

The Freethinker

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EVERY NOW AND THEN READERS, old and new, ask me to solve some of their anti-Christian difficulties, quite unaware that they have been discussed in these columns over the years a number of times. It is not of course their fault that they do not know this, and therefore I hope those other readers who know the facts will not mind if I go over some of the old arguments again.

First, there is the question of Lourdes. The Catholic Truth Society has published quite a number of pamphlets about the now famous shrine; but a reader has sent me the one the CTS published in 1958 to commemorate the centenary of the first appearance to Bernadette of the Virgin Mary when, it may be remembered, she spoke perfect French, and later told the child, that she was "the Immaculate Conception". The writer of this pamphlet is Dr. Noel C. Hypher and, naturally, he believes, if not in all the "miracles", as a good Catholic in nearly all.

Lourdes

The chief point that struck me, however, was his manifest reluctance to fill his little work with accounts of the numerous miracles which at one time took place at Lourdes and only occur these days very rarely. As Dr. Thérèse and Dr. Guy Valot point out in their book, *Lourdes and Illusion*, for every 200 pilgrims in 1858, there was one cure, and the cures became fewer and fewer so that there was in 1900 one cure only for every 2,000 pilgrims, and in 1949 one cure only for every million pilgrims. Most of the miracles took place in the last century, when so long as you were a Catholic you were ready to swallow anything. The Church always got out of any difficulty, that is, when a miracle at Lourdes was *not* a miracle, by protesting that these "cures" were not "dogmas"; and therefore a true Catholic could believe or not believe as he liked.

Dr. Hypher picks out in his book five "authenticated" cases which he claims as miracles, though there is very little genuine evidence for any of them.

Take the way he treats the "cure" or "miracle" of Marie Baillie who went to Lourdes in an advanced stage of tubercular peritonitis. She was so ill that her nurses "begged her not to go". She suffered horribly all the way, and "she herself doubted if she could get there alive". The "cure" of Marie is told in great detail by the world-famous doctor, Alexis Carrel, a Nobel Prize winner for medical research, and the author of some best sellers, in his last book, *A Journey to Lourdes*. What better authority could one have?

"Witness"

It all looks absolutely convincing until we discover that the famous cure took place in 1903—noted by Dr. Hypher—but he does not tell us *when* Carrel published his *Journey*. Well, *A Journey to Lourdes* was not published until *after* Carrel's death in 1949, and it is not unfair to ask why? If he was impressed by the miracle of Marie Baillie's "cure" why did he not say so years before? In

any case, his *Journey* is written as a kind of romance, for he changed his own name to Lerrac and Marie's to Ferrand. As Dr. Valot relevantly points out, Carrel waited 46 years before seeing "the finger of God" in the case. Carrel appears almost all his life to have been haunted by the "Supernormal", and he was certainly a "mystic". But the real point to note is that there are aspects of Carrel's witness to the "miracle" which makes

one either contest the cure or his competence to write about it. These points are not referred to by Dr. Hypher.

Then there is the case of Vion-Dury who was miraculously cured of blindness. He went blind in 1883, and

his doctor, Dr. Dor, claimed he was "incurable". Later, when Vion-Dury was "cured", Dr. Dor admitted that he made a mistake, and would never again say anything was "incurable". Dr. Valot quotes Dr. Merlin writing in 1948 in *Les Cahiers Laennec* that,

the observations concerning maladies of the eyes miraculously cured at Lourdes were not conducted with all the strictness necessary; for the documents are old, dating from before 1914. They never cure so quickly as organic maladies. The cures are never final.

and so on.

In Vion-Dury's case, the late Joseph McCabe (in *The Lourdes Miracles*) insists that there was no medical evidence whatever "at the time" of any miraculous cure which is supposed to have taken place *seven* years after Dr. Dor's certificate.

Dr. Hypher gives the case of "Catherine Lapere" (her name is given by Dr. Valot as Lapeyre) who had a cancerous tongue and was cured in 1887. Two photos "before and after" are shown to prove her cure, but Dr. Valot contemptuously rejects them. The first, he claims, was taken "before the celestial intervention but not before the surgical intervention".

Modern Cases

The two more modern cases are those of Jeanne Fretel (1938-48) and the Englishman, Jack Traynor, who was injured with a shrapnel wound near Antwerp in 1914. Traynor claimed that he was cured after attacks of epilepsy and atrophied muscles in 1923. Dr. Valot quotes a Catholic doctor—he gives no name here for obvious reasons—as saying, "I knew Traynor personally and the facts concerning him have been greatly exaggerated". That, you may think, is not much to go on. Unfortunately—and inevitably—vagueness, lack of information are characteristics of Lourdes "miracle" cures, even the most documented ones. Take the Jeanne Fretel case, for instance.

Dr. D. J. West, author of *Eleven Lourdes Miracles* (Duckworth 1957) had access to the Lourdes dossier, which also contained full clinical notes from the Hôtel Dieu at Rennes, where Jeanne Fretel was treated, and he tells us that the diagnosis of tuberculous peritonitis rested "entirely upon clinical impressions". "The absence of any objective bacteriological evidence of tuberculosis in a case in which—presuming the diagnosis to be correct—such

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

Two Mysteries

By H. CUTNER

evidence could have been readily obtained strikes one as curious", he says. "It is not at all in conformity with modern clinical practice to deal with a patient as a hopeless tuberculous invalid and to ignore all other possible diagnoses when no objective evidence of specific tuberculous infection is available".

Dr. Debroise of Rennes, endeavoured to explain away the absence of diagnostic tests, and Dr. West comments:

If these statements do give a true picture of medical methods in certain parts of France, one can only comment that it is highly regrettable from the point of view of the investigator of unusual cures—and perhaps even more regrettable from the point of view of the sick patient.

"On the information given", says Dr. West, "*no one could feel much confidence in the diagnosis*" (my italics). Various diagnoses are consistent with the history of the case, but were apparently not taken into consideration. Dr. West therefore concludes:

On the unsatisfactory, jumbled and occasionally inconsistent information available no definite scientific statement can be made about Jeanne Fretel's condition. She was apparently very ill . . . Tuberculosis? Ulcerative colitis? Or simply gross hysteria? Because the hospital records are so incomplete and the Lourdes Bureau investigations so superficial one cannot arrive at a certain conclusion. This case seems potentially most remarkable; it is a tragedy that information is so lacking.

This, remember, is one of Dr. Hypher's "authenticated" cases. The reader may now judge the value of Catholic claim for miracle cures at Lourdes.

The Holy Shroud

Another pamphlet sent me deals with the "Holy" Shroud of Turin, which appears to have been kept strangely hidden away. Nobody—or at least very few people—bothered about it until 1898, when it was photographed by a Signor Pia. He discovered that the image on it was really a "negative" and photographing it made it into a "positive" thus making clear that the face looked like the current paintings or drawings—more or less—of Jesus!

According to the writer of the pamphlet, the Rev. L. D. Fox, the historians then came on the scene and showed that the Shroud had a history which could be traced as far back as the 14th century, though "before that", its history "is full of gaps and conjectures". But that did not daunt Catholics. What they do not know, says Dr. Fox, "they can guess". So it was not difficult to guess quite a lot, back to the Crusades when the Holy Shroud was found in Constantinople. But "when exactly it was brought to Constantinople from Jerusalem we do not know". The simple easy way in which Jerusalem is put in here has my unbounded admiration. For obviously, if the Shroud really covered "Our Lord's" body, it *must* have come from Jerusalem, though there is not a scrap of evidence that it did.

The picture on the Shroud has been so publicised, that most people have seen it. How this picture was done neither I nor anybody in the world can know without subjecting it to careful examination. We do not know if the original was a "positive" which turned into a negative. We know literally nothing about it, though Dr. Fox does tell us "the image is not man-made"!

There is not a scrap of evidence that the Shroud ever covered anybody—and, speaking as an artist as well as a photographer, I am compelled to say that no matter what "emanations" or blood could come from a dead body, the shroud covering it could not show hard clear lines—as this one does—but patches at the most.

Dr. Fox falls back on the "experts" who are sure that the image was not "painted"; and the threads of the Shroud show "no trace of any pigment". Thus, here is a "mystery", and one that can only be explained by a miracle. There is no other explanation! It reminds me

of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who saw Houdini "walk" through a brick wall. The only explanation of such a "miracle" was that Houdini turned himself into a spirit, walked through the wall, and then "materialised" back into his old body. Nothing made Doyle change—not even the express declaration by Houdini that it was a very simple trick.

Obviously, whoever was responsible for the Shroud took good care to make it look "authentic" in details, and to say these details "prove" its authenticity is just nonsense. Pope Pius XI however settled the matter once and for all by declaring in 1936 that the Shroud is still "mysterious, but certainly not the work of any human hand".

For Freethinkers, a Catholic "mystery" means nothing at all. The Holy Shroud was, no doubt whatever, made up some time in the Middle Ages, and has the same authenticity as the specimens of the Virgin's milk or her chemise which are still with us, or for that matter, the 1,965,320 or so pieces of the Cross of Jesus still in existence.

Catholic Crisis in Latin America

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC Church of Latin America is in trouble. No stranger to challenges, it faces an unprecedented one today. Before most Church members now alive are dead, there will be as many Catholics in Latin America as in the rest of the world combined—or there will be few, if any, Latin Americans left in the Church.

These two wildly extreme possibilities are accepted with complete conviction by important elements of the Latin-American hierarchy . . . "The problems facing the Church in Latin America must have priority over all others", says Auxiliary Archbishop Dom Helder Camara of Rio de Janeiro, vice-president of Latin American bishops. "It is indispensable for the sake of all Christianity. A continent that is Catholic in name must be made Catholic in fact. There is grave danger that the people of Latin America may cease to be Catholic or even Christian".

Latin America's astonishing rate of growth magnifies this challenge to its traditional Church. Today, one third of the world Catholic population lives in the area—about 200,000,000 members. Within 35 or 40 years, half of all Catholics may be found there—an incredible total of 600,000,000. But recent political developments underline an alternate possibility. Many—perhaps even most—of those 600,000,000 could be outside the Church entirely if some groups in each country reach their obvious goal.

—Look (USA), October 9th, 1962.

BBC BROADCAST

BY ALL ACCOUNTS, the BBC "What's the Idea?" broadcast on Atheism on October 31st, came over quite well, allowing for the necessary limitations of the programme itself: half-an-hour unscripted and, apart from the brief opening statement, entirely dependent on the questions asked. A number of listeners felt as we did, that rather irrelevant aspects of the educational question were introduced and pursued too long, but by and large, Freethinkers who have expressed their opinions seem to have been satisfied. Colin McCall would particularly like to express his gratitude for the many messages of goodwill he has received from people in all branches of the movement. Especially encouraging have been the messages of support from representatives of the Ethical Union and the Rationalist Press Association, which move us to suggest that the time may be ripe for further approaches to the BBC by the Humanist Council.

Mark Twain on Christianity

By JACK RICE

A NEW MARK TWAIN BOOK, *Letters from the Earth*, will be published this month [in the USA] and probably will make Samuel L. Clemens, alias Mark Twain and dead for 52 years, an author on the best-seller list. Some readers are certain to resent Clemens being so safely dead because their righteous itch to horsewhip the writer will be frustrated. Clemens planned it that way.

Something he did not plan on is publication of the notes he wrote in the margins of a two-volume work by William E. H. Lecky, *The History of European Morals*. The books are a Twain scholar's prize and the scholar who guards them is Chester L. Davis of Perry, Mo., a successful man as an engineer, lawyer and all-purpose promoter of Mark Twain. Davis is secretary of the Mark Twain Research Foundation.

Clemens underscored, bracketed, red-pencilled and annotated passages, paragraphs and pages in the *Morals*, making the two volumes of that work resemble a partial blueprint from *Letters from the Earth*.

It is difficult to open either book at random and not see a mark or note made by Clemens. The first note I found read, "Christianity, both North and South, was totally dumb as regards our slavery. It has always been a coward. It has always followed reform processions, it has never led one".

Clemens's handwriting is distinctive, flowing and fast. It is not meticulous handwriting in copy-book style but it is easy to read even in the cramped spaces of the margins of Lecky's *Morals*. One note in Vol. 1 starts at the lower left of a left-hand page, runs vertically on the margin as most of Clemens's notes do, but is written in pencil. Clemens used a pen, most often. Lecky was writing of the influence had by the doctrine of Purgatory upon European morals.

Clemens wrote in the margin, "Christ descended into Purgatory and the only reason he ever got out alive was that the extradition tax had not been instituted. He hadn't a penny of his own, he hadn't a friend who had a penny. If he gets in there again in similar circumstances, he will stay there".

(The uncapitalised "he" was a standard Clemens style when the pronoun referred either to God or to Jesus Christ.)

The previously-quoted note by Clemens, on Christianity's role as a follower in reform movements, was inspired by Lecky's comments upon slavery in the Roman Empire during the early Christian period. Clemens was relatively subtle in his detestation of slavery, as expressed in *Huckleberry Finn*. He is savage in his marginal notes in Lecky:

"There was no Christian law against separation of slave families in our South", he noted at the bottom of one page, and beside a Lecky statement that "The chastity of female slaves was sedulously guarded by the Church", Clemens noted, "This is better than the Southern Protestant Church of America ever did, nicht wahr?"

When Lecky commented upon the conditions of slavery in Charlemagne's empire, and described the social structure under Charlemagne, Clemens wrote in the margin, "Christianity, then, did not raise up the slave but degraded all conditions of men to the slave's level". Satan's ghost-writer was warming to his work.

Monkish medieval piety was not believed able to survive a bath, and as he read on and on of saints untouched by soap or water during their tour of life, Clemens raised a

technical question in the margin: "How will the saints find accommodation in Heaven? Will there be room in the lavatory for all of them?"

In Volume II of Lecky, the marginal notes by Clemens include the following:

"Plainly God never knew anything about human beings; or he would not have trusted the idiots with so dangerous a thing as the Bible." (Twain liked that sentence. He used variants of it in several occasions.)

"The bribery of heaven still goes on in America in the form of robberies of children to leave money to the missions."

"Christmas is a heathen festival (date and all) and so is Easter."

On Clovis, the king of the Franks: "Another pet of the Almighty, like the nephretic David."

"It is an odious religion; still I do not think its priests ought to be burned, but only the missionaries."

"It seems to be pretty clearly proven that Christianity was invented in hell."

"All moral perceptions are acquired by the influences around us; these influences begin in infancy; we never get a chance to find out whether we have any that are innate or not."

On the Christians putting the gladiators out of business: "But the Church leaves the bullfight undenounced—and the priest is fond of it."

"I can quite easily imagine myself giving an unhappy person something to kill himself with but I cannot imagine myself trying to prevent an unhappy person from committing suicide. It gives me a very real pang to read of a prevented suicide, and a very real feeling of gratitude to read of a successful one."

The Clemens note on the last page of Lecky is a mixed blessing for any who feel concern for the present state of Sam Clemens. The note reads:

"If I have understood this book aright, it proves two things beyond shadow or question: 1. That Christianity is the very invention of Hell itself; 2. and that Christianity is the most precious and elevating and ennobling boon ever vouchsafed to the world."

As he read, Clemens was not satisfied to be a marginal commentator. He also was a second-guessing editor, crossing out Lecky's word choice and writing above it the word Clemens would have used. When it is a point of diction, the Clemens choice invariably is the better one. When his theology, or absence of it, controlled his diction, an argument becomes available.

For instance, Lecky wrote, "The only reason why we should perform virtuous actions . . . is that on the whole such a course will bring us the greatest amount of happiness".

Clemens underscored the "us" and wrote between the printed lines, in editor's fashion, "Leave the 'should' out—now it is perfect (and true)".

When Lecky was discoursing on Purgatory, he wrote of its "serious influence" on European morality. Clemens crossed out "serious", and chose as his adjective, "rotten".

Davis, the guardian of the Lecky volumes from Mark Twain's private library, said he is braced for objection to the Clemens diction in the margins. Davis first allowed me to see the notes two years ago, shortly before the dedication of the handsome Mark Twain memorial at the author's birthplace, Florida, Mo. Davis would not

(Concluded on next page)

This Believing World

The "Sunday Pictorial" for October 21st, headed a two-page spread, "The Incredible Religion That Orders You to Hate Your Loved Ones if They Don't Believe", and then discussed an offshoot—the Exclusives—of the Plymouth Brethren who, by the way, consider themselves as the only genuine Christians in this wicked world. But why go to this offshoot at all? All Christians can read in the Gospels of the Divine Words of Jesus—"If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14, 26). There is nothing clearer or to the point in the whole of the Bible.

As for the people who don't "believe" here are Mark's weighty words—"He that believeth not, shall be damned" (16, 16). If the Exclusive Brethren hate unbelievers and their own kith and kin, they have ample Gospel authority for it from Jesus himself. Paul of course was equally authoritative. In 2 Corinthians 6, 14, we get, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers . . .". The Exclusives rigorously carry out Bible teaching—why then talk about the "incredible" religion? It is pure unadulterated Christianity straight from Jesus and Paul. Fortunately for humanity (with the exception of fanatics) even fervent Christians have thrown overboard what the *Pictorial* calls the teaching of "cranks" and "bigots".

Another "Sunday Pictorial" inquiry (October 7th) dealt with "Spiritual Healing", and the "10,000 people who claim they can cure anything from warts to lung cancer". We are given examples—a blind woman who suddenly finds that she can watch television; a cripple who throws away his stick and climbs a mountain; a woman dumb for three years who can now speak. They were all given up by medical specialists and completely cured by "a self-styled healer". So with the aid of the *Pictorial* medical adviser, Mr. Victor Simms went out to investigate and, at the beginning of his report—alas!—had to admit that "we did not knowingly see any sensational cures before our eyes".

They went to see a healer, Ted Fricker, performing in his "sanctuary" and he told them "not to be surprised" if they saw "the sign of the Cross on his forehead as he worked". In the sanctuary, there were the inevitable statue of Christ, and a picture of a negro called Sambo which shies away evil spirits. We would have thought that the Jesus statue could have done that without Sambo!

Mr. Fricker was so sure of his powers that he confidently told the investigators, "If a dead man were brought to my sanctuary, and the voice [of God] told me to make him arise and walk, I know I could do it". We are sorry to say God was probably speaking to other healers at the time, for he was conspicuously absent while the investigators were there.

A "working party" of the Church of England (*Daily Mail*, October 26th), will report to the Church Assembly that "women should be considered for any work for which a clergyman is not essential", and among other recommendations is that woman must be "the very spearhead of mission" with the addition that "the Church's attitude has been most grudging" towards women. The Church should now gratefully consider the appointment of women as priests, and for that matter as bishops as well. And throw poor out-of-date Paul to the winds.

We fully expected that the best way to shatter Trevor Hall's devastating exposure of the swindle of the "materialisations" of Florence Cook and the ignominious part played in it by Sir William Crookes would be to call the eminent scientist himself from the mighty deep and, if possible, "materialise" him for all to see. Obviously this isn't quite as easy these days as it was a hundred yeards or so ago, but with the assistance of an automatic writing medium, Grace Rosher, Sir William came along in splendid form and denounced Trevor Hall exactly like Mr. Barbanell did, though it is true that Miss Rosher expected Sir Oliver Lodge, and not Sir William Crookes. This proves the absolute authenticity of everything.

Needless to add Sir William wrote that he was "much disturbed" at the accusations of fraud—just as if he hadn't ever been "disturbed" during his lifetime and after by similar attacks on his superstition and credulity. *Psychic News* (October 27th), which reported the seance, gave specimens of the real handwriting of Crookes, and his handwriting from Summerland. They are, as was to be expected, completely unlike. Crookes called Trevor Hall's book "a calumny" and Miss Rosher was "surprised" that Crookes spelt the word correctly. We are too dumfounded to comment.

MARK TWAIN ON CHRISTIANITY

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allow me to copy the notes at that time.

He explained that the Mark Twain Research Foundation has a wealth of such material obtained through Twain's only surviving offspring, Mrs. Clara Clemens Samoussoud of San Diego, but the material is not for general publication. The Foundation publishes at regular intervals a four-page piece of scholarship.—*The Twainian*.

The Twainian has a circulation of only 300, largely among university professors, and its readers are termed "members", not subscribers. Many of the marginal notes in Lecky were printed in *The Twainian* seven years ago but Davis recently agreed that they now deserve a wider circulation than 300 members. I did not copy all the Clemens notes in the volumes of Lecky. As Davis said, "A newspaper has to be sent through the mails".

The notes that have been printed are a fair representation, and appropriate footnotes to the title material in *Letters from the Earth*. William Dean Howells wrote the most durable, reasonable and acceptable explanation of the man who wrote the marginal notes in Lecky.

Howells wrote: "He never went back to anything like faith in the Christian theology or in the notion of life after death, or in a conscious divinity. It is best to be honest in this matter; he would have hated anything else, and I do not believe that the truth in it can hurt anyone".

[Reprinted from the *St. Louis Post-Despatch*, 14/10/62.]

OBITUARY

News of the death on October 28th of Thomas H. R. James, late Chairman of Birmingham Branch of the National Secular Society, will come as a sad blow to his many friends in the movement. Thomas James's geniality and sensitivity were widely appreciated by his fellow Freethinkers, and his presence at national functions was always welcomed.

The Birmingham Branch, particularly, of course, will miss the services of a dignified and intelligent Chairman, and his colleagues will miss a cheerful, kindly, and stimulating friend.

In accordance with Mr. James's wishes, the cremation took place without any service, to the accompaniment of his favourite music—from Beethoven's Second Symphony.

We send our deepest sympathy to Mrs. James and to his daughter Ruby.

THE FREETHINKER

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THE FREETHINKER can be obtained through any newsagent or will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates: One year, £1 17s. 6d.; half-year, 19s.; three months, 9s. 6d. In U.S.A. and Canada: One year, \$5.25; half-year, \$2.75; three months, \$1.40.

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, November 13th, 7.30 p.m.: OPEN DISCUSSION on Nuclear Disarmament. Refreshments.

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, November 11th, 6.30 p.m.: PAT SLOAN, "From Superstition to Science—from Poverty to Plenty".

Marble Arch Branch (The Carpenter's Arms, Seymour Place, London, W.1), Sunday, November 11th, 7.30 p.m.: GORDON SCHAFFER, "Keeping the Peace".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, November 11th, 11 a.m.: DR. JOHN LEWIS, "The Problem of Man in Modern Thought".

Notes and News

REMEMBRANCE DAY this year has a special significance. We have just emerged (at least temporarily) from one of the darkest spells in man's history. Can we avoid a recurrence? Perhaps the most terrifying aspect of the Cuban crisis was the feeling of almost total helplessness: the feeling that we were being dragged, against our will, to the very brink—and possibly over. We imagine there are times when every one of us feels fatalistic about the future; that if one of the Mr. Ks frightens or irritates the other sufficiently, that will be that, and we shall be unable to do anything about it. But, however inclined we may be, we must not yield to such fatalism. We must fight—against war and destruction; we must make the voice of sanity and survival heard above the threats and counter threats. On Sunday, Marble Arch Branch of the National Secular Society will hear Gordon Schaffer on "Keeping the Peace", and on Tuesday there will be an open discussion in the Conway Hall on Nuclear Disarmament.

AN EDITORIAL in *The Times* (24/10/62), commenting on Lord Chandos's *Memoirs*, referred to public servants as honourable men who regard the "public interest" as justifying them in actions they would consider unethical in individuals. "Similar and even strong mystical reasons are of course produced by Church committees and the like for actions which the business world would not dream of per-

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

Previously acknowledged, £288 13s. 8d. Anon, 1s.; S. Berry, 2s. 6d.; G. Swan, 2s. 6d.; C. Cullen, 8s.; Anon, 1s.; F. B. Bolton, £3 7s. 6d.; Mrs. B. Allbon, 2s. 6d.; A. Lloyd, £1; A. L. Browne, £1; Mrs. A. Calderwood, £1. Total to date, October 31st, 1962, £295 18s. 8d.

forming", wrote M. Z. Brooke, Chaplain for Industry in the Diocese of Manchester in a letter to *The Times* (29/10/62). These actions, he said, are in the sphere of business ethics and employment policies. And, he added: "It has often seemed to me, as one who moves in both the industrial and ecclesiastical world, that the Church has much more to learn about plain ordinary morality than it has to teach".

★

SEVERAL OF OUR readers who are in the habit of buying Christmas cards to help the Imperial Cancer Research Fund haven't done so this year. Both the designs offered were religious: one a Madonna and child, the other a detail from a reredos. It seems very shortsighted of the Fund's organisers not to produce at least one secular card.

★

MANY READERS are familiar with F. A. Ridley's recent book, *Pope John and the Cold War*. Mr. Ridley has also lectured on this subject in different parts of the country, and we hear good reports of the latest occasion, at the University of Durham on October 29th, under the auspices of the University Humanist Society.

★

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC lay organisation, Knights of St. Columba has—we read in the *Evening Standard* (29/10/62)—withdrawn the October issue of its magazine, *Columba*, "because of an article which might be misconstrued". The article dealt with the Vatican Council, and there were complaints about two sentences in it. They "might have been more happily worded", said a spokesman, so "for safety's sake we withdrew it". No indication of the contents of the sentences was given. The Knights have 500 branches in England, Wales and Scotland, headed by Mr. Stuart Harper, the Mayor of Derby.

★

THE PERSIAN Government wants to give London—and more particularly, Holborn—a statue of Omar Khayyam, but the general reaction of Holborn Council is "amused tolerance", reported the *Daily Herald* (30/10/62). Mrs. Betty Grass, a Labour councillor remarked: "It's not worth tearing up a piece of grass for Omar. We have quite a lot of statues already". Why not tear one of them up then?

★

THE Rev. D. P. Jones, a curate of Exmouth has discovered a way of getting to know his parishioners—visiting them on horseback. "People in England are such animal lovers", he said (*The Guardian*, 30/10/62), "that I find that one of the best ways of making friends is through my horse. Quite often people only speak to the horse to begin with, but once the ice is broken I can talk to them and get to know them".

★

WE HAVE seen a few reproductions of the monkish cartoons by Chon Day from the collection, *Brother Sebastian* (Souvenir Press, 7s. 6d.), and have found them delightful. One has an ecclesiastical supplies shop with two notices on the window: "Under New Management" and "Same Divine Guidance"; while another shows the Brother's two filing cabinets for correspondence, marked "Mortal" and "Immortal" respectively. It is surely a good sign that people are willing—and able—to laugh at Christianity.

The Mystery of the Mary Celeste

By F. A. RIDLEY

AMONGST THE MANY mysteries with which human fancy has so freely strewn what we may perhaps term the margin of history, there are a few apparently genuine ones, genuine in the sense that no solution has so far been advanced that appears adequately to cover all the known facts. One such mystery is that of the Man in the Iron Mask. That such a person actually existed, seems undeniable, but *who* the masked mystery was has never been proved, though many suggestions have been offered, from the twin brother of Louis XIV (as readers of Dumas will recall), or the real father of the Sun King (not his nominal father, Louis XIII) to Oliver Cromwell, who was seriously identified by a contemporary pamphleteer with the perpetually masked prisoner in the Bastille.

If the Man in the Iron Mask constitutes the most famous of modern unsolved mysteries upon terra firma, its most famous nautical counterpart is probably supplied by what is usually referred to as "The strange case of the Marie Celeste", a technical misnomer to begin with, as was pointed out by a recent American writer Mr. Eric Frank Russell. For the deserted bark found sailing the seas without a crew on December 5th, 1872, really put to sea under the English (or rather American) name of the *Mary Celeste*; *viz.* she was not a French boat, and her name was Mary, not Marie; a prosaic but useful correction at the start of as fantastic a still-unexplained mystery as appears to be recorded in the annals of the sea.

The facts are so well known as to need only the briefest recapitulation. *En route* from New York to Gibraltar, the *Dei Gratia* (in Mr. Russell's own words) "sailed calm untroubled seas and headed steadily into the most baffling mystery of the century" in the form of a derelict brig, the *Mary Celeste* sailing erratically in mid-ocean without a human being aboard her. Whilst her crew were conspicuous by their absence, there obviously had been one quite recently, for many signs of their presence were still discernable. Let Mr. Russell, its most recent narrator [his book—*Great World Mysteries*, Mayflower Books, appeared in 1957] take up the tale:

There was nobody aboard, nobody, and there was nothing to show why her crew had gone, when, or where they had gone. Yet the *Mary Celeste* was in a thoroughly seaworthy condition; her masts, yards and hull, sound. Fresh water and provisions remained in adequate supply. No trace of major disturbance was detectable in the fore-castle where the crew's chests, clothing and various personal possessions lay around just as though their owners had departed a mere five minutes before. A couple of razors reposed in readiness for use, their surfaces shiny, unmarked by rust. Laundered underclothes hung from a line where they had been put out to dry. Cooking pans in the galley held remains of food. The stove contained ashes of a burned-out fire. In the cabin, a table was fully laid and a meal thereon, hurriedly abandoned soon after begun. Some porridge adhered to one plate, a boiled egg had been decapitated after which its intending eater had abruptly vanished from the face of creation.

And so on. All the signs of a hasty panic and an abrupt departure. But to add to the mystery, no signs at all of violence or of bloodshed that should surely have accompanied either mutiny or piracy on the high seas. In particular, apparently no attempt had been made to lower the ship's boat. As Mr. Russell concludes: "The entire situation seemed inexplicable and most disturbing. To all appearances every person on board had rushed on deck and leaped into the sea".

The ship's log-book closed with an entry ten days earlier, upon November 25th when the *Mary Celeste* was about 450 miles from the place where she encountered the

Dei Gratia. Something pretty drastic and drastically sudden had transpired in the interval: but precisely what?

That is the question: the mystery of the century as it has been often described. But it cannot really be stated that subsequent search and research, not to mention innumerable conjectures that range from the sublime to the ridiculous, have done much to throw light upon the question. No trace of the missing link in the mystery of the vanished crew of the *Mary Celeste* was ever discovered, nor any clue as to their whereabouts except the apparently strong probability that by the time the captain of the *Dei Gratia* boarded their deserted ship, their bones were already on the bed of the Atlantic Ocean.

The central mystery still remains unsolved. Why did the *Mary Celeste's* entire crew, captain and his wife and child included, strike ship so suddenly and catastrophically and yet without the least trace of violence and/or disorder? Echo answer why? All sorts of explanations have of course, been proffered from sea-monsters to flying saucers, or even to plain "acts of God", the last named explanation being merely (as always) a flat confession of human ignorance. On balance, the least unlikely—but still very unlikely—rational explanation would perhaps still appear to be mutiny. But if so, why no violence? And since the hypothetical mutineers apparently took nothing, *cui bono?* Who benefited? Besides, what happened eventually to the mutineers? It seems to be practically impossible that, with the whole world looking for them—as it soon was—they could so successfully have concealed their tracks from 1872-1962. Even the mutinous crew of the *Bounty* were tracked down at last. Even lower in the scale of possibilities is the suggestion that some monster of the sea whisked them off the ship. It is true and perhaps a very remote analogy that there is a recorded incident when a ship was actually capsized by a school of killer whales, though her crew were actually rescued by a passing ship. (*n.b.* I am obliged to the eminent zoologist, Dr. Maurice Burton for this interesting item of news.)

Our most recent (1957) inquirer, Mr. Russell, has a suggestion; certainly an original, though not perhaps actually a very convincing one. But intriguing if nothing else. According to him: "The mystery of the *Mary Celeste* could well have been born at her point of departure, in a warehouse full of food not fit for pigs". Or briefly, that the ship's food had been poisoned by ergot, a substance described by our author in these terrifying terms: "Ergot is a fungus with an affinity for grains of all kinds, especially rye. Its active principle, ergotine, is highly poisonous, creating fearful delusions, suicidal tendencies and death". In his opinion then, the crew of the *Mary Celeste*, poisoned by ergot in rotten food, got a collective fit of the horrors and jumped overboard *en bloc* in a collective act of *felo de se*. And in case this certainly unusual explanation appears too fantastic for ready acceptance, our learned author immediately follows it up with some grisly, but apparently authentic details (date and place given) of a very similar epidemic of mass insanity and of mass suicide in a French village as recently as 1951, where the root cause was officially conceded to be flour poisoned by ergot.

Have we here a fresh clue to the by now ancient mystery of the *Mary Celeste*? Perhaps, or perhaps not. At least Mr. Russell's suggested explanation has the negative but not inconsiderable merit of being, if not perhaps entirely rational, at least wholly terrestrial in character.

A Clarification

By Dr. J. V. DUHIG

A FRIENDLY CRITIC has told me he thinks that, in attacking religion, and particularly Catholicism, I go beyond the bounds of moderation, especially when I say that it promotes crime. He confines himself, he says, when writing, to expressing the view that in Catholicism there appears to be a stronger tendency to crime than in other sects, and that there are many well-behaved Catholics. As to that I agree, but with two limitations: one that in this they are no different from anybody else who is well-behaved, and secondly that there are not nearly enough of them. Indeed the number who are criminal is far too high; prisons have to be built with twice the accommodation for Catholics that they would, on their proportion in the population, normally require.

However, I am now concerned only with the criticism of my attitude and my expression of it, and I think the validity of them rests with my qualifications to hold views at all, and the known facts.

I was born a Catholic, first attended school at a convent school, and later went to a Catholic secondary boarding school. In these schools the moral standards of both teachers and pupils were deplorably low, which, but for three years at a state school, I might have permanently inherited. I look back on that school of strict discipline and high morality as the most precious phase of my early life. A state school teacher is naturally a good person but in any case he has to be, otherwise he gets the sack. I was trained in classical literature and history, and spent my first University year in a study of these on a classical scholarship. In my casual reading I was immensely struck with the enormous intellectual revolution caused by Darwin's work on Evolution, then a burning topic. As a result, in 1909, I entered on the medical course. I went to World War I and, later in London, I specialised in Medical Science (Pathology, Bacteriology and Biochemistry) which entailed training in the Philosophy of Science and Scientific Method. Actually I worked in the Research Laboratory of King's College at the top of Agar Street, off the Strand. I was trained to express conclusions only after careful study of the evidence.

During the war I began to be suspicious about the truth of Catholicism, and on the evidence of eight years reading and thought, I had by 1928 completely rejected it. To my mind Catholicism was not only not true, but was a gigantic fake, based on deliberate falsehood and the crazy conjectures of theologians, who said anything that happened to come into their heads; it all completely lacked cogency and logic, and had no relation to Ethics. It had persisted by the most appalling methods of intimidation—intolerance, persecution, torture, murder and wholesale massacre—and survived to propagate its falsehoods and attain power as absolute as that of Hitler, Stalin, Franco, or any other human beast of hate and cruelty.

The very history of Christianity and Catholicism struck a chill to my heart and marrow; it was a revelation as horrible as anything dreamed up by Dante. And I had been, too, struck by the dreadful prevalence of wrongdoing (not that I was any angel myself) both public and private, amongst the priests and the Catholic laity. They were not only not better than others, they were not as good. Their conduct was extremely loose, and their casual, highhearted attitude to common morality frightened me, particularly as they were most meticulously scrupulous in the ritual performance of their devout observances. This

queer dichotomy was at first perplexing, so I was determined to study the whole problem of private turpitude and public sanctity over the years, and finally came to the ineluctable conclusion that there was something in the Catholic faith that conduced to or promoted crime, delinquency and social immorality.

I have given the matter a vast amount of thought and in the last few years I have come to the conclusion, to which I can find no alternative, that the only visible cause for such a disproportionately high rate of wrongdoing by Catholics is the Confessional, where there is a remission of sins and practically a warrant to go on committing them. And there seem to be some special Catholic sins: crimes of violence, sex crimes—associated with the unhealthy, prurient Catholic sex ethic—and most especially breaches of trust such as false pretence, fraud and embezzlement. Only this month we have had Michael Joseph Smith, a Catholic solicitor, up for trial for alleged embezzlement of £50,000 from trust funds, and Michael Joseph Boylan, police sergeant, jailed for two years for forgery. Once the Auditor-General on his annual inspection of solicitors' trust funds caught six defaulters, all Roman Catholics, four from my old school.

We need only take a superficial look at Church history to realise the vast and shameful heritage of foul crime it has incurred. And more recently, would Cardinal Stepinach have promoted the murder of half-a-million Serbs, with priests wielding the cut-throat knives, if he had not been a Catholic? Why is it that the Catholic Church is the only one which runs such a huge circuit of swindles: Lourdes, Fatima, La Salette, etc.? Why does it, for example, claim the devotion of the Rosary started as a visionary visit to St. Dominic by the Holy Virgin, when in fact it was faked up by a Dominican monk named Rupe 200 years after Dominic died? Roman Catholic authorities know this. All these crimes, frauds, swindles are too closely connected with these Church authorities to allow of any other explanation but that a casual relationship exists.

When I was a little boy at a convent school, cheating, lying and theft were commonplace, but were ignored if the offender was good as Catechism and publicly assiduous in devout observances; and this is precisely the kind of morality which is standard in the Catholic Church. Common morality is of merely secondary interest if specific ritual requirements of doctrinal significance only are fulfilled. If you are criminal in your tastes there is always the Confessional. And this sets the pace to the whole system.

The Catholic Church is based on falsehood. There is not a trace of evidence of the existence of God so long as the problem of evil is left unsolved. Jesus never existed. If he did, which I deny, the only thing worth while in his alleged teaching was already in existence for hundreds, perhaps thousands, of years. Much of his talk and conduct were unpleasant. A purely secular ethic is vastly superior. Practically all Catholic doctrine is derived from pagan folklore. Its theology is patchy and contradictory. An Archbishop of Paris banned Thomas Aquinas's work after his death, and this persisted until only his proposed canonisation caused it to be removed. The Church's system of fasts and feasts is irrational. If you eat meat on a Friday you risk hell-fire, as you do if you do not believe that the Holy Virgin sailed up into heaven like a

sputnik, and if you do not go to Mass on the day of the alleged levitation.

The whole system is flimsy, ramshackle and riddled with forgery, fraud and fake. It is not only essentially evil, but promotes evil inevitably. People all over the world, including many Roman Catholic priests, are coming to see through the swindle; whole areas and groups are leaving the Church and "vocations" are rapidly shrinking. Behind the scenes, the Church is in a bad way; it sees the rapid rise of Atheism, and establishes a new department to deal specifically with it. In spite of its vast wealth and political power, the Vatican realises that truth will eventually be too strong. Hence the Ecumenical Council, which is simply a panic safety device to help to ward off, if only temporarily, the inevitable day of final disaster. *Dies irae, dies illa, solvet saeculum in favilla.* The Vatican hears the sad sad song of dissolution and is afraid. May that day soon arrive, so that the Secularist and the Atheist may build a rational civilisation on truth, justice, and a human law that will guarantee human rights.

CORRESPONDENCE

FIRST AND LAST

Mrs. O. J. Childs's criticism of "This Believing World" is both unkind and unwarranted. For many years I have read THE FREETHINKER and though I enjoy most of the articles, the week's highlight has always been "This Believing World". It is the first thing I read when the paper is delivered.

(Mrs.) ROBERT DEWAR.

I don't mind THE FREETHINKER using "Micky-taking" arguments against Christianity as long as they are justified. "This Believing World" is very reasonable in this respect. In fact I always save this item to the last, when I get great delight in reading it.

JOHN BOYLE.

BUDDHIST ATHEIST

Having just read Mr. Christmas Humphrey's *Buddhism* I would corroborate the remark in M. Gilbert's letter (26/10/62) that Theravada Buddhists are atheists, i.e. they do not believe in a supreme being. This being so, I am puzzled as to who or what decides whether the spirit, when it is reincarnated, goes to a higher or lower being than the one it left. Surely the spirit could not be trusted to make the choice itself? What self-respecting spirit would choose re-birth as a caterpillar, for instance, if it had been a Pope or Cardinal in its previous life? There is, however, no absence of cabbage caterpillars this year.

Apart from the absurdity of re-birth I found the Theravada Buddhists' philosophy of a very high standard, and with a certain similarity to Secularism.

F. PEARCE.

CHRISTIAN ROCKETS

Your readers may be interested in a letter which was printed as long ago as March 10th, 1961, in Canada's largest newspaper, the *Toronto Daily Star*. Headed "Christian Rockets", it suggested that atomic rockets and missiles should no longer be named after ancient Pagan deities like Thor, Jupiter, Atlas, etc. "Why not be honest", it asked, "and give these bombs Christian names, since they are made by Christians with the avowed intention of preserving the Christian way of life?" And it added this little rhyme:

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John
Tell the folk you fall upon,
You come from a Christian nation
Of most Christ-like motivation.
Sanctified each megaton
From Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

C. H. BUBECK (Toronto).

HUMANISM

The *Daily Telegraph* has been carrying a lengthy correspondence about the meaning of the term "Humanist". In answer to one writer who claimed it could be properly used only for Erasmus of Rotterdam and his theist followers, Mr. F. Griffin, Hon Secretary of the Tyneside Humanist Soc., Newcastle, gave the modern definition (29/10/62). I should like to comment as follows:

The Humanists of Erasmus were contemporaries of the Reformation; they too were critical of certain features of the Church (such as the too visible connection between religion and profit), yet they were too refined to join the Lutheran "mob". Therefore they sat on the fence, watched the outcome of the contention between the factions and spent the time in sterile debating. As a result, they ended up in the Counter-Reformation.

I personally consider the term "Humanist" superior to all the others such as Freethinkers, Rationalist, Atheist. Unfortunately most of our self-styled Humanists are refined fence-sitters, afraid to tread on anybody's toes.

"Some humanists are atheists and don't hesitate to defend their choice of name", Mr. Griffin says. "Some, like myself, are agnostics in the sense that while we see no good reason to believe in a Deity we know of no certain proof that there is no such being, any more than Deists can produce proof that such a being exists".

Had Mr. Griffin been born an Australian aborigine, he would have been told that children are not sexually conceived but that at certain places certain spirits enter the womb of a woman to be born later as human children. Mr. Griffin might then argue that, whilst there is no proof of the existence of such spirits they cannot be disproved either. In this way we have to tolerate the belief in spirits *ad infinitum*.

P. G. ROY.

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