of Our Lady of Fatima! But as time went on and the Red menace of the first world creed to advocate atheism and materialism as part of its official policy, continued to grow, Rome recognised the wider utility of the apparition which (no doubt by divine providence) had occurred in the self-same year as the origin of Communism as a world-wide force. By 1938 when Lucia wrote down her memories of 1917, Communism (with atheism in its train) was the enemy number one. So the Virgin-Prophethood of the Portuguese counter-revolution became the world-wide prophethood of

the Catholic crusade against Communism which in 1938, when Lucia's revelations were made, was upon the point of coming to a head with Hitler's crusade against Russia, with the blessing of Holy Church.

Never surely, can there have been a better example in all history of the combination of religious and of political reaction; of the way in which the Church uses religious superstition to further its drive towards world power.

The Godless University

THE BISHOP OF LEICESTER, Dr. R. R. Williams, hopes that he will "live long enough to see the University of Leicester equipped with a centre of theology so that it may no longer be the godless sister of the three other Midlands universities" (*Leicester Mercury*, 15/10/62). While not wishing the Bishop any harm, I must say that I hope he doesn't live to see it. I hope no one does, because I hope it never happens. Birmingham and Nottingham may be, as Dr. Williams claimed, "making world reputations with their theological studies and teaching" but, if so, it will only be in theological circles. Generally speaking, the worth of universities is not judged by their theological schools.

The Bishop was preaching at the annual university service in Leicester Cathedral, and he took Matthew 16, 26 as his text. A university, he said, could lose its soul by merely becoming adjusted to material progress and technological advancement, and failing to set an example to the world of altruistic devotion to duty and love of daily work. And what was true of the university, was true of the world as a whole. Man had the opportunity to gain the whole world and the universe, but could still lose his soul.

Were Dr. Williams speaking allegorically (and his references to duty and work do suggest a metaphorical interpretation of "soul") one might agree. There is a very real danger of us getting our values wrong in this status-seeking society. But it must be assumed that the words are intended to be taken more literally. For Dr. Williams, as for Jesus, losing one's soul presumably means forfeiting eternal life and—if he is an orthodox Christian (as a Church of England bishop surely must be these days)—suffering eternal damnation. That this is his intention, may be borne out by his subsequent remark that "This immense tragedy could be avoided by the observance of religion." For one can hardly take "the observance of religion" merely as setting an example to the world of "altruistic devotion to duty and love of daily work".

One shouldn't, of course, expect precision and lucidity in a sermon, and "soul" is an ambiguous term to start with. Nevertheless, Dr. Williams's unashamed use of it in different senses to suit his purposes is mischievous. This stratagem enables him to present Christianity in a wholly idealistic way. It enables him, whilst ostensibly deploring the pursuit of material gain, in fact to commend it. For what other gain could equal that of eternal life and happiness? Beside it, what are the lands and riches of the Churches of Rome and England, the estates of Clores and Cottons, or even all the wealth of the world? Mere temporal trivia!

The Bishop was clear on one point, though. There is, he said, "no such thing as neutrality in religion. To ignore religion is to give a vote against it. To institute a university without religion is to proclaim to each year of undergraduates that religion is at best a brief and personal thing". Dr. Williams really showed his worries there.

C.McC.

The Dead Sea Scrolls in English

By "AKIBA"

THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS have become an accepted part of the non-biblical material that is drawn up to explain or amplify the historical background surrounding Christian origins, and *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English* by G. Vermes (Pelican, 4s. 6d.) attempts to fill in the space that should be reserved for the non-technical, but informed general reader, who finds the subject fascinating.

In the introduction, the author points out that: "The books and articles written on the subject could fill a large library, but in the main, they have been highly technical and therefore inaccessible to the general reader. In addition, some of those expressly addressed to him have failed to convey a sufficiently clear and balanced idea of their significance. On the one hand there have been sensational and exaggerated statements to the effect that these two thousand year old manuscripts have revolutionised our knowledge of the Old Testament that they have revealed the existence of a Christ prior to Jesus thus depriving his person and teaching of all originality. On the other, a reactionary tendency to minimise their importance has over-emphasised the identity of the biblical texts with the traditional version of Scripture, and understated the impact of the sectarian writings on our understanding of the New Testament".

The author presents the actual text of these writings, but as he puts it in a note on the texts: "Translators of the Scrolls are tempted to render them either with extreme freedom at the expense of fidelity, or else literally, word for word and line for line. I have tried to avoid both these pitfalls by providing an interpretation in simple English which is at the same time faithful and intelligible".

With the helpful Introduction and some useful historical background material in three chapters: "The Community", "Religious Belief and Practice" and "Persons and Events"—the texts of the various "Rules" of the different sects do indeed become intelligible.

There are three main theories as to the precise dating of the origins of the sect and more particularly the time of the ministry of the Teacher of Righteousness, whose resemblance to the Christ of the Gospels cannot be easily overlooked.

The first theory recognises that the occurrences alluded to in the Scrolls took place in the era of the Hellenistic crisis, i.e. during the reigns of Antiochus Epiphanes and Demetrius (c. 175-160 BCE). The second is the Maccabean theory proposed by the author, which identifies the Wicked Priest with Jonathan and/or Simon. The third theory inclines to the period of the later Hasmonians (134-40 BCE) with marked preference for the reign of either Alexander Jannaeus or Hyrcanus II. Whichever of these theories is adopted, the life and ministry of the Teacher of Righteousness will fall between the years 175 and 63 BCE.

The Qumran settlement has been the subject of extensive archaeological research and excavation—and is generally believed to have been built some time during the second half of the second century BCE, on the deserted ruins of a town belonging to the ancient kings of Judah. It was here that the proto- or pre-Christian Jewish sects practised their austere monastic faith. The Rules, Hymns and Liturgical fragments brought to light fit in well with the environment in which these monastic Jews preserved their "pure" religion, undefiled by the harsh realities of a Judaism that had to submit to, or compromise with a

hated alien power. Many of the Liturgical fragments such as The Words of the Heavenly Lights and the Triumph of Righteousness provide a picture of religious activity and thought, which fills in the gaps between the Old Testament and the New. There must be literally thousands of manuscripts yet to be discovered, which will shed light on the "inter-Testamental period".

The uniqueness of both the Old and New Testament is altogether a questionable proposition now that psalms, prayers, blessings and religious practices have been found which parallel the "unique" central truth of Jewish or Christian theology and practice. Many of the newly-discovered psalms for instance, could easily be slipped into the existing text without any but the most discerning being the wiser. We have this passage for example:

I thank Thee my God, for Thou hast dealt wondrously to dust and mightily towards a creature of clay! I thank Thee, I thank Thee! What am I that thou shouldst [teach] me the council of Thy truth, and give me understanding of Thy marvellous works; that Thou shouldst lay hymns of thanksgiving with my mouth and [praise] upon my tongue, and that of my circumcised lips (Thou shouldst make) a seat of rejoicing?

The biblical commentaries that have been recovered from the Qumran caves, are also illuminating. There is the curious Genesis Apocryphon which embellishes the original Bible story, presumably to make the account more intelligible(!) or acceptable to the modernists(?) of the time. A synopsis is given in the text as follows:

The first section (Col. II), refers to the miraculous birth of Noah. His father, Lamech, suspects that his wife has consorted with one of the angels who descended from heaven and married the "daughters of men" (Gen. 6, 1-4). Her emphatic denial does not convince him and he asks his father, Methuselah, to find his own father the omniscient Enoch who lived at Parwain, the site of Paradise, in order to discover the truth from him.

Apocalyptic material which later fed the school that ended up on the Book of Revelation is also abundantly revealed in these Scrolls.

Christianity may well be faced with a crisis as deep and as profound as the 20th Congress of the CPSU as the Qumran caves continue to give up their secrets. Some of the central historical events alleged to have transpired on the Gospel account, may find an unexpected likeness hidden in an earthen pot.

Manuscripts or scrolls relating to the "reign" of Pontius Pilate or even more to the point, documents covering the Sanhedrin of the Christian era may yet be deciphered which would place the very historical basis of Christianity into the melting point. Will Christianity—or Judaism (in other contexts)—be able to fight off the truth proclaimed from the Scrolls, past, present and future—indeinitely?

BBC BROADCAST

THE BBC programme on Atheism, in the series, "What's the Idea?", will be broadcast on the Home Service on Wednesday, October 31st, at 9.30 p.m. Colin McCall, Secretary of the National Secular Society and Editor of THE FREETHINKER, will be questioned about his beliefs by Anglican Mr. John Wren-Lewis and Roman Catholic priest, Father Anthony Kenny. The programme will be live and unscripted.

This Believing World

Theologians all over the world will be glad at the splash the papers made of the Council which, with the Pope at its head, is dealing with "unity" and kindred problems at the Vatican. The *Daily Mail* (October 5th) was not alone in regarding it as "the most daring experiment in Christendom that may well write history's verdict on the Pope".

★

Once again we are having that dear old discussion—should women be allowed to wear "dog collars"? Sweden has "five fully fledged priestesses", though many people refuse to be married by them, or have their children baptised by them; and it may not surprise some people to learn that it is women who object mostly to women priests. Actually, there is nothing in the Bible against them, except from Paul who, bluntly and un-Christianlike told women to shut up in church, a very difficult thing for most of them! In any case, Congregationalists claim that they have 40 women ministers, though these do not appear to have set the Thames on fire. Will women priests ever make a name?

★

With an optimism which does credit to their Christian training, three Ulster ministers, who don't like Popery at any price, began to hand out Protestant leaflets in St. Peter's Square the day before the Vatican Council opened. The idea was that these would convert Italians to true Christianity, and the ministers were quite surprised that the Italian police stopped them. We suggest to Italian priests to go to Ulster when the celebrations in memory of the Battle of the Boyne are at their height, and do their utmost to convert Ulsterites also to true Christianity. It might well promote "unity".

★

Although, if the story of Jesus as related in the Gospels is true, "our Lord" must have been a Jew, many Christians have never taken kindly to this Bible truth. They do not like the idea that he was probably as brown as an Arab. They much prefer to think of him as a Saxon with golden hair and beard, and therefore a pure "Aryan". In the same way, we shall never see Europeans enthuse over a God who is a negro; and so we can quite understand the Lord Chamberlain's office banning a sketch in an American review at the Comedy Theatre because Almighty God is portrayed as black. As most Christians and Humanists are against any colour bar (to their credit), why should there be any objection whatever to represent God as a full-blooded negro? We give it up.

★

The Archbishop of Canterbury has been interviewed by the *Catholic Herald*—the first time the head of the English Church has ever given such an interview to a Catholic journal. Dr. Ramsey bluntly said that what he found "irritating" was the way Roman Catholics so "contemptuously" rubbed in that "they are the Church" and "we are not". He must have been listening to Dr. J. Heenan, the "Archbishop" of Liverpool, and to some of our "distinguished" converts to Rome. It has always astonished us (though we are outside the pale) how very meekly these days the Catholic claim has been met by Anglicans.

★

What Dr. Ramsey wants is to "come together" in a really great effort in the field of "apologetics", that is, lectures "on the fundamentals of belief in which both Anglicans and Roman Catholics"—or as Dr. Heenan would say, Roman Catholics and Anglicans—"could take part". Well, why don't they? It should prove a glorious occasion if they could fully agree for example on the place of the

Pope in the Christian world. And on celibacy, and the only correct version of the Bible, and who should administer Vatican and Anglican "funds". But no doubt the road leading to such things has no ending.

★

That once all-believing Bible sect, the Christadelphians, is not dead after all. Except for fleeting glimpses of a "veteran" here and there (just like remnants of the Joanna Southcott believers) we seem never to meet any these days, but, a "double column spread" appeared the other day in the *Daily Mail* advertising a "Back to the Bible" campaign. And if you do go back, you will learn "What God has done, what he has guaranteed to do, and what he is eager to do for your future happiness". It's all in the "Word of God" and Christadelphians will heartily welcome you back to the fold to re-learn the Precious Truth.

★

Where Christadelphians almost always score is the ease with which they can overwhelm you with texts. These texts are so numerous and so infallible, that even convinced Freethinkers find it by no means easy to ward off the terrific barrage. Any full trained Christadelphian will produce 18,573 texts while you may be fumbling for one. The campaign they are now initiating is to induce you to go "back to the Bible"—but they seem to avoid the holy snag in this. Which Bible? If they depend on the Authorised Version these days, it is admittedly so full of mistakes that hundreds of "new" translations have been made since it appeared and nobody yet knows which is the "true" one.

A Statue and a Legend

We print below an extract from *The Queen's Mate*, a new book by Oswell Blakeston, which is being published next month by Scorpion Press at 12s. 6d., with a cover design by Lotte Reiniger, creator of silhouette films for both cinema and TV.

OUTSIDE THE TOWN, there was a wayside shrine containing a statue of a man. Alongside, an old gentleman held out a little statue of a woman, a cheap reproduction of some tasteless variant of the madonna with child. Would the young men perhaps like to buy the holy image?

"Oh no," said Paul harshly, "I never thought much of that madonna and child: she has a mantle and the babe is naked. She must have been a very thoughtless woman. But tell me what is this other one?"

He indicated the large statue in the grotto.

"You would like to hear the story we tell about him?" the old man leered. "He was our hermit. He lived on this mountain before the town was built, and he fed off wild herbs and went without clothes for a penance. He wore only a straw hat to protect his poor head from the cruel rays of the sun. Then one day a holy woman climbed the mountain. She came to meditate and pray. She passed our hermit who was gathering grass for his saintly meal. Our saint was horrified, for he was stark naked. He quickly covered his nobility with his bunch of herbs, but then he remembered he was wearing his hat. He put up his hands to raise his hat to a lady. It was an unusual hat made of many scraps and it required two hands to lift it. And—and, gentlemen, this is the miracle of our saint—the bunch of herbs remained in position, miraculously suspended in the air and modestly covering our saint's nobility".

The old man's mouth cracked into a demented smile: and, without warning, he threw the tawdry little statue, which he had been offering for sale, to the ground. It broke into shards of painted plaster.

"A cheap thing," he said, "unworthy. I'm glad you did not buy it."

THE FREETHINKER

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

Details of membership of the National Secular Society may be obtained from the General Secretary, 103 Borough High Street, S.E.1. 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 (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

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Tuesday, October 30th, 7.30 p.m.: W. J. OUSBY,

"Hypnosis and Self-Hypnosis".

Ilford Humanist Group (Friends Meeting House, Cleveland Road, Ilford), Monday, October 29th, 7.45 p.m.: Recording of Discussion between Bertrand Russell and Father Copleston.

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, October 28th, 6.30 p.m.: FILM, "Garden Birds".

Marble Arch Branch NSS (The Carpenter's Arms, Seymour Place, London, W.1), Sunday, October 28th, 7.30 p.m.: ADRIAN

PIGOTT, "Impressions of Three Visits to Russia".

North Staffordshire Humanist Group (Guildhall, High Street, Newcastle-under-Lyme), Friday, October 26th, 7.15 p.m.: A

MEETING.

Nottingham Branch NSS (Co-operative Educational Centre, Heathcote Street entrance), Sunday, October 28th, 7 p.m.: D. H. TRIBE, "Secularism and the Menace of Fascism".

Notes and News

TWO EXHIBITIONS are to be held in London to mark the publication of Oswell Blakeston's latest book *The Queen's Mate* (Scorpion Press, 12s 6d), from which the delightful extract "A Statue and a Legend" opposite is taken. Silhouettes by Lotte Reiniger (who has designed the cover of the book) will be shown in the Foyer Gallery, Everyman Cinema, Hampstead during November, while "Crystal Graphs and Other Paintings" by Mr. Blakeston may be seen at the New Vision Centre, 4 Seymour Place, Marble Arch in mid-November.

WE ALSO print this week another interesting translation by John A. McKay from the well-known Swedish magazine, *Folket i Bild*. Mr. McKay, who translated "A Lift to Madrid" for us (August 17th) from the same magazine, is a former BBC European editor, language supervisor and broadcaster, and was an official translator at the Nuremberg War Criminals' trials.

MR. WILLIAM RUSSELL, Hon. Secretary of the Manchester Branch of the National Secular Society, reports a most

encouraging opening meeting to the winter season in the Wheatsheaf Hotel, High Street. As an addition to the syllabus, Mr. Russell is organising a visit to the Godlee Observatory, Manchester and already has a number of members interested. Will any other Freethinkers in the Manchester area who would like to go please get in touch with Mr. Russell at once. His address is 27 King William Street, Salford 5.

THE TIME is surely opportune for a concerted attack on our absurd and anachronistic theatre censorship. The press on the whole has come out strongly against the Lord Chamberlain's cuts and threats to the American satirical review, *The Premise*, and we hope MPs will do the same. In this connection, a little prompting from constituents will not come amiss, while Londoners can also give direct support to the show at the Comedy Theatre.

THE FRENCH-CANADIAN League of Parents for the Defence of Education (President Mme. Armand Sauvé) organised a picket at the Jacques Cartier Normal School in Montreal on October 13th, in protest against the sacking of three teachers by the Catholic Committee of the Council of Education. The teachers, who had spoken out against the school's administration, were accused of a "flagrant abuse of authority" and were found "lacking in prudence, measure, and judgment". The League pointed out that the Catholic Committee "has never given teachers academic liberty", and called on the Government to take over supervision of its actions until the report of a Royal Commission on Education is submitted. Trade Union support for the picket has been promised.

"I CAN ONLY ASSUME that many people in this Parish are just plain godless". A perfectly justifiable assumption on the part of the Rev. Ernest Pitman, vicar of Emmanuel Church, West Dulwich, London, after receiving only 22 replies to the 550 questionnaires he had sent out asking, "Why don't you come to Church? What is wrong with it? Do you want a new vicar?" Of the 22 replies, three wanted a new vicar, saying Mr. Pitman wasn't "high" enough, and there were complaints that he didn't clean the Church hall and didn't come out strongly enough against the royal tiger shoot (*South London Press*, 5/10/62). Mr. Pitman wanted to hear from "the people who didn't come to church, but "They didn't even reply".

ON OCTOBER 5th, we referred to the *Chicago Tribune's* refusal of an advertisement for Emmett McLoughlin's *Crime and Immorality in the Catholic Church*, which we reviewed on April 13th. Lyle Stuart, the courageous New York publisher of the book, now tells us that it has been given "the complete silent treatment by the press". Newspapers will neither review it nor accept advertising for it, for fear of Roman Catholic circulation or advertising boycotts. Even the *New York Times* has refused advertising or, indeed, any mention of the book. Throughout the nation, says Mr. Stuart, a campaign is under way to vilify the book's author and suppress its contents. Yet it has already sold 18,000 copies. Mr. McLoughlin, who is known to many English readers for his *People's Padre*, and whose *Letter to Roman Catholic Priests* is available from the Pioneer Press in quantities of a dozen for half-a-crown, has also recorded his *Confessions of an Ex-Roman Catholic Priest* on three discs.

IF ANY Freethinking couple is interested in adopting a baby, will they please write to the Editor.

Can Jesus Cure Cancer?

Translated by John A. McKay, from the Swedish magazine, *Folket i Bild* (October 10th, 1962).

WHY DOCTORS? By the laying-on of hands in God's name everything is cured: cancer, growths, amputated legs . . . This is the message proclaimed by the pastors of a new Pentecostal Movement: "Maranata". Recently they appeared in Smaland with orgies in faith-healing and a God-inspired Babel of tongues!

Gunnar E. Sandgren, a young author who belongs to a Freethinking milieu, has recently published two sensational novels. As a reporter he attended a "Maranata" meeting in Jönköping. The local newspaper which he represents refused to publish his article. But you may now read it:

Sunday evening and eight hundred people are waiting in the Jönköping High School building. Most of them are curious and hungry for a little scandal, but others are filled with a child-like faith. They consider "Maranata"—the free Pentecostal Spiritual Awakening—and Pastors Bergagard, Warheim, Lindberg and Carlson as the sacred anointers—the Sensory World's Expression of God's Gift of Grace and Healing by Faith!

All the meetings are well advertised, and an anointed singer gets them going by means of an accordion, castanets, guitars, maracas and tambourines (not to mention scrubbing boards). The meeting is "hotted" up by an ever-increasing rate of hand-clapping, and calls to "Jesus, dear Jesus, Amen, Hallelujah". Amidst waves of appeals, thunderbolts from the outer spaces of eternity bursting (metaphorically) through the roof of the hall, the Great God himself is now called upon to perform in Jönköping. Donald Bergagard—called "The Chief of the Faithful", mounts the rostrum and declares that "Great things are expected that evening", "something really big". He is well-groomed and clean-limbed, a good-looking young man with excellent vocal chords. When he prays a fresh wave of excitement breaks out in a storm of enraptured voices.

More music, more off-beat music! Amongst the anointed singers there are many women wearing high hats. One of them has a vivid green hat, pale blue cardigan and red shoes. A weak little face peeps from under the large hat. She is singing shrilly and, clapping her hands; she gazes into space. However the people in the hall do not respond. A feeling of exhaustion seems already to be setting in. This is where the row of pastors on the platform take over. One of them: Pastor Carlson, a bright, red-cheeked young Northman, begins to talk "in many tongues". A hard, stuttering monotone emanates from his mouth. Donald Bergagard speaks—not much—and strums on his instrument. He looks very determined, like a warrior sizing up the position before the battle begins!

A prayer-mat is produced: a cloth purporting to contain faith-healing properties. It is laid with slow deliberation upon the body of the patient. The parsons stand around him with their arms entwined. They call out and shout in a "Babel of many tongues" over the cloth. After this all are aware that God himself has commenced working through their faith, curing growths and making grow again limbs that have been amputated in operations. He changes life and health by means of a "telephone call" between the anointed and the sick. God is alive. To God everything is possible. Why call in doctors? All they do is fumble, mess about and make experiments. They never get to the root of sicknesses. Only the laying on of hands in Jesus's name drives out the evil. Come if you have a pain in your stomach, heart, breast, head or legs.

Call Pastor Bergagard. And he requests the sick to raise their hands. Nobody does so. He then asks that all who believe in Jesus should raise their hands. Nearly everyone does so. Pastor Carlson preaches. He speaks of the helplessness of science in dealing with cancer. What (he asks) causes cancer? Doctors do not know, but I (says Pastor Carlson) declare that Cancer is a Demon from the depths of Hell. He is a Creature of Satan, which proves that Satan himself dwells within the human organism. The only cure for Cancer is the name of Jesus. Only when one of God's anointed lays his hand on the sick spot and admonishes the Demon to withdraw, can the Cancer be cured. Then the Demon dies. What can the doctor do? Nothing against Jesus.

A sick person comes apologetically forward and begs for faith-healing. He stands grinning and unsure of himself before the anointed singers, musicians and pastors. Pastor Carlson takes a firm grip on his head and neck and speaks to him "in many tongues". When he loosens his grip the man has convulsions, he is seized with a kind of hiccough and shakes and trembles. The audience stand up and stare at him. Now the tempo of the music increases, the voices become ever shriller and the woman in the green hat perspires profusely. Her eyes gaze far out into space, but her hands continue to clap indefatigably. What at first had seemed to be merely excitement has now become hard work!

"We fish for souls for Jesus" shouts Pastor Bergagard. He goes down among the audience together with his colleagues. He passes from bench to bench, taking a hand and asking questions every now and then. He has a soft slinky gait. The meeting begins to break up. The audience realises that they dare not ask to meet the one they have really come to see. They dare not risk exchanging a word with the "Chief".

Outside on the benches the enthusiasm of the Faithful has now died down. But a woman who had come into the meeting after it had begun, shouts in a loud shrill voice: "The Lord says . . . The Lord says . . . I am the Lord thy God, says the Lord . . .". But a wave of off-beat music, tambourines, scrubbing boards, maracas, piano accordions drowns out whatever the Lord was going to say. A sidesman or "brother" is busy counting the collection!

Everyman III

EVERYMAN III, which sailed from Gravesend on September 26th for Leningrad and Moscow, to protest against nuclear tests, is reported to have been well received at her ports of call so far. At Ostend, the crew was greeted by the Mayor, and at Kiel by the Lord Mayor and the local MP. It comprises men of different creeds and none, among the latter, Barnaby Martin of the National Secular Society. At Amsterdam, he was informed by a police inspector that foreigners were not allowed to speak on political matters. Having replied that he would speak on matters concerning humanity and that it would be for others to decide whether this was illegal, Mr. Martin addressed the meeting uninterrupted. The boat was due to leave Stockholm for Leningrad on October 15th. Contributions towards the expenses of the voyage may be sent to Everyman III, 6 Endsleigh Street, London, W.C.1.

Catholics v Catholics

THE DUTCH association of Roman Catholic intellectuals, named after St. Adelbert, held its annual meeting at Rotterdam during the last days of September and, according to the October 1st and 3rd issues of the Catholic newspaper, *Volkscrant*, one of the speakers, Father J. van Kilsdonk of the Society of Jesus, spoke for "those disheartened and disillusioned people in whom the Spirit has been extinguished, because they have ceased to believe that Church leadership, here and in far Rome, will ever show the slightest comprehension" of contemporary reality.

The Father is moderator of the Catholic university students in Amsterdam, who had set their hopes of a more modern Church outlook on the teachings of Father Teilhard de Chardin. Hopes that were dashed by leaders "whose chilliness has the appearance of docility or is the result of their desire to make a career . . .". That so little criticism is heard in Italy and the Latin American countries, may indicate, said the Father, that in these very countries the dissatisfied intellectual feels less attached to the Church. "Many people think that the Roman Curia . . . forms the great obstacle to a sound dialogue".

The horrible crisis raging in the world of the young Catholic intelligentsia which, the Father went on, results in the loss of faith of many young scientists in Holland and elsewhere, "seems to be brought about by the spiritual terror which, in the opinion of many Christians, finds expression in the language and the decisions of the Curia". "Age, not competence, is the principle underlying the division of responsibility in this ecclesiastical government".

"The Theological Committee [one of the committees that was preparing for the Council of Rome] bears too close a resemblance to the Upper Congregation of the Holy Office, charged with the ballast of its past. The members have given no indication whatsoever of awareness of the immense amount of work done by Roman Catholic theology during the last thirty years. The leaders of the Theological Committee are not worthy of comparison with those of the corresponding committee who prepared Vaticanum I [the Council of 1870]".

Father van Kilsdonk also referred to a "coarse sort of authoritative behaviour in connection with birth-ethics" at a meeting of Netherlands Catholic physicians. "All the lecturers were carefully selected", he said, "yet even then the Cardinal made some changes", while censorship beforehand prevented discussion of original sin.

The Cardinal Archbishop of Utrecht has remarked that Father van Kilsdonk's criticisms were dishonest.

A. M. VAN DER GIEZEN.

BEGINNING OF ETERNITY

Dr. Harry M. Orlinsky, editor-in-chief of a committee of Bible scholars who worked eight years on the project [of a new Jewish Bible], said better understanding of the original Hebrew eliminates the inaccurate implications that eternity began when God made the earth.—*Daily Express* (12/10/62)

When did it begin then?

ABORTION LAW REFORM ASSOCIATION

A PUBLIC MEETING will be held in the Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, W.C.1, at 7.30 p.m. on Tuesday, November 6th, 1962. Admission is Free.

Speakers:

KENNETH ROBINSON, M.P.

Subject: Abortion Law Reform in Parliament.

Chairman: Professor W. C. W. Nixon, M.D., F.R.C.S., F.R.C.O.G.

DR. PETER DARBY.

Subject: The Effects of Legal Abortion—Warsaw Conference, 1962.

Chairman: Dr. Glanville Williams, F.B.A.

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

WEDNESDAY, October 17th, 1962: Present: Mr. F. A. Ridley (Chair), Mrs. Ebury, Mrs. Venton, Messrs. Barker, Borsman, Cleaver, Ebury, Hornibrook, McIlroy, Miller, Mills, Shannon, the Treasurer (Mr. Griffiths) and the Secretary. Apology from Mr. Tribe. Mr. Ebury handed over £5 to the Building Fund, on behalf of North London Branch. The Financial Statement was approved. Marble Arch Branch financial statement was also before the meeting. New members were admitted to Birmingham, Manchester and Marble Arch Branches, which with Individual members made 23 in all. Correspondence was reported from the Archbishop of Canterbury who said: "There is a great deal of difference between people like you who accept moral principles and seek the truth and the completely materialist atheism derived from Marx . . ."; and from the National Council for the Unmarried Mother and Her Child, stating that the staff of the Council "does not make a practice of ascribing a particular religion to an unmarried mother who says that she does not belong to a Church". The Humanist Council was holding a meeting to explain its Freedom from Hunger Campaign projects at the Conway Hall, Monday, October 29th, 7.15 p.m. The National Council for Civil Liberties had written to the Ministry of Works and the London County Council regarding selling of literature at Hyde Park. The next meeting was fixed for Wednesday, November 14th, 1962.

Donald McGill

"WHO," asked George Orwell, in one of his finest essays, "does not know the 'comics' of the cheap stationers' windows, the penny or twopenny coloured post cards with their endless succession of fat women in tight bathing-dresses and their crude drawing and unbearable colours, chiefly hedge-sparrow's egg tint and Post Office red?" That was written twenty-one years ago, so the prices may have gone up. I even have the feeling that the cards are less popular now, but this may only mean that I myself am out of touch—"not with it"! I hope that is the explanation, because I agree with Orwell that they filled a need; that they satisfied the Sancho Panza side in us. They were, he said, "a sort of saturnalia, a harmless rebellion against virtue". And, in a society "which is still basically Christian they naturally concentrate on sex jokes".

Orwell associated the cards especially with the name of Donald McGill, the most prolific and best of the artists in the genre. On October 15th, in a tiny obituary notice at the foot of a column, *The Guardian* reported that:

Mr. Donald McGill, the artist whose comic postcards have been sold at almost all British seaside resorts for the past 50 years, died in a London hospital on Saturday, aged 87. At the time of his death he was artistic director of a firm of fine art publishers which publishes postcards.

That "Mr." is quite out of place. And while those few lines may be enough for the artistic director of a firm of fine art publishers, it seems totally inadequate for the immortal Donald McGill. C.McC.

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WANTED.—English girl correspondent in early 20's, for young French Freethinker.—Box 910 B.

CORRESPONDENCE

THE "CHURCH TIMES"

Far from agreeing with Mr. Stanley in that all not purely atheistic arguments should be banned from THE FREETHINKER, I feel that the publication of Theistic and Christian arguments should be strongly encouraged so as to give us a chance to reply and expose the errors of Christian apologetics. I would even go much further and say that Christian organisations should be contacted and challenged to expound their views and criticisms in our journal. I am thinking e.g. of the Jehovah's Witnesses who, to judge from "Without Comment" on page 320, may possibly be prepared to join in a debate.

Christianity is based on "faith", i.e. intuitive or irrational thinking. Christians are therefore very reluctant to come out of their irrational fortress into the open battlefield of debate, but if they could be induced to do so the main difficulty would have been overcome, since, if the right arguments are used, their intellectual defeat will be bound to be certain.

In any case, I believe we render a better service to the cause of Freethought by offering a rational refutation of the arguments we disagree with than by merely displaying intolerance.

G. WAPPENHANS (Barcelona).

[This correspondence is now closed.—ED.]

DESIGN

The remarks in Robert H. Scott's article about the Design argument suggest (to me) other arguments about Design or otherwise in the universe.

We know that the universe keeps going only through a number of rules being observed; a planet must go round a sun, we must be at a certain distance from a sun to get the necessary heat and light and so on. Now if the universe depended on an all-powerful Being, surely this would be unnecessary? Planets could keep going without a sun; heat and light could be supplied free; and so on.

Lucretius said something very similar centuries ago.

I. S. Low.

AN ATHEIST SPEAKS

Very many thanks indeed for transcript of Robert H. Scott's US Radio Broadcast. I have never before read a so ably condensed and objectively put statement of what seems to be the atheist's position.

E. NEWBOLD.

[The above is typical of many letters received.—ED.]

BBC BROADCAST

It is with great pleasure that I note the announcement of Colin McCall's broadcast on October 31st. This could be a major breakthrough for Freethought. We should each one of us, after hearing the broadcast, write to the BBC congratulating them and demanding more of the same stuff. Letters to the Editor do have an effect provided there are enough of them.

C. H. HAMMERSLEY.

BIBLE DEBTS

ON OCTOBER 12th, the Glasgow *Evening Citizen* contained an informative article on "Debt" by a legal expert, pointing out that, in our so-called affluent society, there were 48,000 cases dealt with in the Glasgow Small Debt Court last year, the highest ever figure. And it included a statement by Mr. Tom Soutar, sheriff-clerk in charge of the court, that: "Bibles are the most common cause of debt—with vacuum cleaners a close second".

During the past year or so, there have been many salesmen (spivs?) going from door-to-door in Glasgow, selling expensively-bound editions of God's Word to a gullible public. Judging by this report, many Christians have been buying them on HP and have not completed their payments. The Bible distributors have therefore had to take legal action to get their money. The law in Scotland forbids imprisonment for debt so, as the *Citizen* writer said, "if you haven't paid for your Bible or vacuum cleaner, at least you won't get jailed". But this article, with its banner headline, "These Christians in Our Debt Courts", should shake the Christianity-morality argument. Fancy getting Jesus on the never-never and then refusing to pay! JOHN W. TELFER.

BUDDHIST ATHEIST

As an occasional but interested reader, I would respectfully point out to the writer of "This Believing World" (12/10/62) that all Buddhists are not necessarily Theists. The Buddha did not proclaim the existence of a Supreme Being, it was the later breakaway denominations who found it necessary to postulate a God. Theravada Buddhists are in fact Atheists. From the Buddhist angle your reference to "Champions of the Design Argument" appears to indicate that the Buddha imagined a Design. In fact he always stressed the lack of Design. Thus the First Truth that existence entails a certain degree of suffering.

M. GILBERT.

SO THERE!

I am a Christian, admittedly of the type of which many of my fellow Christians would say "not quite sound", and my non-believing friends would call "broad-minded"—a sort of half-breed!

I really enjoy your magazine and find the articles on the whole most stimulating, with one exception—"This Believing World". It is not the subject matter that is offensive to me—because no doubt much of what is written is true—but the style of writing and the childish manner of composition. Honestly, at times one can imagine the author sitting at a desk, sucking a lollipop, and on completion of the column, sticking out his or her tongue, and saying "So there!". (Mrs.) O. J. CHILDS.

MARIOLATRY

Just a tale from Bishop Burnet's *History of His Own Times*, which needs no comment. During the wars of Queen Anne, the capture of Gibraltar was proving most difficult and the issue was in doubt. So, relates the Bishop, "some bold men ventured to go ashore in a place where it was not thought possible to climb up the rocks, yet they succeeded in it. When they got up, they saw all the women of the town were come out to a chapel there, to implore the Virgin's protection. They seized on them, and that contributed not a little to dispose those in the town to surrender. The Prince of Hesse, with the mariners that were on board the fleet, possessed himself of the place, and they were furnished out of the stores with everything that was necessary".

L. EBURY.

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