

# The Freethinker

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ON JULY 13TH, 1962, the *Daily Sketch* devoted most of a page to the alleged Lourdes miracle cancer cure of John de Bourse of Hertfordshire. On July 16th, 1962, I wrote to Mr. de Bourse, c/o the *Daily Sketch*, challenging the cure and asking him to supply details, which I promised to publish in THE FREETHINKER. Although I enclosed a stamped-addressed envelope, I received no reply. So, on September 7th 1962, I repeated the challenge publicly in THE FREETHINKER, copies of which were sent to Mr. de Bourse and the *Daily Sketch*. To this day I have heard no word from either. Yet, on June 15th, 1963, in a strip-cartoon, *Focus on Fact*, "The Mystery of Lourdes (6)", the *Daily Sketch* blandly repeated: "John de Bourse of Watford lay dying of cancer. He was taken to Lourdes. Doctors at the West Herts Hospital expected him to die there. He was lowered into the water. He walked out unaided—completely cured" (italics in original).

Dr. D. J. West, author of *Eleven Lourdes Miracles*, the most searching inquiry I know into alleged cures, has remarked on the "great discrepancy between the poor quality of the evidence actually available and the Lourdes authorities' reputation for painstaking exactitude" (*The Rationalist Annual* 1958). "One reason why it has not come to light", Dr. West says, "is that public controversies about Lourdes have usually been conducted through popular articles in the Press with a regrettably low level of factual information". The pity is, of course, that medical men don't challenge the popular press on such occasions. Perhaps professional etiquette forbids it, but indifference would seem to be a contributory factor. In some cases one suspects timidity too. Whatever the reason, it means that the press claims have to be challenged by others.

### Questions to the Patient

In the present instance, notice the general title of the strip-cartoons, *Focus on Fact*. The week after "The Mystery of Lourdes" had been featured on six successive days, the cartoons dealt in a purely factual way with Wimbledon tennis. The same men, Gary Keane and Neville Randall, were responsible. That Rod Laver won the Men's Singles title twice is attested fact. That John de Bourse was miraculously cured of cancer is a very different type of statement. Without the medical data which I sought in vain, it is impossible to reach any conclusion in this latter case. I cannot do better than repeat the unanswered letter I wrote a year ago to Mr. de Bourse,

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

"Now it so happens that I live in Watford, and I have a proposal to make to you. Are you prepared to let me inquire—that is, really inquire—into your case? What

I mean is, will you give me details of the doctors who diagnosed the lung cancer, on what basis it was diagnosed, what tests were conducted, etc.?"

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

"The trouble with all the many miracle cure claims that our popular papers publicise—and then generally forget about—is that vague references are made to doctors giving patients up as hopeless. The *Sketch*

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

## Cancer "Cures"

### at Lourdes

By COLIN McCALL

said in your case that 'the doctors gave him up'. Again, who are these doctors? May we have their names? Do you recall their actual words? Did one or more of them say to you: 'Mr. de Bourse, I (we) give you up as hopeless. You are suffering from incurable lung cancer'? If they did, it sounds very unlike the usual practice of doctors. If they did not, what grounds have you for saying that they gave you up?"

### Vague

"In short, Mr. de Bourse, may we have a little precision where all is vague? I assure you that any statement you make in reply to this letter will receive full publicity in our paper, THE FREETHINKER, and if your reply is devastating, you may be doing your Church an enormous amount of good. Think of the possibility of converting unbelievers. I warn you, though, that they may be a little more critical than the average reader of the *Daily Sketch*".

### Questions to the "Daily Sketch"

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

the Lourdes Medical Bureau.

This, I suggested, is the way that a responsible newspaper should approach an alleged miracle cure. And I informed them that it was THE FREETHINKER'S intention, should any names of doctors be received from Mr. de Bourse, to put the matter in the hands of Dr. J. V. Duhig. I asked Miss King and her editor what value could be placed on the article they had printed on July 13th, 1962. Did they consider that it provided sufficient information to enable a non-medical reader (or even a medical reader for that matter) to answer the question they asked: "Was it faith that saved his life?" If we had a real Press Council in this country (in fact as well as name), I said, this is a type of article that it might inquire into. "It might decide that, cancer being such a terrible and widespread disease, causing probably more human unhappiness than any other, articles like Doreen King's are not only irresponsible, but harmful—even cruel, because they may raise false hopes". That such hopes *are* false can be shown, I said by reference to Dr. West's exposure of the hopelessly unsatisfactory basis for the only "officially recognised Lourdes cancer cure since the war".

#### Rose Martin

That was the case of Rose Martin. And in its *Focus on Fact*, the *Daily Sketch* not only cited the de Bourse case, it repeated the claim that Mme. Martin had been cured of cancer. Here is its description: "Sent home from hospital riddled with cancer to die. Lowered into the water, she felt a movement, gentle and warm, through her body. That night she walked. Back home her doctor certified: 'You were incurable. Your tumours have vanished'."

What are the facts? Dr. West, who has examined the dossier of the Lourdes Medical Bureau reports that in February 1946 Rose Martin had an operation for the removal of the womb because of cervical cancer, "the diagnosis being confirmed by examination of the affected tissue". In October the same year she had to undergo another operation because of a protrusion of the intestines at the site of the first operation, and also a fistula that would not heal. Six months later she returned to hospital complaining of pain in the rectum, which "was assumed to be an inoperable secondary cancerous growth", and the patient was sent home. For three months she lay in bed getting worse, losing weight, and taking enormous doses of morphine to ease the pain. On June 30th she was taken to Lourdes on a stretcher and on July 3rd, following her third immersion in the pool, she felt better and was able to go to the lavatory successfully without an enema. The lump *assumed* to be cancerous, had disappeared.

#### Constipation

Was Mme. Martin cured of cancer? Oddly enough, though the surgeons had confirmed the 1946 diagnosis by microscopical examination, they did not do so in 1947. "Considering the history of infection persisting after her first operation", says Dr. West, "and in view of the fact that she had a persistent fetid discharge from the vagina, one would have thought that the possibility of the illness being due to an infective process in the lower abdomen would have been carefully investigated". But the dossier did not even include a temperature chart. "Another consideration is", says Dr. West, "that the condition might have been aggravated by the large doses of morphia that the patient was taking, since this drug causes severe constipation. Indeed, there is even a possibility that the 'tumour' was simply a mass of faeces".

#### Contradiction

Moreover, the Lourdes Medical Bureau must have considered these possibilities and "realised that they would

make nonsense of the miracle". Written on the report in the handwriting of the President of the Lourdes Medical Bureau is the statement that there was no evacuation from the bowel of pus or any collection of abnormal material. But, as Dr. West points out, "this contradicts the evidence given by Mme. Martin herself, who says, in a statement included in the dossier, that during the train journey to Lourdes she called for a bed pan and passed a large quantity of stinking faeces. The nurse who looked after Mme. Martin on the train remembers giving her the bed pan, and she recalls that Mme. Martin was demanding frequent morphia injections. On the instructions of the doctor on the train, this nurse gave Mme. Martin an injection of Lourdes water and camphor instead, and was surprised to notice how effectively this calmed the patient. One may well speculate whether the effect of the journey, plus the withdrawal of the morphia and consequent relief of constipation, may not have been the real cause of her improvement". No one can do more than speculate, says Dr. West, "for the relevant medical information is sadly lacking".

The fact remains that the *Daily Sketch* report on Rose Martin could, in conformity with the available data, be amended to read: "Cured of severe constipation on the train to Lourdes".

## The Burning of Adam Duff O'Toole

By GERARD McDERMOTT

HE WAS one of the strangest characters that ever appeared in this country [Eire] his name was Adam Duff O'Toole. He was born in County Wicklow, somewhere around 1300. It is said of him as a boy that he was wild and unmanageable, but he was always a great reader of books and before he had reached the age of 20 he was formulating his own opinions on every conceivable subject, including that of religion.

Indeed, it was his views on religion that eventually got him into trouble. He came to Dublin at the age of 22 and a year later began issuing pamphlets denying the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. He also aspersed the character of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and he declared that the Holy Scripture, both the Old Testament and the New, were a fraud and a fable.

Duff O'Toole was arrested and charged with uttering blasphemous statements, but he refused to retract them or to say that he was in any way sorry. Because of his youth, he was given every chance to repent, but he absolutely refused.

Then he was publicly tried for blasphemy, found guilty and sentenced to be burned alive at the stake. In those days the sentence for blasphemy was death by burning.

This sentence was carried out publicly in Dublin in 1327.

It is said that the stake at which Adam Duff O'Toole was burned to death was built on the site now occupied by Saint Stephen's Green, but the exact location is not definite. Crowds collected around the fire before the blasphemer was consigned to the flames.

[Reprinted from the *Evening Herald*, Dublin, 15/7/63]

#### ESTATE MISSIONARIES

I am glad to learn from the *Estates Gazette* magazine that there is a Christian Union for the Estate Profession. A rich field for missionary work, without doubt.

—Henry Fielding (*Daily Herald*, 31/7/63)

# Agnosticism and Thomas Hardy

By REGINALD UNDERWOOD

IN THAT LONG CAREER as novelist, beginning so blithely with *Under the Greenwood Tree* and ending so somberly with *Jude the Obscure*, in an even longer career beginning with experimental versifying and culminating in that epic indictment of divine ineptitude, *The Dynasts*, it requires no particular acumen to see why two stock and facile accusations should be levelled with increasing frequency at Thomas Hardy. One was that he was a pessimist, other that he was an agnostic. There was certainly considerable justification for both charges. But there was no justification for the inference that pessimism and agnosticism were as inevitably allied as Christianity pretended to be with optimism.

According to the prejudices of Christian critics, Hardy's pessimism was a necessary outcome of his agnosticism. To cast a doubt on Christian faith was to cast a shadow on human life. And this, in spite of the entire lack of evidence to show that agnostics were any more chronically down in the dumps on account of their doubt, than Christians were perpetually up in the seventh heaven because of their assurance. Moreover, the fact that nothing had done so much to darken so many lives as some of the outrageous and indefensible ideas perpetrated by Christianity, was blandly ignored.

Critics, strong enough at freethinking to rise above such a restricting bias, understood more clearly that it was not so much the agnosticism that engendered the pessimism as the pessimism that led to the agnosticism. Hardy's agnosticism was the outcome of an innate leaning to pessimism which was bound to grow and strengthen in the mind of a highly intelligent and sensitive artist contemplating a human order which he was driven to regard as the "Forlorn hope" brought about by "some vast Imbecility, mighty to build and blend, but impotent to tend . . .".

As Hardy himself more than once pointed out, this tendency to pessimism was primarily a matter of inborn and unalterable temperament. Or, in the trenchant idiom of his rustics might have used, it's like wooden legs, it runs in the blood. It does not follow as some so-and-sos would delight to make out, that agnosticism has a similar relation to wooden heads. On the contrary, agnosticism is very plainly the proper result of that sagacious audacity which is able to brush aside authoritarian directives and bring an audacious sagacity to seek and propound its own conclusions in its own way, whether they be optimistic, pessimistic, or what some people call meliorist and others, neither one thing nor the other.

There is a quality about Hardy's much berated pessimism which often makes one feel that it should not be called pessimism at all. It should be called compassion. All his work is permeated with that great humane emotion which is so much more typical of agnostic humanism than it is of conventional Christianity. For true humanism, by its very name and nature, is humanly compassionate. Humanists not only emphasise that it is here and now we experience suffering, they insist that here and now are the place and time to combat it. But while humanists aim to dispense all possible alleviation, Christians largely aim to dispense with it. Christians of the more sacerdotal brands often seem to take the view that earthly suffering should be accepted as a sort of privileged long-suffering, a condition to be borne with religious fortitude (especially when it is somebody else who is suffering) as a spiritual preparation for some far-off, celestial, God-forgive-me then

and there in which, they affirm—heaven only knows on what ground—all suffering will be finally cancelled and compensated. An agnostic can but wearily reiterate that in face of the Christian's all-good and omnipotent God, such a make-shift state of affairs is deplorably void of rhyme or reason, since such a God could and would as St. Paul says in another context, change it in the twinkling of an eye. Mercifully, not all Christians uphold such a piously callous attitude. Nevertheless, there is much caustic truth in the pithy country saying: Christians will never see you suffer, they'd sooner shut their eyes.

In these matters, the compassionate Hardy was wholeheartedly on the side of the humanists. And although he may have gone further and fared worse than some humanists would have done in portraying human life as predominantly tragic, his books are not at all the dramas of unrelieved gloom that some of his detractors, overflowing with righteous uplift, would have us believe. Sometimes his very pessimism seems positively optimistic. Nobody could have been more vividly aware of man's courageous will and even capacity, to mitigate man's misfortunes. His pages are rich in vivaciously charming pastoral scenes and rare with an inimitable bucolic humour. And it is noteworthy that his humour, which springs with such earthly spontaneity from the very stuff of life, always seems to be more intelligently appreciated by the so-called pessimist than the often mis-called optimist. Hardy's pen was unrivalled in depicting a genuine, uncontrived drollery. But he also keenly apprehended that it was a vitality of humour which held a deeper significance than the mere provocation to laughter. Whether as atheist or pessimist, he never lost sight of that significance. In him, it is expressed by the readiness with which he can be identified with the "Spirit of the Pities" so poignantly prominent in his great poem *The Dynasts*. This splendid aspect of Hardy arises out of his profound sympathy with all such unfortunates as those he himself created, victims whom life has wronged with gross and grievous injustice. And, as he bitingly puts it "With God's consent on thee". The tragedy of *Tess* is only one counterpart of numberless similar tragedies in actual life. When it comes at last to its piteous close, Hardy announces with cold, disgusted, baffled but always dignified contempt, it is because the President of the Immortals has ended his sport with her.

This famous phrase made quite a stir on its publication. Hardy was roundly rebuked for what in some circles was considered to be a blasphemous imputation. Chesterton, the Catholic convert and uncompromising optimist, whose optimism was often so light-hearted that it might be called light-headed, undertook his own share of the general chastisement which included his absurd and now well-known jeer at Hardy as "the village atheist brooding over the village idiot." But why shouldn't the village atheist brood over the village idiot? Why shouldn't the village idiot be regarded as grave enough cause for brooding in any thoughtful man? Neither the idiot nor the brooding is an appropriate subject for derision. However, at least one youthful champion (no names mentioned) of Hardy came out with the rude retort, that Chesterton's quip, rightly understood, merely showed the Roman Catholic idiot trying to brood over the really Catholic atheist.

That, as they say, was coming it rather strong. For Chesterton was a long way from being an idiot, just as,  
(Concluded on next page)

## This Believing World

A gentleman called Colin Cross writing recently in the *Sunday Express* on bestsellers asks his readers, do they know Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, who are the World's bestsellers? Well, if they don't, if they have never heard of them, what a damning accusation this must be for the Churches! For at least 1800 years, the four Gospel writers have been spoken about and written about, and their works printed in millions, or perhaps it should be billions, and people are asked "Do you know them?" There is hardly a school in Christendom which does not talk about them and "explain" them for hours every week.

★

Yet it is true in spite of all this publicity nobody knows anything whatever for certain about the *men*, the authors of the Gospels which are given their names. We do not know who they are, when they wrote, what language they originally used, who or what were their authorities, who put the Gospels in Greek, and even why the so-called Apocryphal Gospels were discarded. Mr. Cross merely repeats what Bible "history" books tell him, and they merely repeat each other. Incidentally, he finds John (or some parts of John) "crystal clear". It is actually packed with sheer unintelligible nonsense. The "beautiful story" of "our Lord", written for children by very pious ladies, almost always give John a miss.

★

In trying to answer a question on John the Baptist in a Birmingham journal the other day, the Rev. N. S. Power points out that it is quite *wrong* to think of the "Kingdom of Heaven" as a "place" to which we go when we die. It is nothing of the kind, he says. So Mr. Power is another parson who does not believe that God is actually sitting on a cloud "up there" in the Heaven we were all taught about at school. Moreover, "Jesus was not the sort of Christ most people wanted or expected"—he adds—though we are always told that "the common people heard him gladly". And Mr. Power's Jesus was not "puritanical". He "really shocked them".

★

The truth is of course that by picking out little bits you can prove anything whatever from the Bible, and certainly anything about Jesus. We once hinted that Jesus was the greatest boxer that ever lived, and a very angry believer asked us to tell where that was said. And he got much angrier when it was pointed out to him that Jesus chased, all *alone* too, a bunch of "money changers" out of the Temple. Anyhow, we are delighted to find Christians now throwing overboard Heaven as a place! They are learning from Freethinkers.

★

It never takes a medium long before he (or she) gets in touch with a famous man who has recently died. For example, a month or so ago, John Cowper Powys, the distinguished novelist, passed on, and naturally a medium, in this case, a Miss Horsfield, told Professor G. Wilson Knight who had gone to a Spiritualist church where she was holding a "service", that all through it she had seen the figure of Powys standing by him. How she knew the figure of Powys, we are not told but probably the lady found out Mr. Knight was there—and hey presto! there was Powys.

★

The whole show is given away in an article in *Psychic News* for July 27th. First, there was a fine account of Powys by Professor Knight in the *Yorkshire Post*; then a note to him from the medium who said she had a

message for him from the dead Powys; then Knight approached the medium for further particulars: then she pointed out to the Professor how powerful was the dead novelist's influence, and so on. It would have been a Spiritualist miracle if Professor Knight had not succumbed. Like so many other professors, he was thoroughly bamboozled.

### AGNOSTICISM AND THOMAS HARDY

(Concluded from page 251)

in some opinions, he was a long way from being a convincing Catholic. It is true that in later life, under, it was whispered, the influence of petticoat government, he followed his wife Frances into the Romish Church. But he seems to have remained more of a devoted Francescan than he ever became a devout Catholic. Whether or not at a later date, when Hardy had become world famous with a personal reputation of unblemished probity that might have shamed more than one eminent Christian, Chesterton, in defiance of his Catholic conscience, joined in the general acclamation of Hardy as being, not only a great writer, but also, notwithstanding his wicked agnosticism, a good man.

Now a great writer who is also patently a good man and at the same time a recognised agnostic, is as useful an argument for agnosticism as any agnostic could desire. But the Church was more alert to see this than most agnostics at the time. The Church had already seen, as Hardy advanced into extreme old age, how valuable an asset he might be to the Church's prestige, if only he could be posed as still some sort of churchman. The Church also saw that although Hardy's agnosticism was inconspicuously implicit in everything he wrote, it lacked the incisiveness which could have shielded it from a special sort of attack. The Church therefore, crafty from long experience, attacked it by ignoring it and by playing up Hardy's undisguised interest in old churches, old church customs, and especially old church music. It mattered nothing to churchmen that this interest was plainly artistic and not religious. It served. And Hardy had probably grown too old to bother.

His instructions were understood to have been that when he died he should be returned with the utmost simplicity to lie with his kinsfolk at Stinsford. But the Church intervened with the tempting offer of burial near to his friend Meredith, in Westminster Abbey. His wife was reported as saying, that after due and anxious reflection, she felt she must give way to what she believed were the country's wishes. The result, as we know, was that Stinsford received his heart and the Abbey the ashes of the rest of him, as though he were a great Christian saint instead of the atheist saint Chesterton had somewhat unwittingly dubbed him. All this may have been Christian, but it could hardly be called strictly honourable. It may have been mildly dishonourable, but it could certainly have been called successful—from the Church's point of view. From any other point of view the best that can be said is, that Hardy in his death gave us one more of those life's little ironies which in his fiction he had so often handled with such masterly skill.

### CLERICAL ASSISTANCE

"We are," reveals the General Secretary of the National Secular Society, Mr. Colin McCall, in a modest letter to the *Observer* on the aims of the Society, "trying to undo the immense psychological and social harm done by religion".

It is consoling to think that there are many people trying to help them, including a number of clergymen.—PETER SIMPLE II.  
*Daily Telegraph* (30/7/63).

# THE FREETHINKER

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Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1. Details of membership of the National Secular Society may be obtained from the General Secretary, 103 Borough High Street, S.E.1. Inquiries regarding Bequests and Secular Funeral Services should also be made to the General Secretary, N.S.S.

## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### OUTDOOR

- Edinburgh Branch NSS (The Mound).—Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. CRONAN, McRAE and MURRAY.
- London Branches—Kingston, Marble Arch, North London: (Marble Arch), Sundays, from 4 p.m.: Messrs. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER, C. E. WOOD, D. H. TRIBE, J. A. MILLAR.
- (Tower Hill). Every Thursday, 12—2 p.m.: Messrs. J. W. BARKER and L. EBURY.
- Manchester Branch NSS (Platt Fields), Sunday afternoon (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
- Nottingham Branch NSS (Old Market Square), every Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

### INDOOR

- Birmingham Branch NSS (Midland Institute, Paradise Street), Sunday, August 11th, 6.45 p.m.: PROFESSOR P. SARGANT FLORENCE, "Rationalist Sociology and Humanist Aims".

## Notes and News

THIS WEEK we print synopses of two startling plays which have been translated from the Portuguese by Nan Flanagan. Miss Flanagan tells us that she has had many telegrams and letters from all over South America, "many from priests", congratulating her on her translation of *The Sin of Father Amaro*, and "hoping there will soon be an end to the farcical law of celibacy of the Catholic clergy". The book was listed fourth in *Time's* eight best books of the season on May 10th, and continues to be widely read in Britain. How widely, may be indicated by a story Miss Flanagan tells us. Her niece, in London, had invited a cousin, an Irish Dominican, to tea, and he came a little late, bringing a Benedictine monk with him. They had passed each other in Trafalgar Square, each with *The Sin of Father Amaro* under his arm. They stopped and talked. Both were taking the book back to Ireland.

"I SEE you all mourned the Pope's death," Miss Flanagan writes from the Canary Islands, "but not as much as we did here. We had sorrowful processions in all towns and villages, and it was so sad to see the little children, dressed in the habits of monks and nuns, with eyes inflamed from weeping for the loss of Christ's Vicar on earth".

FROM PADUA, another ex-Roman Catholic, Mary C. Blakiston, sends a different picture, and expresses the hope that, "if the Western world is going to turn Catholic, it will be in the Italian way". The Italians are, as Miss Blakiston says, Catholic in name, but only in name. They think and act just as they like. "I once asked some Italians of very low class in the lake districts, what they thought of a sermon they and I had listened to. 'Oh,

they laughed, 'the priest said all that for the people, not for us'." Who the "people" were, Miss Blakiston never discovered.

ITALIAN PRIESTS themselves speak of "latent protestantism", and even come to terms with it. "I have often been told, 'My confessor allows this or that'", says Miss Blakiston, and "though I cannot specify the 'this' and 'that', they might well surprise you". What it all amounts to is, that "religion in Italy, in spite of all the noise and pomp and continual feasts, has a very secondary place in the lives of the people". But the Pope is a commercial asset.

IN THE Jesuit-edited, Irish-printed *Christian Order* for July 1963, Hugh Kay, assistant editor of the *Catholic Herald*, finds "very great promise for the future" of his Church in Latin America, in the report of an Argentinian Methodist, Senor José Miguel, who was an observer at the Vatican Council. A "new dawn has broken for the Church in those troubled areas", we are told, the first signs of which are, apparently, that "the Church is facing the facts, as, for instance, that the number of practising Catholics in Chile today may not be much more than seventeen or eighteen per cent". The Church is said to be "throwing herself"—rather belatedly!—"into the work of education and of securing better conditions for family life", and "is determined now to dissociate herself from the reactionary forces of big business and the army". The italics are ours.

CATHOLIC PARTIES, says Mr. Kay, "are beginning to represent a significant political force in Latin America", and the "popular image of a reactionary Church is gradually being modified by movements of a moderate left-wing, impregnated with the social spirit". We don't doubt that the Roman Church is making a big effort to modify the "popular image", or that it will have a certain limited success. But some images are deeply graven.

EVEN THE optimistic Mr. Kay can't be very happy about the situation in Britain. A London parish priest recently told him that, "In some industrial areas, the young are abandoning their religion to an unprecedented extent. In some schools, half the children miss Mass on Sundays. In some areas, the majority totally abandon the practice of their faith after leaving school". And Mr. Kay adds that the "situation in many grammar schools is hardly better than that in secondary moderns" and "priests working with teenagers after school-leaving age find an extraordinary ignorance of the principles of the faith . . .". No wonder Archbishop Heenan declared, a month or so ago, that the school must take the place of the home!

THE SCHOOL can hardly take the place of the home in a case reported by the *South London Press* (19/7/63), however, since two of William Harris's children are having to leave the English Martyrs' Roman Catholic School, Walworth, London, because their father refuses to attend weekly Mass. Mr. Harris, a coloured radio engineer, who is married to a non-Catholic, says he doesn't go to church because he doesn't like the smell of the incense, but his children attend Mass every Sunday. That isn't sufficient for the parish priest, Father Thomas Power. "We think it is only fair", he says, "that the children of those people who take an interest in the Church and the school and who support it financially should have the first chance of receiving a Catholic education". Archbishop Heenan, please note.

## Two Plays from the Portuguese

NAN FLANAGAN, translator of the widely praised and immensely successful *Sin of Father Amaro* by Eça de Queiroz, has translated two plays by the Portuguese playwright, Bernardino Santareno, which it is hoped will be published in this country. She gives here, brief synopses of them.

### JOANA OF THE EVIL EYE

The whole countryside is bubbling with excitement over the horrid crime of the burning of a witch in the old village of Canaves, near Lisbon, on March 3rd, 1934. The trial of the women who perpetrated the crime was held the day before yesterday in the Common Court. They hadn't done the deed through any ill-will towards the girl, they pleaded; on the contrary, they were all friendly disposed towards her and only wished to free her from the evil spirit which had taken up its abode in her body.

They confessed to having soundly beaten her and then forced her into the fire made from sweet myrtle, wild pine, the poison from two vipers and salt. They had been directed in their operations by an old woman, Zefa de Jesus, whom they considered a saint. She had studied the article "How To Remove An Evil Spirit", from the book of St. Cyprano, the patron saint of all witchcraft. The actual words of the saint were: "The person conducting the cleansing must first get the consent of the possessed one to enter the Holy Fire. Then, after hearing the accusations against the possessed . . ."

"Ah, Joana, you cursed witch", a young woman cried, "thinking you were my friend, I delivered my baby all healthy and joyful, into your arms, and when you gave him back to me, his little body was covered all over with purplish-red marks [the child obviously had measles] and that same night he withered up and died because you had cast your Evil Eye on him. Before, my home was so full of gladness that a crust of dry bread tasted like honey, now at night my man lies beside me as cold as the pebbles in the bottom of the well—cursed, thrice cursed witch!"

Then Rita, a woman of sixty, shouted out in pain and sorrow, "My son, Antonio, loved you and he and his rival, Rui, fought with knives for you and killed one another. Never more will I touch that lovely flesh of his, softer than the petal of a rose. Never more will I hear his lovely young voice trilling out like the song of the blackbird in the early morning. Curse you, witch, you were the cause of his death".

Then upspoke Maria, a little wizened old woman. "My John loved you and sat all night on your doorstep. You spurned him, so that now they tell me he wanders day and night through the woods. He is now a veritable werewolf. Suffer the Holy Fire, Joana, so that my son will come back to me.

Zefa says, "If Joana's cure is efficacious all your beloved ones will come back to you".

". . . Then after hearing the accusations against the possessed, kindle a low fire, gradually feeding it till the flames reach the shameful parts of the possessed and, provided that all present believe, she will come out of the fire pure as the driven snow".

The screams of Joana grow louder and louder and she dies in the fire.

### THE VOW

A young engaged couple are on the shore watching three fishing-boats, in one of which is the young man's father, struggling against a raging sea and a wild wind.

They kneel on the sand and make a vow that if the father is saved, they will marry but have no sexual relations. The father's boat is saved while the two other boats go down. All on, shore, cry "A Miracle! A Miracle!" though the father has lost the use of his limbs.

The marriage is unhappy, the wife, Maria do Mar, complains that her husband, Jose, now the church sacristan is cold as a dead fish as he lies beside her at night; that their sheets smell of incense and wax candles and never of a man and that Jose has lost all interest in the sea.

They hear the guards shooting at some smugglers to one of whom they give shelter and with whom Maria do Mar falls in love. Jose in his jealousy thinks she has been unfaithful to him, he tears off the smuggler's sexual organs with his bare hands, then shoots him dead. He then rushes home, takes the statue of the Virgin from the shrine, and spitting on it, cries, "You, who are just a maggoty worm-eaten piece of wood, you too fooled me, curse you!"

With that he throws the statue into the sea, grabs his wife by the throat, and calling her an unfaithful whore, then pushes her to the ground and takes her, to find she is intact. The guards arrive to arrest him. He is sentenced to twenty-eight years of forced labour in Africa.

## Short Story

By ARTHUR FRANCIS

I AM a lorry driver and a councillor. Socialist and Secularist. When I was a child—not so very long ago—I knew near-starvation. My feet knew the feel of the cold pavements of West Ham, London. The Christian pawnbroker was my mother's broker. But I knew and sang—"Land of Hope and Glory".

The years passed. Hitler attacked. Christians prayed to the same God and killed each other. My ten-minute-a-day scripture lessons provided no answer.

At twenty my holy work began. I bought a Bible and got an answer. Those who died in the war were but sinners. I should be saved if I kept to the "straight and narrow".

I succeeded for six faithful months. Not an oath passed my lips. But I couldn't keep it up. One day in the war I tried to get a lift to Oxford. One by one the vehicles ignored me. God-fearing was forgotten in the torrent that flowed.

Now, I hope, I have found my balance. Married, with children; politics, trade unionism, and my work at the Town Hall to aid my fellow beings. And one day, I glanced at *Tribune*—at an advertisement: "Agnostics, Atheists, Humanists etc." For a threepenny stamp I applied for information. Now I am a member of the National Secular Society, and my question has been answered.

A year ago I served a mission for the Society. Not in darkest Africa, but in Dover, where I live. It was to visit a sick Freethinker, James Matson. He told me he was dying. There was no fear of the Lord. James Matson died a little while after.

I was privileged to say the farewell on behalf of us all. Just an honest good-bye without false sentiments. That is how I have tried to tell my story.

# The "Secret" of Fatima

By JOHN W. TELFER

A FEW YEARS AGO, the Catholic press informed the world that the so-called "third secret of Fatima" was about to be disclosed. But, alas, no sensational revelation has as yet been unfolded. However, since Pope Paul's elevation to the papal throne, the rumours are once more in circulation. The question now being asked is: Will he reveal it?

The "secret" in question is the third part of the message alleged to have been confided by the Virgin Mary to three ignorant peasant children at Fatima on July 13th, 1917. This message is reputed to have been written down by Lucia dos Santos, sole survivor of the three children, in a document composed during 1941-42. She "wrote the account at the bidding of the late Bishop Jose Alves Correia da Santos of Leiria, the diocese which includes Fatima" (*The Glasgow Observer and Scottish Catholic Herald*, July 12th, 1963). Lucia, at that time a member of the Sisters of St. Dorothy, told the Bishop that the first two parts of the "secret" could be revealed then. But "the third part was put in a sealed envelope not to be opened until her death or 1960, whichever came first".

The first "secret" divulged by Lucia was the "vision of hell which the three children said they had in 1917". (One of the hallucinated children concerned, Francisco, was only seven in 1917: which surely indicates just how much reliance can be placed on the "witnesses"). The second "secret" referred to the "consecration of Russia"—but can be hastily discarded as the result of hypocritical clerical prompting.

The sealed envelope containing the third "secret"—about which there have been many speculations—was "inherited" by Bishop Venancio when he succeeded to the Leiria diocese in 1958. In 1959, Bishop Venancio announced that the envelope would presumably be opened in 1960. But, in February 1960, Cardinal Cerejeira said: "I cannot comment on the expediency or in expediency of divulging the secret. I know nothing about it, nor have I been consulted. Regarding publication in 1960, I know only what has been published in the papers".

It is now known that the "secret" was despatched to Pope John—although nothing was disclosed. Lucia, now a nun at the Carmelite convent in Coimbra, is "not allowed to see anyone but her own immediate family". Therefore, like the hallucinated Bernadette at Nevers, she is safeguarded from the scrutiny of sceptics.

Upon critical examination Fatima—like Lourdes, Guadalupe, and La Salette—can easily be exposed as a fraud. The only evidence tendered in support of it are the assertions of credulous, untutored rustics. Modern psychopathology can adequately diagnose the visions and hallucinations "seen" by these mentally unbalanced peasants. In the Catholic Church, however, science and logic are subordinate to superstition and "lolly".

Which brings us back to the question: Will Pope Paul open the letter or will he continue the suspense indefinitely?

# CORRESPONDENCE

The Editor welcomes letters from readers, but asks that they be kept as brief and pertinent as possible.

## SPARTACUS

Normally I do not "gatecrash" into current controversy. As, however, Mr. H. Cutner has impugned the accuracy of my recent book, *Spartacus*, I wish to raise these relevant points.

(a) I used the name "Paul" as that consigned to the author (or authors) of the "Pauline" Epistles, and of their specific theological teachings. In Acts, Paul is described as a weaver from Tarsus but, obviously, in a small book on Roman history I could not be expected to consider moot points in New Testament criticism.

(b) One of the outstanding features of the Pauline theology is that it seeks to effect a compromise between the Roman Empire and its social order based throughout on chattel slavery, and the early Christian Church. Unlike, for example, the Apocalypse, which is violently anti-Roman, Paul's Epistles are full of such statements as "slaves, obey your masters", "the powers that be are ordained of God", etc., etc. The net result of this Pauline theology was to prepare the way for the later (4th century) compromise between Christianity and the Roman Empire and social order effected by Constantine. What, in effect, the Pauline Epistles did, was to say to the Roman slaves, who probably formed the majority of early Christian believers, accept the empire plus slavery, in your lifetime and you will have eternal life hereafter.

I must ask Mr. Cutner to tell us in what respect it is incorrect to describe such teaching (as I did in *Spartacus*) as "a powerful brew of spiritual opium". Or does Mr. Cutner approve of slaves obeying their masters, according to the expression of Paul?

(c) Mr. Cutner also criticises as excessive the figures for the Roman slaves crucified along the Appian Way after the final defeat of Spartacus. No doubt 6,000 represents a convenient round figure, but the number was certainly very large. Josephus, who was an actual eye-witness, tells us that during the Siege Jerusalem (70 AD), Titus crucified 500 Jews a day. If this is to be taken literally the total would have considerably exceeded 6,000. Be that as it may, the number was again certainly very large, as is indicated by the grim comment of the Jewish historian: "room was wanting for the crosses and crosses for the bodies".

The Roman Empire was a colossal institution and its system of repression was upon correspondingly vast scale, many more examples of which are recorded.

I accordingly submit that Mr. Cutner's criticisms of my substantial accuracy in my book *Spartacus* are entirely unfounded.

F. A. RIDLEY.

I have always been a great admirer of Mr. Cutner's scholarly and hard-hitting articles, and in consequence am sorry to find that he has misunderstood my use of the word "misquote" which was not intended in the colloquial sense he appears to imagine, but in the strict definition given by the *Oxford Dictionary* of wrongly citing or appealing to in confirmation of a particular view.

The contention that Mr. Ridley should be able to answer all of Mr. Cutner's questions regarding an historical Paul on every aspect of his life, accurately dated, and indisputably authenticated, simply because he assigns a degree of probability to his historicity is absurd. To deduce it from a single sentence in a short work devoted to another subject, where not only was there not room to deal at length with the points raised, but the author had made abundantly clear the limitations under which he laboured, is illogical. To imply that a series of absurdities concerning specific events must of necessity arise from a generalisation is unfair.

I suppose it should be considered a tribute to Mr. Ridley's ability that as fine a critic as Mr. Cutner can only raise irrelevances such as the stature of a Jew in his criticism.

Whether a little Jew named Paul wrote his epistles or a big gentile using his name is irrelevant compared with the fact that these ideas which did not suddenly appear by virtue of a divine revelation, undoubtedly evolved as a result of the defeat of Spartacus into an opiate so powerful that it appears to drug even some secularists to this day.

JOHN A. MILLAR.

## TRAGEDY AND MARXISM

In answer to my critics re Tragedy and Marxism, I would like to agree with Mr. Barry. Yes, Marxists wrangle, interminable words and heat, but there is one matter upon which they never argue, that "The Tool is the Dynamic of Social Progress". *Das Kapital* is a study of economics; to one who stogged through Mill, Smith and Henry George, it came as a clarifying light, simplicity itself. It is the German metaphysics and philosophy of

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Engels that obfuscate the plain materialism of Marx. It is significant that even bourgeois science has named the epochs of man's progress by his tools:— stone age, bronze age, iron age, and today atomic age.

I too, Mr. Smith, hold that there is no purpose in history, in fact the very phrase is jargon. Men have purpose, either individually or collectively, and the collective purpose of men has made its mark upon the history of mankind. The 20 years of Russian history after the 1917 Revolution bear witness to that, it was the collective purpose of the Bolsheviks to jump the time lag of Russian technological development, to produce the tools that could produce the social advance. Defeatism and pessimism were treason to that end, defeatism is treason in wartime, Stalin was faced with war against poverty.

Without a definition of Will and World, I still find the quotation from Schopenhauer meaningless. Perhaps Mr. Smith can enlighten me of the difference between "the Purpose in History" and the "Will of the World". Comte was not claiming a purpose in history, he was pointing to a method of understanding man by a study of the historical evolution of man in society.

Without straining the indulgence of the editor and reader I could not deal with your "Marx-mutilations". Your interpretation of Marxism is not mine, and without your substantiating your theories with the equivalent quotations, we should merely go round in circles and bedevil Mr. Barry, whose thanks to God would lose their validity!

EVA EBURY.

### MONTAIGNE

In the issue dated June 28th, Frederick E. Papps quotes J. M. Robertson as saying that Montaigne's "whole habit of mind is perfectly fatal to orthodox religion".

But Montaigne says in four essays respectively, "God Almighty has ordered all things as it has best pleased him".

"I am, thanks be to God . . . in such a condition . . ."; "Death is the beginning of another life".

" 'Tis enough for a Christian to believe that all things come from God, . . . and receive them with what face soever they may present themselves, it has also pleased God . . . to shew us, that the good have something else to hope for and the wicked something else to fear, than the fortunes or misfortunes, of this world. He manages, and applies them, according to his own secret will and pleasure".

"God is indeed our sole and only protector, and can do all things for us: but though he is pleas'd to honour us with his paternal care . . . I see a man cross himself . . . (and the more, because it is a sign I have in great veneration, and constant use upon solemn occasions)"; ". . . divine psalms with which the Holy Ghost inspir'd King David."; ". . . the holy Bible, the rule of our worship and belief. . . . Neither is it a book for every one to fist, but the study of select men . . . whom Almighty God has been pleased to call to that office."; "And upon what occasion soever we call upon God to accompany and assist us, it ought always to be done with the greatest reverence and devotion."

S. G. KNOTT.

[Mr. Papps writes: "I must refer Mr. Knott to J. M. Robertson's various studies of Montaigne which are summarised in A Short History of Freethought as follows: 'it was not in Montaigne's nature to frame a logical system of thought . . . he was a kind of metis, belonging neither to the camp of ignorant faith nor to that of philosophic conviction, whether believing or unbelieving. But on the other hand his whole habit of mind is perfectly fatal to orthodox religion; and it is clear that, despite his professions of conformity he did not hold the ordinary Christian beliefs'. The essay on Custom, as Robertson says, 'strikes at the root of all orthodoxy'. Presumably the Roman Catholic Church shared Robertson's view when it placed Montaigne's Essays on the Index, where they remain to this day.'"]

### MR. CUTNER'S "IGNORANCE"

It is a pity that Dr. Schonfield should resort to that well-known cliché—accusing an opponent of "ignorance", when of course it is more than easy for me to show up his own. I would have preferred not to if at all possible. For example, he says, dealing with what I said about the four Gospels—"Justin speaks of them before" 180 AD. This is, as he should know, completely untrue. Justin never mentions the Gospels. Dr. Schonfield adds that Papias "speaks of them as far back as 135 AD". This is also quite untrue. In any case, we know practically nothing of Papias—even the *Catholic Encyclopedia* admits this; and Eusebius, who writes about him, actually calls him "little-minded", or in other words a fool.

The point I made was that our Gospels were unknown by

name before 180 AD, but I am quite ready to admit they were written before then. Only I defy anybody to tell us how or where. As Luke happily admits there must have been crowds of Gospels written before the year 180, and we still have some of them. They are "apocryphal", that is, they are like Acts. Just fiction. And for me, the "canonical" Gospels are equally fiction.

I have in these columns dealt with all this in detail many times, and Dr. Schonfield could have found the truth about the Gospels in the writings of many eminent Freethinkers; but he prefers to point out that my "Rationalist conceptions" are those of a hundred years ago—which I gladly admit. The Freethinkers of a hundred years ago have never been answered. But what about Dr. Schonfield? He has not advanced one iota from dear old Paley's *Evidences of Christianity* (1794) with his great "authorities", Justin and Papias. But even Dr. Schonfield has not as far as I know answered the very well known jibe by Trypho the Jew to Justin. Trypho actually accused Christians of having invented Jesus Christ, the Messiah who is, as Dr. Schonfield so proudly asserts, his own special Messiah. And Justin can only reply to this by lamely (or sadly) claiming that they don't believe in "empty fables"! Don't they indeed! How would Dr. Schonfield reply to Trypho? Like Justin?

H. CUTNER.

### H. CUTNER

I have just read Mr. Cutner's excellent article (June 7th issue), "Paine Still Libelled," and should, if I may, be permitted to express my appreciation not alone for this particular piece of work but also for the innumerable contributions that have emanated from the pen of Mr. Cutner for more than a half century and somewhat longer to be exact.

Myself, have been in the Freethought movement for about the aforementioned time and throughout have contributed in the form of articles, discussions, lectures, etc., whatever I could to aid humanity to escape from the great hoax, namely, the god idea.

I have read THE FREETHINKER now for many, many years and consider it to be one of the very best out-and-out Freethought publications in the world. I might add that I think it wouldn't be amiss to assess Mr. Cutner, as one of its important contributors, as one of the grand, old men of Freethought and I trust he won't take umbrage at the term "old", because he certainly isn't "old" in mind and I hope that the forthcoming years will bring forth atheistic Freethinkers worthy to step into his shoes.

Myself, though not young, I see with sadness that Freethought isn't, today, in its golden age. Our titans are gone, alas.

With friendly greetings and all good wishes, I remain,  
JACK BENJAMIN (New York).

### MEMORIES

How "This Believing World" (12/7/63) took me back! It sent me straight to my old copies of *In His Steps* and *What Would Jesus Do?* I loved them when I read them. Even now they are interesting as literary curiosities. And Bishop Magee! He used to come fairly frequently to the Finedon Hall. I can remember my mother talking about him. We are in the Peterborough diocese—and also out of it, of course.

REGINALD UNDERWOOD

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