

# The Freethinker

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ONE OF THE INDIRECT, but effective and influential results of major scientific discoveries, is to be found in the progressive enlargement of the human mental vision. Thus, one has only to read the works of say, da Vinci, Columbus and Galileo, to realise how mentally staggering was the impact of their epoch-making discoveries upon their more imaginative contemporaries in that revolutionary age of the Renaissance. For as the most encyclopedic genius of that

era (and perhaps of any other) Leonardo da Vinci concisely noted, "there are an infinity of things in nature that are not yet in human experience". It is the special function of scientific discovery to bring the consecutive understanding of successive natural phenomena within the object of human experience. In which connection one would probably be justified in stating that this present century has witnessed more extensive incorporations of natural phenomena into human experience than did the whole previous era since the Pharaohs originated whatever degree of civilisation humanity has so far been able to attain.

## Exploring the Universe

The recent sensational achievements in mankind's initial exploration of the universe undoubtedly indicate that a new era in human mental and physical expansion is now beginning. For during the past six years since the first Sputnik blazed its spectacular trail through the skies, human feats of spatial expansion and exploration have been achieved that, down to well within living memory, would have been regarded as impossible, if not indeed, diabolical in origin. Men have encircled the earth, guided rockets have landed with man-controlled accuracy hundreds of thousands of miles away upon the moon, whilst most recently, recording machines effectively controlled from earth many millions of miles away, have visited and duly recorded their observations of our planetary neighbour before transmitting them to earth. No such technical feats can be even remotely paralleled during preceding ages. Even the colossal brain of an Aristotle or of a da Vinci could hardly have conceived such incredible achievements as now make the headlines in our newspapers. The exploration of the solar system has actually begun; that of the Galactic universe must surely follow.

## Life in Other Worlds

"Coming events cast their shadows before them". Many centuries ago, imaginative writers of what would now be styled "science fiction", boldly made contact—but on paper only—with other worlds and their presumed inhabitants. In such a connection it is sufficient to recall amongst authors in this literary genre, Lucian of Samosata, and Cyrano de Bergerac, and amongst the modern authors Jules Verne and H. G. Wells as authentic forerunners of the present space-age. Now, however, we are upon the eve of a new era in which reality can, and to all present appearances, probably soon will effectively supersede the free use of the human imagination that has notably characterised those authors and others of their kind. For

it now appears as certain as anything in the future can reasonably be, that before our present 60s have run their course, strangely-garbed explorers will make physical contact with the moon, whilst human instruments, followed probably by human explorers themselves, will land upon, or—if an actual landing proves to be impossible—at least, approach the nearer planets of our solar system. This to be followed in due course, no doubt, by flights still further afield, during what everything at present indicates will be an era of interplanetary travel and exploration. But what will mankind find upon these remote and quite possibly unfriendly worlds? For as the science fiction writers of the past

ages of pre-contact have already demonstrated, in seeking for new worlds in outer space, mankind also seeks for their inhabitants. It would appear that man has never relished the prospect of being, so to speak, the unique hermit of the universe. Instinctively he seeks for his fellows—or at least for some kind of conscious life similar to his own amongst the innumerable galaxies scattered throughout our illimitable universe.

## Is Man Unique?

Will he, or can he, find them? Is man alone in the universe or does life exist also in other worlds? The very nature of the human mind and imagination makes it extremely probable that this intriguing question will bulk larger and larger in human speculation. Is man unique in the universe, or somewhere in the colossal dimensions of space, are there "human" hearts that feel and "human" brains that think? Perhaps we should say *superhuman*, since did not a cynical sage of antiquity long ago, go on record with the certainly notable, if depressing observation that the universe would be a sorry place if in the course of its immensity, one or more of its innumerable worlds could not produce something or someone at least rather more advanced than humanity had then shown itself to be? In our own nuclear era, surely one must fervently echo this comment of the old Greek cynic.

Since the publication of Dr. Spencer-Jones's pioneer book, *Life in other Worlds*, 1940, several writers on theoretical astronomy, have alluded to the intriguing problems that centre upon the possibility of human (or super or subhuman) existence upon other planets. So far, their conclusions with regard to the whole question of conscious, extra-human life in other worlds seems still to be mainly theoretical, or even speculative in character. That is, of course, with regard to the problem as stated generically. For, as far as our own solar system is concerned, even our present day astronomic knowledge enables us already to arrive at certain fairly positive conclusions. Apart from our earth, no planet in our solar system is capable of supporting any known form of life, with the exceptions of Mars and Venus, which may support some very primitive forms of plant life. As the optimistic spokesmen of interplanetary travel are wont to express it: "We'll never know until we get there". True enough. However, no solar

## VIEWS and OPINIONS

# Life on other Worlds

By F. A. RIDLEY

planet, apart from our own, could conceivably support anything remotely resembling human or animal life. This by no means disposes of the speculative problem of life in the universe at large. For one of the major consequences of modern astronomy has been, so to speak, to cut not only our own planet, but equally our own solar system down to size. We are a mere drop in the infinite ocean of existence. There might still be life in other worlds far beyond the bounds of either our solar or even our galactic system. Here, telescopic astronomy can no longer help us, for the fantastic distances involved make any direct observation of any planets which may encircle other suns a stark impossibility now and probably for ever. But even upon this incredibly remote terrain, theoretical astronomy may still avail us somewhat. For since whenever we encounter matter anywhere in the universe, it never reveals totally unknown forms, it seems a reasonable assumption that the basic problems attendant upon the appearance of life must be, broadly speaking, similar to what they are here.

The basis of life lies in the permutations of the carbon atom, and if there are no entirely unfamiliar materials throughout the universe (92 such basic forms which recur universally are currently known), it seems unlikely that

there can be any entirely unfamiliar foundations for living matter anywhere. At this point we can perhaps invoke the "law of divergences", as a well-known writer on astronomy (Patrick Moore) has done in a recent publication thus: "Our earth is an average planet, our sun is an average star, we ourselves, are (presumably) average combinations of material elements already known to exist (in varying degrees) throughout the universe".

Hence in the opinion both of Spencer-Jones and of Patrick Moore, one can legitimately invoke the "law of averages" and assume that in a certain proportion of cases, planets will encircle suns (stars) and that again in a certain proportion of these cases, forms of living matter—again in some cases, perhaps similar to ourselves—will exist. Certainly a hypothetical argument, but one that appears to be not only logical but not to violate any currently known fact or probability.

And recently an American astronomer, Mr. Frank Drake, hit on the ingenious idea of sending out radio waves into space on the same frequency as we receive from the Milky Way. So far as I know, no extra-terrestrial radiologist has replied, but this imaginative experiment is perhaps worth pursuing further. And there, at present, we must leave this fascinating subject.

## John Burns—Secularist?

By WILLIAM KENT, FSA

JOHN BURNS, who died just twenty years ago, is not known to the present generation, yet in his heyday he was better known than was, later, Aneurin Bevan. An engineer by profession, Burns was the first manual worker to enter the Cabinet. From December 1905 until February 1914, he was President of the Local Government Board. Then he became President of the Board of Trade. As such he had, as parliamentary secretary, no less a person than John M. Robertson. Burns told me he got on well with Robertson and was most interested when I told him that the latter had written an excellent critique of Bernard Shaw's *St. Joan* under the title, *Mr. Shaw and the Maid*. Burns had told Shaw that his best two works were *St. Joan* and *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, and Shaw was pleased by this discernment.

In his later years I knew Burns intimately and must have visited him nearly a hundred times. I spent five nights in his room during his last illness, and had the thrilling experience of reading Shakespeare to him in the early hours of the morning. Unlike Mr. Cutner and myself, he was of the Stratfordian faith, and when I presented my "Shakespeare" as Edward de Vere, the seventeenth Earl of Oxford, he threatened to get me certified! He knew nothing of the problem of authorship.

I spent a memorable night in his cellar when an air-raid was on. About 6 a.m., he shouted down to me, "Come on", as if I was a horse being summoned from its stable, and when I went upstairs I found he had interested himself in *The Literary Guide* (now *The Humanist*). As this was in my closed attaché case, I was surprised that "Honest John" should have found it. Once we had a competition as to the twelve greatest Englishmen, and we only differed on one name. Burns inexplicably excluded Samuel Johnson. Both of us included Thomas Paine.

Burns said several times, "We freethinkers, Kent", and in the House of Commons he once called himself "a respectable freethinker". Strangely enough, though, when I submitted to him the proof of my article in *London Worthies*, he altered my phrase, "freethinking son of Labour" to "secular son of Labour", and accused me of

trying to make propaganda out of him. He never went to church. He always affirmed in the House of Commons. He declined to address any meeting held under religious auspices. He had no belief in prayer. This is shown by the following episode reported in my biography, *John Burns, Labour's Lost Leader*—a Book Society recommendation.

He was pleased to see the Rev. William Souper, an aged retired minister of the Presbyterian Church, but the latter allowed professional zeal to encroach upon a friendly act. Burns told me they were chatting pleasantly and fairly intimately, when the minister said he proposed to offer a few words of prayer. The reverend gentleman had his knees crooked on his way to the floor, when he was arrested by a peremptory exclamation, "No, no, I don't want it!" Burns's eye gleamed as he told me: "I didn't want any tale of deathbed repentance like Bradlaugh—do you blame me Kent?" I hastened to assure him I did not; it was just what I should have done myself, though incidentally I have never heard any tale of Bradlaugh's repentance.

Yet, when I suggested to Burns's relatives that there should be a secular funeral, I was, in effect, told to mind my own business. I proposed that Lord Snell should conduct it. He was one of Burns's contemporaries, for whom he had unqualified praise. But I was told that Burns's wish was that his funeral should be conducted by the Rev. William Souper. I could not understand this, having declined a prayer in life he should want one at death. However, I was not in a position to deny it. As there was no will there were no written directions as to the funeral.

As they both resigned from the Cabinet on the outbreak of the first World War, Burns and Lord Morley became fast friends. I once expressed my surprise that at the cremation of Morley (at Golders Green) there was a religious service (It caused J. M. Robertson to say "This is bloody hypocrisy"), but Burns made no comment. I think it probable that he thought it mattered nothing

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# Aristotle

By COLIN McCALL

ARISTOTLE, said George Henry Lewes, "seems to me to have been the greatest intellect of antiquity, an intellect at once comprehensive and subtle, patient, receptive, and original". Anyone inclined to dispute that assessment should first read John Herman Randall, Junior's, *Aristotle*, first published in 1960 and now available in paperback (Columbia University Press, 11s.). It is, as one reviewer has said, a philosopher's delineation, not a philologist's, a Platonist's or a medievalist's. Therein lies its value. Our attitude to Aristotle has been enormously affected by his adoption by Aquinas who, as Professor Randall says, may have thought well of Aristotle, but after all was known as "the angelic doctor".

In fact, Aquinas and the Schoolmen, and a good many other "Aristotelians" have taken their Aristotle with a mixture of Platonism, as well as giving preference to the Platonic side of Aristotle's own thought. Professor Randall finds it necessary to remind us that Aristotle had "no knowledge of the Christian angels or the Christian God" and that "he came in his maturity to maintain that 'pure forms' could not exist". Aquinas, of course, believed in a celestial hierarchy of angelic pure forms.

Nor is Aristotle's "Unmoved Mover" to be identified with God in any Jewish, Christian or Muslim sense: "it has nothing to do with the God of Moses and the Prophets, or with the God of Jesus or of the Church—to say nothing of the God of Mohammed".

It is not the "creator" of anything, for the world is eternal, and motion and time are eternal. It is not even the eternal "sustainer" of the world, in a Neoplatonic sense: for to Aristotle, the world does not need to be sustained, it needs rather to be explained and understood. The Unmoved Mover exercises no providence, it has no "will" and no "purpose". It does not "know" the world: it does not "know" anything, any more than the laws of nature can be said to "know" anything. It is not "intelligent", as man has the power of intelligence; it does not "think", as man can be said to think at times. It can be called *nous* or intellect only in the sense in which Spinoza's Order of Nature or Substance can be said to be "intellect". . . . Hence Avicenna, Maimonides, Thomas Aquinas, and the rest, in identifying the Unmoved Mover of Aristotle with the "God" of the religious traditions, were, like all rational or natural theologians, indulging in double talk—they were equivocating.

To be sure, a certain religious feeling can be detected in the early, Platonistic Aristotle, but in maturity he showed no interest in religion. It is therefore "a colossal irony", as Professor Randall remarks, that Aristotle should have been used by the medievalists as a religious apologist. Perhaps it should also be mentioned that Aquinas never read him in Greek, but only in Latin translation, and that not the least of Professor Randall's achievements is to convey the shades of meaning of the original terms which are frequently lost in translation.

For Aristotle, the universe was intelligible, and man, being rational, was capable of understanding it. In contrast to the Platonistic claim to a direct, internal vision of truth, he insisted that we can only know the world from experience; but there was nothing in the world that could not enter into that experience. "Experience" is the means whereby "the intelligible aspect of the world and things is conveyed to the intellect, *nous*".

Nobody, surely, can be said to have made such an effort—a superhuman effort, one might be forgiven in saying of such a naturalist—to understand the world, as Aristotle. In Hegel's words, he "penetrated into the whole universe of things . . . the greater number of the philosophical sciences owe to him their separation and commencement.

He is more comprehensive and speculative than anyone else". Of course, he was not an evolutionist, and his criticism of Anaxagoras's contention that it was the possession of hands that made man the most intelligent of animals, has rebounded. But Professor Randall justly emphasises Aristotle's lack of interest in how man came to be as he is. Aristotle's concern was with function: the role of the various parts of the organism and, in man's case, how they may be utilised in intelligent living.

For Aristotle, the intelligent life, the life of reason, is the aim, the supreme fulfilment of man's functioning, the power with which he is endowed by nature. This fullest development of human nature, he exclaimed on a Platonic—and poetic—note, leads men beyond human nature to the "life of the gods", to participation in what is "deathless and eternal", sheer *nousing*. Yet his approach was essentially realistic. Man's capacities might be bestowed on him by nature, but they needed to be developed by sound education. The matter could not be left to the gods.

For as man is the best of animals when perfected, so he is the worst of all when sundered from law and right. For unrighteousness is most pernicious when possessed of weapons, and man is born possessing weapons for the use of wisdom and excellence, which it is possible to employ entirely for the opposite ends. Hence when devoid of excellence man is the most unholy and savage of animals, and the worst in sexual indulgence and in gluttony.

Professor Randall acknowledges that Aristotle's cosmology was a disaster. His *De Caelo* ("On the Heavens") is also the least distinctively Aristotelian of his major works. "One who comes to the *De Caelo* from the careful analysis of concepts in the *Physics*, or from the combination of close observation with clear functional reasoning in the biological writings, cannot but be impressed by the great difference in temper and indeed of fundamental aim". Darwin, it may be recalled, said that Linnaeus and Cuvier had been his two gods, but "they were mere schoolboys compared to old Aristotle". And Professor Randall argues persuasively that, though it goes mostly unrecognised, "the concepts of Aristotle's physics, those notions involved in his analysis of process, have been driving those of Newton out of our theory".

Professor Randall has, of course, sympathy as well as admiration for Aristotle. But he has, too, (as *his* admirers will know), a highly developed critical faculty. His book is simultaneously sensitive and searching. It is a remarkable and a deeply rewarding study of a great mind, seen in its historical setting, yet assessed for the modern inquirer. There is no suggestion that Aristotle said the last word on anything, but that, "without what he first said, all words would be meaningless, and when it is forgotten they usually are". The basic lesson we have to learn from him, is his realism: his habit of dealing with the world as it is and not as it might be; showing humility before the facts. Science, it seems to me, has succeeded in doing this. To the extent that philosophy has done so, it has been by Aristotelian precept.

## "The American Rationalist"

THE NOVEMBER-DECEMBER issue of *The American Rationalist*, the last issue before it becomes a monthly, contained an article on Charles Bradlaugh by his grandson, Charles Bradlaugh Bonner, President of the World Union of Freethinkers.

## This Believing World

Quite a number of Spiritualists appear to find the word "spirit" for any of the dear departed who return to this vale of tears, a misnomer. Indeed, *Psychic News* once rebuked us for calling Hannen Swaffer "the late". We should have said the "present" Hannen Swaffer. Well, we can help them out of their quandary. The best word which can fulfil all requirements is "spook", so clear, so unequivocal, and so splendid a description in one word. There can be no mistaking what is a spook. We ourselves use it as often as possible and everybody knows what we mean. So here's to the word "spook", to be used always instead of "spirit" . . .

★

The BBC, in introducing Canon Stanley Evans on TV the other evening about the subject on which he has recently written a book, *The Church in the Back Streets*, called it "probably the most important single topic facing the Church of England today". That may be only an opinion of course, but the fact remains that the worthy Canon—unless we are mistaken—never mentioned "our Lord", or even God Almighty and the part they are supposed to play in our back streets. What is the positive thing that the Church has done there? We ourselves haven't the slightest idea. But Canon Evans spoke exactly like a *secularist*.

★

Moreover, according to the Rev. G. Rayner, Vicar of Holy Trinity, Taunton, Somerset, writing in his parish magazine recently, "the average Englishman hasn't much time for the Church" . . . though there is an "exception" which no doubt applies to the back streets. It is that he likes the Church to get his babies made "members of that Church" from which he himself stays away. Thus does "apathy" make the best of two worlds.

★

We have all heard that "apocryphal(?)" story of school-boys who, though strenuously taught religion, have never heard of Jesus Christ. The *Kentish Mercury* reported the other week that thirty teenage girls were asked a few questions. Not one of them liked their jobs, not one ever went to church, only five knew who Mr. Macmillan was, only three had ever heard of Mr. Gaitskell—and of course they all had boy friends.

★

We cannot help wondering what it was that kept them from going to church? Were they not piously taught the wonderful story of Jesus, his miracles, angels and devils? Did they never sing "Nearer my God to thee" and similar imbecilities? In any case, the religious adviser of ATV, Mr. Percy Jones, wants all teenagers to realise that a recent talk of his, "Living for Kicks", meant "living with a purpose and living the life abundant". Is this where "our Lord" comes in?

★

Then there is the Rev. P. Swinbank of Holy Trinity Church, Hampstead, who wants the religion of Jesus modernised. As he rightly points out we have been compelled to modernise the Bible—why should the Prayer Book not now be revised? Why should we waft our prayers up to Heaven in the language of the 17th century when we are living in the 20th? Mr. Swinbank feels that the language of the Prayer Book is "unreal and a hindrance", but surely it never was the words but the actual prayer "from the heart" that God listened to every time? Anyway, is not a prayer in "pidgin" English as acceptable to Jesus as one in the cultured tones of a Bishop?

## The World Union of Freethinkers

THE 1962 ANNUAL MEETING of the General Committee of the World Union of Freethinkers was held this last summer in Vienna. At these meetings it is the practice to review the preceding congress and prepare as far as possible for the next one, as well as dealing with any other business e.g. the execution of resolutions passed at the preceding congress. Of recent years the Committee has arranged a public meeting in co-operation with the Freethought society of the locality where the meeting is held. This year the Austrian Federation were the hosts, and were renewing their affiliation with the Union. The combined meeting held on Saturday, July 28th, was well attended, overflowing into the adjoining corridor, and there was a highly satisfactory spirit of enthusiasm and energy throughout.

By statute, international congresses should be held approximately every three years. It is recognised that "hot" wars stop and "cold" wars retard preparations for such gatherings. In 1957 a congress was held in Paris; the next was held two years later to celebrate the centenary of the birth of the great Spanish educationalist Francisco Ferrer. The next will be held in Germany from July 27th-29th, 1963 at Duisburg on the Rhine, part of a great industrial conurbation, where Freethinkers are relatively numerous and keen. The subjects for discussion will be: 1. How Freethought may profit by the Widespread Interest in Scientific Development; 2. The Defence of Freedom from Clerical Encroachment (*La Défense de la Laïcité*); 3. The present Vatican Council. Bertrand Russell has expressed his willingness to make a tape-recorded speech. Among the speakers on the first theme will be Professor H. Levy, Professor Dr. Hollitscher (Austria), M. A. Koeckelenberg (Belgium). On the second a report will be presented by each country. On the third M. André Lorulot and Mr. F. A. Ridley will speak. Mr. Walter Hoops will speak for the American Rationalist Federation who are planning to charter a plane to bring over their contingent. There will also be strong delegations from most of the European countries. We hope that Great Britain will also be well represented.

Our German friends are making great efforts to render the congress a memorable success—a brigade of interpreters and an excursion in steamer down, or up the Rhine, which will include the convivial reunion. Readers interested in attending this congress should write early to Mr. Colin McCall, 103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1.

### JOHN BURNS—SECULARIST?

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what was said when you were dead. He dismissed spiritualism airily, saying in effect, some old men take to being others to spirits. Generally his attitude was that attributed to Thoreau. When a holy man approached his bedside Thoreau waved him away with the words, "one world at a time, my friend; one world at a time". Burns never hinted at any belief in another.

He was inclined to agree with me that the probability was in favour of the story of Jesus being almost entirely mythical. He would not go farther than saying that there was a teacher of whom practically nothing was known around whom had nucleated endless nonsense about miracles.

Burns was certainly a secularist though a bit of a careerist—he was apt to soft-pedal his scepticism with an eye to Christian voters. At any rate, it is due to him to say that he never indulged in religious rhetoric. He was not of the school of God-blessers.

# 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 Requests 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. A. MILLAR.

(Tower Hill). Every Thursday, 12—2 p.m.: Messrs. J. W. BARKER and L. EBURY.

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

Nottingham Branch NSS (Old Market Square), every Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

### INDOOR

Birmingham Branch NSS (Midland Institute, Paradise Street). Sunday, January 27th, 6.45 p.m.: MRS. S. JULL, "Africa, the Last Stronghold of Colonialism".

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Tuesday, January 29th, 7.30 p.m.: GUILFOYLE WILLIAMS.

"Our System of Education".

Glasgow Secular Society (Central Halls, 35 Bath Street, Glasgow, C.2), Sunday, January 27th, 3 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, "Rome, Europe and the Common Market".

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, January 27th, 6.30 p.m.: F. H. AMPHLETT MICKLEWRIGHT, M.A., "Historic Secularism and Present Problems".

Marble Arch Branch NSS (The Carpenter's Arms, Seymour Place, London, W.1), Sunday, January 27th, 7.30 p.m.: S. D. KUEBART.

"The Spanish Inquisition".

North Staffordshire Humanist Group (Guildhall, High Street, Newcastle-under-Lyme), Friday, January 25th, 7.15 p.m.: A MEETING.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, January 27th, 11 a.m.: LORD CHORLEY.

"How Much Liberty of Speech?"

## Notes and News

"A CRADLE-TO-GRAVE service from a priesthood unimpeded by family ties." That was the description of Roman Catholicism in the BBC television programme, "That Was The Week That Was", on Saturday, January 12th. "The Pope claims to be infallible", it went on, "but he can't tell you which television set to buy, only which television programmes not to watch". "TWTWTW" was equally irreverent at the expense of other religions, which it assessed as the magazine *Which* assesses merchandise—from the standpoint of the consumer. How much do you have to put in? What do you get out of it? and so on. The Church of England was considered "the best buy", being pretty well adaptable to all needs. Unfortunately, said compère David Frost, no volunteers could be found to test the various religions' claims regarding a future life.

NATURALLY, the programme came in for strong criticism (it will be time to stop when it doesn't) particularly from religious quarters. "It seems to me", said the Bishop of Leicester, "to be part of the policy of the programme to take all things which normally command respect and reverence and make a mock of them" (*Daily Telegraph*).

14/1/63). He added that he had not seen the programme. "If we were 100 per cent Christian we would storm the BBC building and make it drop this horrible programme", said Canon John Duffield, preaching in the Isle of Man, while Father Joseph Loran, Roman Catholic priest of Little Hulton, Lancashire, urged his congregation at Mass to protest to the BBC. Father Loran later described the sketch as "disgusting, childish and crude" (*Daily Herald*, 14/1/63).

THE BBC, in fact, is, as the *Daily Herald* pointed out (9/1/63) "living through a revolution which would once have shaken Broadcasting House like an earthquake". The night before, in an item on "Tonight", Fyfe Robertson had visited the Sicilian town of Syracuse where, a few years ago, a statue of the Madonna had been seen to weep. Robertson, as the *Herald* put it, "was dryly caustic about the shoddy commercialism and sanctimonious vulgarity blossoming from the alleged miracle". Perhaps Father Loran will say which he considers "disgusting, childish and crude"—Mr. Robertson or the Roman Church's exploitation of the "miracle".

AS MOST people know, David Frost is the son of a Methodist minister, attends church, and occasionally preaches. Among the writers for "TWTWTW", the *Daily Herald* (15/1/63) reported, Keith Waterhouse and Willis Hall, describe themselves as "the usual agnostics", while Christopher Booker is an atheist.

FURTHER EVIDENCE that the BBC was at long last escaping from the Reith strait-jacket came with the withdrawal of the 16-page booklet, *BBC Variety Programmes Policy Guide for Writers and Producers* (*Daily Telegraph*, 15/1/63). This means the lifting of the ban on references to religion, royalty, politicians and sex in light entertainment programmes, giving them the same freedom as "TWTWTW", which escaped the ban by coming under the Talks and Current Affairs Department.

THOMAS HYSLOP, Provost of Denny, caused a local and (Scottish) national sensation last year when he refused to attend the Kirkin' of the Council because he was an Atheist. On January 13th, *The Sunday Post* must have caused a greater sensation among pious Glaswegians when it devoted a page to Mr. Hyslop and his atheistic views under the heading, "The Honest Truth". "Do you ever have doubts about atheism?" was one of the questions put to Mr Hyslop, and his answer was: "Never. But I don't blame Christians for doubting the existence of a benevolent God. With millions starving on the earth, with pain, illness, threat of war, there's plenty to doubt".

ASKED IF he had read the Bible and made a serious attempt to know the Christian faith, Mr. Hyslop replied: "I certainly have. But how many professing Christians know the Christian faith? Can many tell what the Holy Trinity is about?" He was then asked if he thought there was any form of life after death. "None whatsoever", he answered. "It is vanity and fear that cause people to want a life after death". *The Sunday Post* invited its readers "to reply to the case for atheism".

THERE MUST, of course, be many Glaswegians who share Mr. Hyslop's views, and we hope they will gather in force at the Central Halls, 25 Bath Street, Glasgow, C.2, this Sunday at 3 p.m., when F. A. Ridley will speak on "Rome, Europe and the Common Market".

## On "Faith-Healing"

By H. CUTNER

THERE HAS ALWAYS BEEN throughout history, no matter under what name, something very much like what is known these days as "faith-healing". In past ages diseases were rampant everywhere. Sanitation, as we know it now, was nearly if not altogether unknown to nations of antiquity. Flies, lice, bugs, and other repellent pests were partly the cause of the dreadful plagues which decimated cities in all countries for centuries.

The story of the part played by rats and similar germ carriers has often been told, and a terrible story it is in terms of human suffering. Moreover, professional doctors up to about only a century ago were often badly trained and had inadequate methods of healing, due mostly to sheer ignorance and often to sheer stupidity. As a perfect example of this, I invite the reader to study the details of the *medical* side of the Crimean War and the part Florence Nightingale played in it.

But one side of "healing" always flourished. Charlatans, witches, sorcerers, gypsies, were all in their element when it came to providing the sick with "infallible" cures. Many of them claimed a special "gift" of healing—a gift, very rare, from God himself. Not only did the gods have it, but they could pass it on to their progeny. In fact, as we all know, the greatest of the world's healers was Jesus Christ himself and ever since Christianity began to flourish, men and women claiming to be healers nearly always insist that their "gift" is due to Jesus. They cure under his *direct* influence.

Spiritualists of course are in the forefront of the faith-healing mania. They lay their hands on an incurable invalid, and in a moment he is healed. Perhaps the first attempt fails, but that is never due to the healer. Either the patient has no faith or very little faith, or it is not God's will to perform the cure—or the invalid dies.

In any case, what are a few failures in thousands of cures? They are not worth talking about—in fact, no healer is prepared to talk about them. The cures, all genuine of course, are actually "miracles" and as such form some of the hottest features in our national papers. The "miracles" get the fullest publicity, complete with pictures.

I have often wondered what our hard-working doctors must think of all the "miracles" they are forced to read about? The one outstanding fact about these doctors is that—so we are told—they have invariably failed in curing the patient. Their names are never given—that simply would not be ethical—but their treatment is always blazoned out as utterly hopeless. Only the Divine Gift from "our Lord" himself can cure incurable cases, and "thank God", say the faith-healers, "we have it".

The BBC has succumbed to all this twaddle. On December 13th last, we were given in "Viewpoint" a complete account of the Divine Grace, the Gift of Healing, accorded by God Almighty and his Son—who is himself—to a Miss Dorothy Kerin, who has founded a Home of Healing with a church and altar complete, a devoted chaplain, and a doctor. Together with a very few patients who were "cured" by Miss Kerin, and what the doctor thought of faith-healing, and the definite opinion of the chaplain that God himself and Jesus both spoke to Miss Kerin, the stage was set mostly around this lady, and I must say, very well set.

First of all, she told us that years ago she was very ill

indeed, and was given up entirely by no fewer than 28 doctors—a story which had as a matter of fact been going the rounds for years. In the twinkling of an eye, owing entirely to her faith in God and Jesus, she was cured—a cure so remarkable that she decided to devote the rest of her life to curing the sick exactly as she herself had been cured.

Miss Kerin certainly looked the part. Beautifully dressed, much in the manner of some of our grand Victorian ladies, a sort of mixture of a matron in a hospital and an aristocratic duchess, she breathed saintliness in every word she uttered. It may be very naughty of me, but I couldn't help thinking of the two saintly Cambridge ladies who fooled the public with a pack of lies about Versailles. They wrote a book claiming that they saw a ghostly garden picnic enacted before them just as it had happened in Marie Antoinette's time—and serious and reverent critics practically agreed that it all really happened. A few years ago, a genuine criticism—I dealt with it in these columns—proved that Miss Moberly and Miss Jourdain were unmitigated liars.

Miss Kerin's story of the 28 doctors who had given her up has never been criticised to my knowledge. It is taken for granted. But while it is impossible for me to say what exactly happened, I claim the right to disbelieve it altogether. 28 doctors indeed! What are their names? How can the story be tested? Do doctors themselves believe it? This silly story reminds me of Paul telling us that after his crucifixion, Jesus was seen by "five hundred brethren at once". If Paul had said five hundred thousand brethren, there would always be millions of Christians to believe him and ready to defend the statement. Had Miss Kerin said 28,000 doctors she perhaps would have expected to be believed.

As for cures—I am quite certain that there have been cures not only with patent medicines, with osteopathy, with homoeopathy, with herbs, and even with what are called "old women's remedies". Why not? Many of these methods of course have been severely tested. And none of them depended on "Divine Intervention".

Let me add one word here. I am not speaking from merely reading about faith-healing. I personally have investigated the methods used, and they utterly failed. Even Miss Kerin admits to failures—not her fault of course—all due to "God's will", whatever that is! What I saw of faith-healing in practice was a mixture of ignorance, sheer humbug, and the most credulous "witch doctor" appeals to Jesus and Mary.

But what amazes me in all this is the contemptuous, even savage, attacks on doctors. To read the "miracles of healing" detailed in our national press with their lies about the complete failure of doctors to cure—anything?—and to see how these "miracles" are swallowed even by intelligent people, proves how safely entrenched are the charlatans and humbugs. Yet whenever their "cures" are really investigated, they turn out to be without real evidence of any kind.

We owe a great deal to our highly trained doctors and specialists. Let all who believe in truth see to it that charlatans, and particularly medical ones, are always exposed. Though, unless we manage to get the national press on our side against them, truth will disappear in an orgy of religious sentimentality, slush, and deliberate lying.

## Stunt Christianity

It is a poor outlook for any religion when it has to resort to stunts and gimmicks in an effort to attract followers, either new or relapsed. The old fairy tales and threats that have usefully served the Christian Church throughout the centuries no longer appeal to the faithful, it seems. No more allure in the thought of the Virgin Mary careering about in space—no more credence given to the story of those angelic air travellers who ferried a holy house from Palestine to Loretto in Italy. Something more this-worldly and credible must be found.

So a Fr. Domerson, priest of St. Margaret's Roman Catholic Church, Middlesex, needing £70,000 for a new church (£15,000 of which has already been raised) thought up a new stunt. On Sunday, January 6th, he stood at the church door after Mass and distributed £1 notes to members of the congregation, having previously during the service invited their acceptance. He hopes to receive back the £100 so distributed on March 25th, plus interest and whatever extra may have accrued in the interim, and considers this an enterprising way of raising money. The Christian Church has rarely lacked enterprise in accumulating funds, and the Church of Rome has probably been more successful financially than any other religious body, even more so than those powerful and wealthy worshippers of Mammon, the priests of Amon-Ra in ancient Egypt.

Still, in this scientific age, when the god-religions are dying, I suppose new stunts have to be thought up to take the place of miracles which have lost their potency, except among backward people and the very ignorant. Purgatory is no longer feared as heretofore, when indulgences, designed ostensibly to limit one's sojourn in that unattractive halfway house to Heaven were exceedingly profitable. The mystique is departing. Our Lady looks like going the way of her predecessors, Isis, Astarte, and the other goddesses of antiquity. No longer do people rush to endow churches with lands and fortunes for the love of God—or more probably fear of Hell-fire. Other methods, more in line with an increasingly secular age, must be restored to keep the religion-business solvent. So let us try what the psychologically embarrassing gimmick of distributing £1 notes will do? Recipients will never have the face just to hand back £1 on March 25th, even if Mum has to go without her hair-do for weeks.

Then there is the Anglican Rev. Kenneth Toovey with his magazine the *Teddington Outlook*, which replaces the parish up picture of S.S. Peter and Paul, Teddington. This has the pin-up picture of a glamour girl on the front page. Shades of the Church Fathers! The reverend gentleman says he wants to show that if glamour has attractions so has God! The paper aims to emulate the popularity of national daily papers. He does not indicate which ones, but with bingo for bazaars, rock and roll in crypts, and God equated with pin-up girls, what is Christianity coming to? It was never behindhand in thinking up ways to delude the people and to persuade them to part with their money. Now, however, I fancy they are becoming rather desperate. The edifice is gradually crumbling, and we are witnessing the twilight of an outworn faith, the emptiness of which is exposed for all to see as it passes away into history along with all the other outworn cults of the past. In spite of £1 note distributions and glamorous pin-up girls.

ELIZABETH COLLINS.

## SPEAK FOR YOURSELF!

"Please do not wear a bridal gown with a daring neckline. The person who gets the benefit is the minister—and he does not want it!" The advice comes in a list of "helpful hints" by the Rev. Charles Grice, 38-year-old Rector of Armthorpe, Yorks, in his parish magazine.

Mr. Grice, a former miner, said yesterday: "I just had to say we don't get many daring necklines here, but I am speaking out for all clergymen."—*Daily Herald* (14/1/63).

## CORRESPONDENCE

### THE LEICESTER DEBATE

I have just received copies of *THE FREETHINKER* (December 14th, 1962) which report my debate with Tom Mosley.

Although I think that Mr. Hammersley has attempted to be scrupulously fair in his report, it contains some human errors which I must refer to.

1. I never claimed that Einstein was a Christian. The reference I made to Einstein was in reply to Mr. Mosley's dogmatic statement that he was an Atheist, which I controverted. My claim was that Einstein believed in God, and this I stick to. I mentioned a quotation (carved above the fire place of a room in Princeton University) "God who creates and is nature, is very difficult to understand, but He is not arbitrary or malicious". Another statement of Einstein's (*Friends Intelligence*, October 18th, 1949), which describes his attitude gives, "You will hardly find one among the profounder sort of scientific minds, without peculiar religious feeling of his own . . . His religious feeling takes the form of rapturous amazement at the harmony of the natural law . . . This feeling is the guiding principle of his life and work. It is beyond question akin to that which has possessed the religious geniuses of all ages". Such remarks illustrate the fact that Einstein saw the fitness of God in the natural order of things.

2. I never claimed that most scientists are Christians, since I have no evidence for such a claim. What I said was that most of the scientists who were at University with me were Christians.

3. I would also like to refer to Kant. I objected, in the debate, to the specific label of "atheist" that Mr. Mosley placed on him. It is true that in his day he was a great critic of traditional precepts of theology but also of rationalist and empirical philosophy too. He was no orthodox believer but there is no evidence of atheism in his writing. He had a sense of some ultimate reality through which individuals receive their moral law or categorical imperative. I quote Bertrand Russell (*History of Western Philosophy*, p. 620), Kant, "rejects all the old metaphysical arguments for God, but considers his new ethical argument irrefutable".

Throughout the debate Mr. Mosley, whose company I enjoyed immensely, seemed unable to understand the difference between atheism and agnosticism and the fact that faith by its very nature contains an element of doubt or agnosticism. This, however, is an essential element in the Christian attitude to life.

I am very much looking forward to my next encounter.

(The Rev.) BILL MATTHEWS.

Vicar of Copt Oak, Markfield, Leicester.

### GERHARD SZCZESNY

Mr. Colin McCall's article on Gerhard Szczesny and his book, *The Future of Unbelief* (*THE FREETHINKER*, 21/12/62) cannot stand as it is without comment from a German. Szczesny published a small booklet in 1947, *Europe and the Anarchy of Soul*, and he was awarded the position with the Bavarian Radio. He succeeded in staying with the station despite the fact that ever since the war this country, especially with the aid of the USA, has been made into an anti-communist bulwark. Szczesny is not clerical, however anti-communist, but he is no atheist, and indeed he brought a libel suit against a Stuttgart paper, the *Deutsche Mark*, for having called him an atheist. He was no atheist, he declared; he didn't fight the Churches; he stood for tolerance and humanism. But his tolerance and humanism end at the Iron Curtain.

Clericalism made such inroads into this country that he had to resign from his broadcasting work in November 1961, after he had put the Polish philosopher, Kolakowski, on his special night programme speaking on "The Catholic Church in an Atheistic Country". Four months earlier he had formed the Humanistische Union, which now publishes (sporadically) a monthly entitled *Vorgänge*. On January 23rd, 1962, he spoke at Nurnberg, with about 700 people present, and then replied to written questions only. Asked whether Christians were admitted to his Union, he replied: "No union is possible in this country without Christian assistance". Asked about Christians supporting nuclear weapons, he said this was a political question. "It would be unbearable", he said at Erlangen, "to be ready on one side to give one's life against the Marxian-Leninist ideological state, when there is no alternative but a Christian ideological state".

These are just a few indications (I could give many more) that Szczesny is a many-sided opportunist, gathering around him those who have grudges against the government but actually having no remedy to offer.

GERDA GUTTENBERG (Erlangen, West Germany).

### CONFUSION?

Robert Dent in a letter (*THE FREETHINKER*, 11/1/63), questioning Mr. Ridley's Age of Progress article on December 28th, 1962, refers to "choosing the unaesthetic of one period and contrasting it with the aesthetic of another".

This caused me to wonder just what is the meaning of aesthetic.

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as used here in a Freethought journal. To me, the term means the indulgence of the cultured mind in meditation and enjoyment of the arts of nature and especially of man, and in an abstract sense this may be legitimate. When however, a learned man of humane outlook and altruistic mind uses the term and makes comparisons of the ages, I wonder is there not some confusion of thought in the matter?

The aesthetic age he refers to is one in which the leisured and cultured minority used their power to enslave the workers and artists of their time to build these beautiful monuments to poverty, dirt, degradation and want—these same monuments exist the world over from the pyramids of Egypt to the Vatican. That we have no such monuments in the present era is probably due to the lessened influence of the Church and aristocratic society, and the power of the common man with Trade Unions which demand an hourly wage for the least skilled worker of about 8s. to 10s. per hour.

In this light, St. Pancras might become beautiful and to the true humanist Durham Cathedral and others might lay bare all their shabby skeleton of misery.

Some people may gaze on the tools of the Inquisition and marvel at the ingenuity of man to devise such appliances and the age of Faith that gave him inspiration.

I could not term such people aesthetic nor Freethinkers.

JAMES HENDREN.

### A CONVERT TO ANGLICANISM

My own reply to Miss Neal would have differed somewhat from that published in THE FREETHINKER on January 11th.

I would have said "I am quite willing to concede the logical necessity of a first cause. Clearly everything must have a cause except the first cause, the uncaused cause of all other causes. The word cause can have various meanings. The first cause can have only one meaning. It is that which gives existence to all the factors which contribute to the making of the universal whole. I must however point out to you, Miss Neal, that the acceptance of a first cause as a logical necessity, provides no moral justification for a belief in God. This is an error which I myself have made and corrected. You simply must not identify the first cause of the physical universe with a purely religious concept such as Jehovah or Jesus Christ or Allah or any other god of any other religion. The fact that the universe has a first cause provides no valid excuse for believing the story of Jesus or any other story in the Bible. It provides no valid excuse to the millions of Roman Catholics who surrender their freedom of mind to the spiritual dictatorship of the Pope.

I deeply regret your conversion to the Anglican Communion. Sectarian religion is a very poor substitute for atheistic humanism which aims at stimulating the real moral progress of all mankind. We are all the product of the same first cause, but we are not the children of the same god. For the gods, Miss Neal are mere idols, the product of human imagination, varying enormously according to the time and place of their birth.

I hope sincerely that in due course you will recover your lost freedom, and that you will come once again to recognise the fact that you cannot really become anything better than a free human being.

P. P. CROMMELIN.

[We cannot accept the "logical necessity" of a first cause but, assuming there to have been one, we agree that its identification with a deity is unwarranted.—Ed.]

### A FAKE?

I have a book entitled, *Interesting Letters of Pope Clement XIV* (Ganganelli) Vol. 1, 1777, which formed the basis of Mr. F. A. Ridley's article, "The Pope Who Suppressed the Jesuits", on November 30th, 1962. A friend assures me that this book is a fake. Could any reader of THE FREETHINKER offer more information about this book?

ROGER POWER.

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