

# FREE THINKER

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## 90th ANNIVERSARY OF "FRUITS OF PHILOSOPHY" TRIAL

### Two leading personalities :

**CHARLES WATTS**, b. 1836. Son of Wesleyan Minister; at early age converted to Freethought by Southwell and G. J. Holyoake. Sub-editor of Bradlaugh's *National Reformer*, 1864-77. Editor for some years of the *Secular Review*. One-time Secretary of the NSS. Died 1906.

**CHARLES BRADLAUGH**, b. 1833. Editor of *National Reformer*. President of National Secular Society. MP for Northampton. Died 1891.

NOTE.—Italic type is reproduced as such from originals. Bold type does not appear in originals but is used to draw readers' attention to particular pieces.

Charles Watts did valuable work for the Freethought movement and deserves credit for his long service. But was he right in the *Fruits of Philosophy* case? And are those who would adopt his attitude in this respect right today? Readers are left to decide for themselves by considering the following extracts from the historical records. Those who are sufficiently interested in the subject will find much relevant material in the *National Reformer* and *Secular Chronicle* for 1877 and in the verbatim report of the trial.

In 1877 many people, including some Freethinkers, and certainly the Law of the land, considered *Fruits of Philosophy* an obscene, filthy publication which should be suppressed. In 1967 the problem is still with us.

(From *National Reformer*, January 14, 1877)

### PROSECUTION AGAINST MR CHARLES WATTS

Most old Freethinkers knew the late James Watson, and all who knew him respected him. Amongst the pamphlets sold by James Watson was one called *Fruits of Philosophy*. When Mr Watson retired from business this pamphlet was sold by Mr Austin Holyoake, by Mr F. Farrah, by Mr Brooke, and by other publishers. When James Watson died the plates of this pamphlet were bought by Mr Watts from Mrs Watson. The pamphlet had been on sale unchallenged for more than thirty years, and yet it is now

made the subject of prosecution. Mr Charles Watts was suddenly arrested on Monday last, and on Tuesday was brought before the magistrate at Guildhall. Mr E. Truelove was one of the first to offer to be bail for Mr Watts, and others, amongst whom were Mr Sumner, Mr Le Lubez, and Mr R. H. Side, attended court in readiness to enter into recognizances. The case is adjourned until Friday, and we therefore refrain from comment until next week. Sir Benjamin Phillips accepted Mr Le Lubez alone as sufficient surety for Mr Watts.

(From *National Reformer*, January 21, 1877)

### MR WATTS ON HIS PROSECUTION

For the first time in my life I am "in the hands of justice". During the year 1875 I purchased some hundreds of stereotyped plates from the widow of the late James Watson, of whose respectability there could not be the slightest doubt. Among the plates bought of Mrs Watson were those of a pamphlet called *The Fruits of Philosophy*. This work had been sold for nearly forty years, without once having been called in question, or any imputation, that I am aware of, made against it. There was, therefore, no special reason why I should read this particular pamphlet, seeing that it had been on sale for so many years unchallenged. I, therefore, had no knowledge whatever of its contents till a few weeks since, and having nothing whatever to do myself with the publishing department of my establishment, there was little chance of the said pamphlet coming under my notice. Of course, legally, I am responsible for all that is published in my name, a fact with which, being a novice in the trade, I was not sufficiently impressed, although the large publishers in London will avow that they are liable to a similar mistake, for it is next to impossible that they can read every line of the works issued by them.

On hearing recently that a man in Bristol had been summoned for selling one of my books, I voluntarily went down and offered to defend the book, believing at the time that it was a proper and legal publication. On hearing the vile purposes to which the pamphlet had been applied, and the indecent associations that had been connected with it by the man who had sold it in Bristol, I withdrew from his defence, and informed the authorities there that, whatever their decision respecting the book, I should publish the work no more; and since that time, although we have had a great increase of applications for the pamphlet, not *one copy* has been sold.

The fact is, then, I have committed an error—not in selling a book which I knew to be obscene, but in not acquainting myself with the nature of the work in question. Having, then, made one mistake, which is the proper, the moral, course to adopt? To try to defend it by committing a second error? I think not, and I will not do it, let the cost be what it may. I elect rather to pursue a course which will prevent the repetition of mistake No. 1. Bearing in mind that the book does not belong to the members of the Secular party, I cannot believe it just to saddle them even with the semblance of the responsibility of its contents. I therefore decline to defend the pamphlet. I regret that, in adopting this independent—and what I believe to be the only proper—course, I differ from my colleagues, with whom, up to the present, I have worked harmoniously; but to me it is far more noble and manly to differ upon what you deem right than to agree upon terms which you consider wrong. I may say that, after long and serious consideration, and careful perusal of the book, I myself decided upon this plan of defence, and then submitted it to my solicitor, who

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immediately said that it was the proper and legal defence, and the one which he should advise. To fight this question in the particular manner which has been suggested to me would, I think, be unwise and useless. I fail to see any good principle to contend for in such a fight, or any moral victory to win. Were it a question of the freedom of speech, or the liberty of the press, or one of our theological or political pamphlets, I would fight persistently to the last, and willingly endure any punishment or imprisonment resulting from the struggle. To invite penalties, however, for doing what by me would be regarded as a wrong act does not accord with my notions of true bravery or morality. If the *Fruits of Philosophy* be a medical work, let it be sold (if at all) at a medical depot, and not at the head-centre of Freethought literature. After this lesson in publishing I shall evince every care to avoid the sale of any publications that I cannot defend from a moral standpoint.

In following out my present plan it is possible that I shall lose the co-operation of some hitherto warm friends. Well, much as I should regret such an event, yet, if I can only obtain help at the sacrifice of my independence, I must forego such assistance.

The legal conduct of my defence will be expensive, costing nearly £200. As that expense will fall on me alone, I appeal to all my friends who think I am doing right in the matter to render me what pecuniary aid they can without doing injustice to themselves. Immediate subscriptions will be most valuable, as legal fees have to be paid *at once*.

In another column will be found some remarks by Mr Bradlaugh upon this case. I can only say that I regret their publication, and here record my disapproval of most of them; and I thank the Editor of this journal for his courtesy in allowing me to say so in this place.

CHARLES WATTS.

(From *National Reformer*, January 21, 1877)

#### PROSECUTION OF MR CHARLES WATTS

Mr Charles Watts, as most of our readers will have already learned, has been committed for trial at the Central Criminal Court for February 5th, for misdemeanour, for publication of a work on the population question, entitled *Fruits of Philosophy*, by Charles Knowlton, MD. This book has been openly published in England and America for more than thirty years. It was sold in England by James Watson, who always bore the highest repute. On James Watson's retirement from business it was sold by Holyoake & Co., at Fleet Street House, and was afterwards sold by Mr Austin Holyoake until the time of his death; and a separate edition was, up to last week, still sold by Mr Brooks, of 282 Strand, WC. When Mr James Watson died, Mr Charles Watts bought from James Watson's widow a large quantity of stereotype plates, including this work. If this book is to be condemned as obscene, so also in my opinion must be many published by Messrs W. H. Smith and Son, and other publishers, against whose respectability no imputation has ever been made. Such books as Darwin's *Origin of Species* and *Descent of Man* must immediately be branded as obscene, while no medical work must be permitted publication; and all theological works, like those of Dulaure, Inman, etc, dealing with ancient creeds, must at once be suppressed. The bulk of the publications of the Society for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, together with its monthly organ, the *Shield*, would be equally liable. The issue of the greater part of classic authors, and of Lemprière, Shakespeare, Sterne, Fielding, Richardson, Rabelais, etc, must be stopped; while the Bible—containing obscene passages omitted from the lectionary—must no longer be permitted circulation. All these contain obscenity which is either inserted to amuse or to instruct, and the medical work now assailed deals with physiological points purely to instruct and to increase the happiness of men and women.

If the pamphlet now prosecuted had been brought to me for publication, I should probably have declined to publish it, not because of the subject matter, but because I do not like its style. If I had once published it, I should have defended it until the very last. Here Mr Watts and myself disagree in opinion; and as he is the person chiefly concerned, it is, of course, right that his decision should determine what is done. He tells me that he thinks the pamphlet indefensible, and that he was misled in publishing it without examination as part of James Watson's stock. I think it ought to be fought right through. Under these circumstances I can only leave Mr Watts to speak for himself, as we so utterly differ in opinion on this case that I cease to be his proper interpreter. I have therefore already offered Mr Watts the columns of the *National Reformer*, that he may put before the party his view of the case, which he does in another column.

CHARLES BRADLAUGH.

The feelings of a number of Secularists were firmly with Charles Watts. As an example of this body of opinion I quote from a letter by J. P. Adams to the Editor of the *Secular Chronicle* (January 28, 1877). Commenting on a

letter from Mr W. Willis which had appeared in the previous issue, Mr Adams wrote of the *Fruits of Philosophy* pamphlet:

'Originally published in America nearly half a century ago, when our cousins across the Atlantic were much less refined in their language than they are at present, it contains sentences which even Mr Willis himself would severely reprobate were they uttered in his presence. It is my firm opinion, that should Mr Willis's advice be acted upon, and Mr Watts be induced as a representative man of our party to defend in a court of justice the **obscene and excessively vulgar pamphlet**, of which he unwittingly became the publisher, a severe punishment will be inflicted on him, and a **lasting disgrace fastened upon Freethought**; because if it is right to defend the past, we must adhere to the same course in the future: the public will look for our literature in Holywell Street, and the majority of our adherents will desert a movement whose standard has been disgraced from having been paraded before the country, defiled by pollution.'

Charles Watts was indicted, pleaded 'Guilty', promised to publish no more copies of the pamphlet, and was released without fine. Charles Bradlaugh felt that Watts had done Freethought a disservice and accordingly set out to gain what had been lost. He and Annie Besant took up the publishing of the pamphlet and duly notified the police that they would be selling copies at a certain day and hour. As was to be expected they were arrested, charged, tried, and found guilty. They were sentenced to six months imprisonment and fined £200, but the verdict was subsequently quashed on a technicality.

However, the indictment should make enlightening reading for those who claim that today we unjustly defend the publication of obscene literature'.

'The Jurors for our Lady the Queen, upon their oath present that Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant unlawfully and wickedly devising and contriving and intending, as much as in them lay, to vitiate and corrupt the morals as well of youth as of divers other liege subjects of our said Lady the Queen, and to incite and encourage the said liege subjects to indecent, obscene, unnatural, and immoral practices, and bring them to a state of wickedness, lewdness, and debauchery, therefore, to wit, on the 24th day of March, AD 1877, in the City of London, and within the jurisdiction of the Central Criminal Court, unlawfully, wickedly, knowingly, wilfully, and **designedly did print, publish, sell, and utter a certain indecent, lewd, filthy, and obscene libel, to wit, a certain indecent, lewd, filthy, bawdy, and obscene book, called "Fruits of Philosophy"**, thereby contaminating, vitiating, and corrupting the morals as well of youth as of other liege subjects of our said Lady the Queen, and bringing the said liege subjects to a state of wickedness, lewdness, debauchery, and immorality, in contempt of our said Lady the Queen and her laws, to the evil and pernicious example of all others in the like case offending, and against the peace of our said Lady the Queen, her crown, and dignity.'

No less enlightening and instructive is the preface by Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant to the report of the trial, published by the Freethought Publishing Company, 1877.

'It is a contribution to the discussion of the Population Question that we issue this report of the prosecution against ourselves for publishing Dr Charles Knowlton's pamphlet, entitled *Fruits of Philosophy*. Dr Knowlton's pamphlet, although an ably and carefully written essay by a thoughtful and scientific man, is not, of itself, of vital importance; its importance lies in the fact that it is condemned—says Lord Chief Justice Cockburn—because it advocates prudential restraint to population, while also advocating early marriage. It is the advocacy of prudential checks after marriage that is now said to be a punishable offence. Many a better book than that of Dr Knowlton might be written on the same subject today, for we have had 40 years of scientific improvement since *Fruits of Philosophy* was penned; until, however, the judgment against Knowlton is reversed, no better book can be published, for doctors will not write, and publishers will not sell, a work which may bring them within the walls of a gaol. It was for the sake of free discussion that we published the assailed pamphlet when its former seller yielded to the pressure put upon him by the police; it was not so much in defence of this pamphlet, as to make the way possible for others dealing with the same topic,

(Continued on page 204)

Harry Lamont

**TO A SCHOOLBOY**

(IT is with the deepest regret that I must tell our readers that Harry Lamont died at 1.45 a.m. last Friday. He was 70 years old. He had suffered a long illness through kidney and heart trouble for three years and failed to respond to a last-minute desperate attempt to save his life by a kidney machine.

Within the next three weeks I shall pay my personal tribute to this great Freethinker. In the meantime I can think of no more appropriate epitaph for Harry Lamont than his own letter to a schoolboy. It was one of the last pieces which Harry sent to me, just a few weeks ago. Indeed, only two weeks after he had written it he was in hospital on the last stage of his journey in life—with death as his destination.—DAVID COLLIS.)

**Speaking Personally**

DEAR TOMMY,

You ask me to write to you about religion and want to know about the hell-fire and damnation reserved for unrepentant sinners, also the crowns and harps for the saved.

Well, you have given me a tall order, but I shall do my best to comply. Remember that such views are entirely conjectural and I make no claim to infallibility. I can simply give you my honest opinion, as free from bias as I can make it.

First of all I must tell you that there is absolutely no evidence at all of life after death. All religions are entire speculation.

We don't know if there is a god. If you say god created the world we at once ask who created god and there is no answer. As an agnostic I say there *may* be a god, but if so I have no means of finding out anything about him. I refuse to believe he sits on a throne upstairs, cursing us for making graven images or coveting our neighbour's ass. So instead of spending our time wailing hymns and moaning prayers to a mythical deity, let us try to make life as full and happy as possible for ordinary people.

Priests and other professional holy men have a vested interest in making you feel sinful, so that you will attend their services and be impressed by their jiggery-pokery.

You ask if it is possible to teach ethics without religion. In my opinion, yes. We are truthful because it is stupid to tell lies. If you are found out telling lies people will not believe you any more, and life becomes more difficult than it need be; it's as simple as that. Similarly we are honest because it is foolish to be otherwise. Dishonest folk are not trusted, and we naturally seek to earn the good opinion of those who have dealings with us.

Try to cultivate a happy disposition. Don't listen to the Dismal Jimmies who prate of hell-fire and damnation. Most of them suffer from some form of religious mania.

If a kill-joy tries to frighten you with his mythical hell and damnation, ask him what proof he has that such doctrines are true. If he quotes Biblical texts tell him such sources are suspect, of dubious authenticity. Remember that *joie de vivre* (joy in mere living) is or should be spontaneous and durable. Instead of a dismal vale of tears, where poor sinners expiate the sins of Adam and Eve, this life is to be enjoyed and lived to the full.

Distrust the Pecksniffs who pretend to be very pious. Usually they are unbalanced or have an axe to grind. In the world piety pays, hence the ubiquitous hypocrisy of unscrupulous rogues seeking promotion.

When a preacher tells you all about god, take it with a big grain of salt. A vivid imagination can result in impressive eloquence. Some people like being preached at. To sit still during a dreary sermon makes them feel virtuous. It may be good for one's self-discipline. Usually the ranting goes in one ear and out of the other.

You ask me if religion hasn't done more harm than good. In former times religion was responsible for tremendous cruelty and bloodshed, but now that most religions seem to have become civilised, it is probable they can be justified by useful social work.

Beware of the professional holy man who moans about the need of atonement and salvation. Avoid him like the plague. He poisons life at the source.

When a man comes to preach with impressive degrees remember that his stock-in-trade is mere speculation. He has no proof of any sort that his dogmatic statements and seemingly wise utterances are anything more than theological bunkum.

Never be impressed by verbiage. Holy cant is usually a smoke-screen to conceal ignorance.

When a pious tub-thumper expatiates about the will of god and the nature of the deity, say to yourself: "This preacher knows no more about god than I do, and that is precisely nothing". Wishful thinking is no substitute for proof.

Beware of those who use piety as a cloak. They pay lip service to its observances while behaving like ruthless gangsters in their private lives.

Remember that kindness, sympathy, courtesy and consideration are more important to the afflicted than professions of piety and sanctimonious cant.

Let your religion consist in trying to help people, particularly the aged, the ill, the destitute.

You ask me why religion is taught in schools and suggest that such instruction be abolished. I suppose that formal religion is taught because those who decide such matters think it is important, but when you get down to brass tacks hardly any two persons agree about what one ought to believe. We merely bolster up a moribund religion, and in my view religious instruction in schools tends to become farcical.

At a recent conference head teachers voted to retain religious instruction in schools. I suppose they play for safety and want to please governors and parents. It may be they think a pupil is less likely to become anti-social if they inculcate a wholesome fear of hell and eternal torment for wrong-doing.

You ask what proof I have for the existence of a soul. The truthful answer is none. The soul was invented by theologians to intimidate people, to keep them enslaved to a tyrannical creed.

The idea that this life has meaning only as a preparation for eternity in heaven or hell is a concept I have always repudiated. Let us abandon the gloomy mythology that has terrified people for hundreds of years. Let us enjoy life without any thought of hell's flames in the basement and harps and crowns in the upper regions.

## NEWS AND NOTES

IT is reported that Roman Catholics may join with the Anglican Church in Wales to provide joint "Christian comprehensive schools" at Llanelli and Haverfordwest. The Department of Education and Science has been informed, and discussions will take place with the local authorities concerned.

Bishop Fix stated that there are insufficient Catholic children in the area to consider setting up a comprehensive school on their own. "But Christian education is essential to combat the danger of humanism and materialism that one can meet at this level", he said.

The Anglican Bishop of St David's is reported to be "quite enthusiastic" about the proposal.

### Sabbatarians rejoice!

FROM Manchester comes yet another example of a ridiculous situation arising from Britain's antiquated Sunday observance laws. At a charity show Ray Alan was not allowed to use a ventriloquist's dummy in his act. Shortly before he went on stage, the manager of the Palace Theatre informed him that it could not be used as it was a prop. The ban also applied to funny hats, but not to musical instruments because they were regarded as part of the entertainment.

During the show the curtain was rung down on top comedian Dickie Henderson because he did a cross-talk act with another member of the company. An organiser commented: "It seems a bit ridiculous that a man can go on stage and talk to the audience, but when someone speaks to him as part of a double act it is not allowed".

The show was in aid of the Catholic Handicapped Children's Fellowship.

### Unity Theatre

LONDON'S Unity Theatre has been in existence for over thirty years and has an impressive list of productions to its credit. Many plays were seen for the first time there and in almost every West End theatre you will find someone—actor, musician or technician—who at some time was at Unity.

Unity's directors are now widening its range of activities with a view to making the theatre genuine Arts Centre. Last Sunday the newly-formed Camden Chamber Ensemble conducted by Benjamin Thomas played a Bach-Mozart programme. A poetry group meets every Monday evening, and a programme of plays, folk sessions and concerts is being arranged. On Sunday, July 2nd, at 8 p.m., there will be a concert compered by actor Warren Mitchell—better known to TV fans as Alf Garnett of *Till Death Us Do Part*. Alfie Bass, Amelia Bayntun and Maxine Audley will also be appearing.

A fund was launched some time ago to build a new Unity Theatre, and enough money has been raised to purchase the ground. But at least another £60,000 is required before the new theatre will be completed.

Membership and other enquiries to Unity Theatre, 1 Goldington Street, London, NW1.

### Challenge to Billy Graham

WHEN Billy Graham visited Britain in 1966 he announced his willingness to take part in a public debate with an unbeliever. David Tribe, President of the National Secular Society, challenged the American evangelist to such an encounter, but Billy slipped away before it could be arranged.

David Tribe has again challenged Billy Graham to a public, televised debate. In a press statement he accuses Billy Graham of (1) undermining people's self-confidence and belief in scientific and democratic processes to solve the world's problems by reasoning together; (2) exploiting secret fears and neuroses; (3) putting his message across with a blend of oldtime hot-gospeiling and rabble-rousing and modern motivation research discoveries; aided by a slick public relations machine, a retinue of desperate, try-anything-once bishops, and a circus of weight-lifters and jazz and pop singers; (4) hypocritically claiming all this to be the work of the Holy Ghost; (5) falsely suggesting that those who come forward at his meetings are converts, whereas the overwhelming majority are churchpeople re-dedicating themselves; (6) making the sensitive Middle East situation yet more difficult by throwing in mischievous Bible "prophecies"; (7) at the same time refusing to comment on Vietnam so as not to upset his friends at the White House; (8) living in ostentatious affluence while commending gospel poverty and other worldliness for the earth's impoverished millions; (9) reassembling exploded superstitions.

Mr Tribe pays tribute to Billy Graham's devotion to what he believes to be right and his persistence in the face of ill-health and ridicule, but urges him to think again whether his glib formula is right for all individuals and all nations.

E.A.

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## 90th ANNIVERSARY OF "FRUITS OF PHILOSOPHY" TRIAL

(Continued from page 202)

that we risked the penalty which has fallen upon us. The accounts of the trial which have appeared in the daily and weekly papers have brought to the knowledge of thousands a great social question of whose existence they had no idea before this prosecution took place. Once more a cause has triumphed by the fall of its defenders. Once more a new truth has been spread everywhere by its persecutors, and has gained a hearing from the dock that it could never have won from the platform . . .

What will be the ultimate issue of the struggle is certain; this battle will end, as every other such battle has ended, in the triumph of a Free Press. There is but one limit to that Freedom, and that is that slander and libel should be easily punishable by the law, so that the pen should not be permitted to vent private malice in assault on private reputation. The discussion of a question of ethics, of social science, of medicine, is an attack on no one; no one's reputation is injured by it; it can have nothing in it of the nature of slander. Such discussion has always been the medium of progress, and the right to it must be won at all hazards.

This month is the 90th anniversary of Charles Bradlaugh's and Annie Besant's trial at the Court of Queen's Bench in this famous case. Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant are dead. The principles on which they fought this case still live.

## SCIENTIFIC OBSCURANTISM

Michael Cregan

WHENEVER a non-believer is confronted with a demand for an explanation of the miracles reported in the Bible, he usually tries to discredit them by maintaining that the evidence for them is unreliable or insufficient. However, another line of defence occasionally taken is the declaration that the evidence for them must be unreliable because miracles simply do not happen. Whatever arguments are marshalled in their favour the reply is that those arguments are not credible, for, since miracles are *per se* impossible, any evidence for them is, of necessity, worthless.

This attitude is akin to that taken up by David Hume in his *Essay on Miracles*, and in view of its lingering effects upon current "rationalism"—how often does one hear comments like "Science Proves (capital S and P) that the Apostles were liars", etc—it is worthwhile re-examining the whole of Hume's anti-miracle apparatus.

He begins with the uncontroversial observation that "A wise man . . . proportions his beliefs to the evidence", ie, gives his assent to the more probable of conflicting hypotheses. From there he argues that the probability that a miracle has occurred must always be less than the probability that the evidence in favour of its occurrence is false: eg, it is our "uniform experience" that dead men do not rise; so that, if X claims to have seen Y do just that, it is intrinsically more probable that X is lying or deceived than that Y really *did* rise, since lying and deceit are more "in keeping" with our experience than resurrected corpses. He formulates the principle that "no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle unless the testimony be of such a kind that its falsehood would be more miraculous than the fact which it endeavours to establish". But since there is "uniform experience against miraculous events" this condition can never be met, and "we may establish it as a maxim that no human testimony can have such a force as to prove a miracle". As the argument might be stated "It is a universal experience that the dead do not rise; it is a universal experience that men lie, hoax, and make mistakes; hence Y's resurrection contradicts all experience, whereas the falsity of X's testimony does not. Therefore we can reasonably assume that X was lying or deceived".

The argument may seem at first sight to be the sort of weapon rationalists seek, but it is vitiated by too many simple errors to do what Hume wished it to.

Firstly, he fails to give a satisfactory definition of what he means by "miracle". He calls it "a violation of the laws of nature", and presumably would include such events as resurrection in this category. But what of such phenomena as telepathy and tele-kinesis? These indeed are *strange* phenomena—are they then miracles? I imagine that such a principle as t-k would by now be an accepted field for scientific research. But if it is feasible that one man can influence the roll of a dice by no apparent or explicable means, why is it not feasible that another can cure palsy in an equally inexplicable manner? Or walk on water? Or resurrect a dead man? Why are the last three derided as "incredible" while the first is regarded as an "interesting" or "fascinating" facet of human personality? The distinction, I suspect, is that t-k can be experimented with in the reassuring familiarity of the laboratory, while the resurrection of Lazarus is a little too disturbing to be tolerated. Whatever is safe and manageable is acceptable; whatever is too uncomfortable is branded as superstition and, with a

sigh of relief, discarded as being unworthy of the attention of the "rational" enquirer.

It would be interesting to see the results of a rigid application of Hume's argument. For example, our "uniform experience" is that no-one with multiple sclerosis has been cured. Therefore, if one hears that a researcher has developed a new treatment and successfully affected a cure, it is intrinsically more probable that he is lying or deceived; for, of course, just as "it is a miracle that a dead man should come to life because that has never been observed in any age or country", so would the cure of an m.s. sufferer be a "miracle", because *that* has never been observed in any age or country either. Hence we would be "wise men" to scorn such a report as being completely at variance with our universal experience. (And to argue that because other diseases have proved curable we may reasonably expect m.s. to share this characteristic is to tacitly reject Hume's argument—for one may simply reply that there is uniform experience that m.s. does *not* share.) Thus, if applied fully, Hume's argument leads to the ridiculous position where knowledge is completely static; since any novel event, precisely because of its novelty, is discredited by our past experience.

Hume alleges, and it is of course crucial to his argument, that there is uniform experience against miracles since no one has experienced them. However, it is equally possible to assert that there is *not* uniform experience against them as people *have* experienced them. C. S. Lewis neatly put his finger on this error when he wrote, ". . . we know the experience against them to be uniform only if we know the reports of them are false. And we can know all the reports of them to be false only if we know already that miracles have never occurred. In fact we are arguing in a circle". There is, of course, another way to know the reports to be false—and that is by examining them in themselves, and *proving* lies, deception, etc, which is, in fact, the only scientific way to approach the problem.

It is in connection with this point that Hume makes an unwarranted jump. Early in the *Essay* he seems to be suggesting a not unreasonable criterion for distinguishing the miraculous from the fraudulent; but he is subsequently asserting that miracles are not merely improbable but impossible. He cites for example, the alleged miracles of the Abbé Paris, and the fact that "many of the miracles were immediately proved on the spot, before judges of unquestionable integrity, attested by witnesses of credit and distinction . . ." and then asks, "where shall we find such a number of circumstances agreeing to the corroboration of one fact? and what have we to oppose to such a cloud of witnesses but the *absolute impossibility or miraculous nature of the events which they relate?*" (my italics). In other words he is no longer interested in discussing the reliability of any particular evidence; he has declared all evidence for miracles an absolute impossibility. (Just as, if A *knows* a particular football match was cancelled, all evidence brought forward by anyone to prove he saw it must be unfounded.)

Hume's cardinal difficulty is, of course, to show how we know miracles to be an "absolute impossibility". If he is arguing inductively, he must show that miracles have never occurred, ie, that all witnesses to them were deceived or deceiving. And the way he does this is by asserting that

they must have been deceived because miracles cannot happen! This is precisely the sort of manoeuvre that was used to shackle Galileo since an "infallible" Bible tells us the sun circles the earth, then, obviously, Galileo *must* be wrong. And since his conclusion is wrong, the evidence on which he reached it must also be wrong—therefore there is no evidence for Galileo's theory.

Another expression of Hume's argument is indicated by his definition of a miracle as a "violation of the laws of nature". These laws of nature, so the argument runs, tell us what must happen, and, correspondingly, cannot happen. For example, it is a "law of nature" that human beings cannot walk on water (apart from the employment of artificial aids). Since this is a law, any occurrence of the contrary would "break" or "violate" it; and since the law tells us what cannot happen, whatever violates it falls into the category of what cannot happen. Therefore Jesus could not have walked upon the water.

But again Hume is confronted with the problem of deciding what *are* these laws of nature (ie, what cannot happen), and my previous criticisms show how he lapses into circularity over this point.

Moreover, "a violation of the laws of nature" is a dangerously loose and emotive expression. For laws of nature cannot be violated, only falsified. These laws take the form "all A's are B's", "if A then B", "wherever A then B", etc. And if an example of A together with not-B is found this does not violate the law—it merely shows it is not a law. The law that a free-falling object accelerates at a rate of 32 ft. per sec. per sec. would not be "broken" by an object accelerating at 64 ft. per sec. per sec.—it

would simply be shown not to be a law. And the law "dead men cannot rise" is not "violated" by Lazarus any more than the law "all swans are white" is broken by the inconvenient discovery of a black swan.

It is, I think, a confused equation of "laws" with "legislation" that lies at the root of Hume's type of dogmatism. The universe he envisages as being "governed" by certain "laws of nature" is rather like a society governed by parliamentary decrees, with a sufficiently effective "law enforcement" apparatus to ensure that "unlawful" events are prevented. However, laws of nature are not like laws of the land; they are not "rules" which "forbid" certain events—they are merely observations of what does in fact happen. And what does in fact happen—as Hume himself well knew in his less partisan moods—is found out only by experience, either our own or others.

Once empirical questions were decided according to metaphysical presuppositions—Galileo is wrong, the planets revolve in circles because the circle is the most perfect shape, and thus "most fitting" for Divine Creation. Today, it seems, the pendulum has swung to the other extreme; the questions are decided on materialistic presuppositions—Christ could not have risen on the third day, and all miracles may be disregarded without the bother of investigation—as hoaxes or hallucinations.

Perhaps they are; but the truth will only be found by objective analysis of all available evidence, and not by this latter-day dogmatism and obscurantism which so many people seem to consider one of the achievements of rational thinking.

(Next week S. A. Josephs replies.)

## CRUCIFIXION MYTH

Khamis A. Busaidy

THE story of the crucifixion is just another myth of redemption through blood borrowed from ancient paganism. This is born out by hard cold facts from history.

The doctrine of atonement of sin existed long before the Christian Bible was pretended to have been written. Five hundred years before the Christian Era, the tragedy of the crucifixion of *Prometheus* was written by Aeschylus and acted in Athens. This dramatic poem of the *Divine Sufferer* who was nailed by the hands and feet to Mount Caucasus is still existing today.<sup>1</sup> The hero of the epic, *Prometheus*, hanging with arms extended in the form of a cross, utters these words:

"I dared,  
And boldly pleading saved them from destruction,  
Saved them from sinking to the realms of night,  
For this offence I bend beneath these pains,  
Dreadful to suffer, piteous to behold:  
For mercy to mankind I am not deemed worthy of mercy,  
but with ruthless hate,  
In this uncouth appointment am fixed here,  
A spectacle dishonourable to Jove."<sup>2</sup>

In the hymns of the Rig-Veda we observe that the sun is spoken of as "stretching out his arms" to bless the world. Consequently, Indra, the crucified Saviour of Nepal and Tibet is identified with Krishna, the sun. The Egyptian sun-god, Osiris, was supposed to have been crucified in the heavens. So were other sun-gods: Adonis, Attis, Horus, Apollo, etc. There is also the crucified Dove with which Adonis, the vegetarian god, was identified. At the ceremonies of his resurrection, his devotees said:

"Hail to the Dove! the Restorer of Light".

The story goes that sun-god Attis was killed at the foot of a pine tree. His blood was said to have renewed the fertility of the earth and his image was fastened on the trunk of the tree.<sup>3</sup> Attis was also hailed by such names as the "Only Begotten Son" and "Saviour". The celebrants of Attis were Phrygians, who are regarded as the oldest races of Asia Minor. They represented their deity as a man tied to a tree at the foot of which was a lamb. Or as a man nailed to the tree or stake.<sup>4</sup> Son-god Bacchus, son of Jupiter and Semele, was also known by such titles as "Saviour", "Only Begotten Son", the "Slain One", the "Sin Bearer" and the "Redeemer" which are today the grith-stool of the church. Consider this message of Bacchus with that of current churchianity:

"It is I who guides mankind; it is I who protects and saves mankind; I who am Alpha and Omega".<sup>5</sup>

If we turn to the New World we find that the first Spanish monks who went to Mexico found the crucifix among the heathens of that land. Surprised, the monks enquired what it meant. They were told that it represented *Bacob* the Son of God who was killed by *Eopuco* who had placed him on a beam of wood until he died. The Aztecs, it is recorded, celebrated a feast "in the early spring" when victims were nailed to a cross and shot with an arrow.<sup>6</sup> No wonder St Augustine had to remark: "The same thing which is now called Christian Religion existed among the ancients. They have begun to call Christian the true religion which existed before".

What better way to round off the subject than with the words of the poet Ovid, one of the greatest freethinkers,

who has written 'the most powerful shafts of philosophic scorn' on the myth of crucifixion:

"When thou thyself art guilty, why should a victim die for thee? What folly it is to expect salvation from the death of another." I couldn't agree with him more.

#### REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> *Bible Myths and Their Parallels in Other Religions*. The Truth Seeker Company, New York, 1910, p. 192.
- <sup>2</sup> *Prometheus Chained* translated by Rev. R. Potter: Harper and Bros., New York, p. 82.
- <sup>3</sup> *Pagan and Christian Creeds* by Edward Carpenter: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, 1921, p. 23.
- <sup>4</sup> *Bible Myths and Their Parallels*: p. 191.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. 193.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p. 200.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* p. 181.

## THEATRE

David Tribe

*Crimes of Passion* (Joe Orton), Royal Court.

*Ghosts* (Henrik Ibsen), Aldwych.

*The Mighty Reservoir* (Peter Terson), Jeanetta Cochrane.

"THE RUFFIAN ON THE STAIR" is the better constructed of Joe Orton's *Crimes of Passion*. Somewhat Pinteresque, it is more ebullient, less sinister. There is a nice portrait of a sanctimonious Irish Catholic murderer (Bernard Gallagher) and a particularly well-observed bedsitter slattern (Avril Elgar), whose empty life responds only to her goldfish. "The Erpingham Camp" is a fantasia on a Butlin-type holiday camp, run by a megalomaniac as a supermarket of pre-packaged, stripit, background-soundtracked, cash-down, gift-stamped, non-stop, instant entertainment. But things go wrong when a half-baked couple of holiday-makers, she pregnant and drooling maternity, imagine themselves aggrieved by the stand-in entertainments officer and start a riot. The play lurches uneasily between slapstick farce and a serious allegory on reason and emotion, authority and anarchy, religion and hedonism, bread and circuses in our society. On the way there are wonderful interludes, notably a parody by Ken Wynne and Josie Bradley of seaside pier-pavilion-promenade concert party duetting. Peter Gill directs efficiently; Deirdre Clancy designs economically but could have used more op art fantasy in the second play.

We live a long way intellectually from the world of nineteenth century Norwegian provincialism, where the pater-familias was a holy idol never to be profaned, pastors dared not insure religious premises lest they seemed to question providence, and syphilis could not be mentioned even in the bosom of the family. Yet Pastor Manders's dismissal of advanced books with "I haven't read them, but from what I read about them I'm sure I wouldn't approve of them if I were to read them" has an evergreen look, and Ibsen's beautiful control over the most melodramatic of situations make *Ghosts* a tireless classic. The present Royal Shakespeare Company production by Alan Bridges has Peggy Ashcroft as the unforgettable Mrs Alving struggling to free herself from the armour of "duty" society has put on her, and David Waller in the impossibly difficult rôle of the pastor who is at once a canting humbug and a likeable confidant with whom Mrs Alving had once been in love. William Archer's standard translation, adapted by Denis Carnan, is used; Peggy Ashcroft is splendid in her mordant comments (especially when referring to the memorial programme in honour of her worthless late husband) and impatient gestures; all concerned in the evening have obviously lavished loving care. But something is missing. The ghosts are not there. The inexorable doom does not build up. The orphanage fire is over almost before it begins. Jocelyn Herbert's set is neither convincingly realistic nor poetically evocative. The final breakdown by Mrs Alving and her son Oswald (John Castle) should be more moving. This is not a great production, but it has many good things.

From the somewhat unlikely position of resident dramatist at the Victoria Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, Peter Terson has brought a very interesting duologue to London. *The Mighty Reservoir* is set in the dome and caretaker's hut of a half-million gallon reservoir in the Vale of Evesham. It is looked after by a guilt-ridden dipsomaniac, failed horticulturalist (Ray McAnally), who has left his Mothers' Union wife for a hermit existence. One day a fellow-inadequate turns up: ex-Geordie, impotent, brow-beaten clerk (Tim Preece), son of a domineering, hard-working, hard-drinking miner and husband of a plaster-dwarf-loving office girl. After a slow, inconsequential beginning the play rapidly gains interest as it explores the public front and private fantasies and fears of these

two doomed men. Though the ending is predictable, speculation over what the people they have known in the world outside were really like and absorption in the compensation-mechanisms they build for themselves and each other, aided by damson wine, persist. The play is as disturbing as Beckett, though more explicit, eventful and witty, less archetypal or ultimately significant. Peter Cheeseman and Ronald Hayman direct with a discretion which blends action and introspection, beautifully personified by the actors.

## REVIEW

Robert Halstead

*Albert Angelo* by B. S. Johnson (Constable, 21/- bound; Panther, 5/- paper).

LIKE his first novel, *Travelling People*, this is experimental and contains several different styles, including a section where speech is on the left-hand side of the page and thoughts on the right-hand side. It also contains two pages with holes in them.

Although it is one of the funniest books I have ever read it has its serious side. It questions the current methods of teaching, especially in the lower streams, and the whole question of discipline. Its message is that children must be interested in the subject that is being taught them and not have it forced down their throats. He shows a rare understanding of child mentality and really gets inside them.

## LETTERS

### All-time low

AS a lifelong Secularist on the wrong side of 70 years, I note with increasing dismay over the last few months the deterioration of the FREETHINKER as an effective weapon in the fight against organised Christianity in Europe and those even more absurd beliefs abroad.

It seems to me that our main opponent is the Roman Catholic Church, and in our position of such limited means of communication we should use much more of our precious space in the FREETHINKER to deal with it.

The issue of June 2nd achieved an all-time low; the only article worth its space being by Gregory Smelters.

The present seeming obsession with sex, abortion, and so-called "free art", and space devoted to the never-ending reminiscences of Harry Lamont will not get us much further along our proper road.

I have my FREETHINKER regularly delivered by the local newsagent, and for many years have passed it over to chance readers. Lately I have discontinued this habit because I no longer think it serves our purpose.

J. G. CARTWRIGHT.

### Shocked beyond measure

I REGRET that after being a reader of the paper for over twenty years I must now request that you refrain from supplying me with any more issues.

For some time now I have found myself in complete disagreement with you on most social and ethical questions.

The book review by Westcott in your number of June 2nd shocked me beyond measure that this noble paper which has had in the past such distinguished contributors and contributed so much to learning and scholarship besides keeping intellectual debate on such a high plane could descend to reviewing a book that is nothing more than a revolting piece of perversion is indeed grievous.

I am fortunate enough to have on my shelves many good books; amongst these I treasure the works of Foote and Bradlaugh and Cohen and to these I must now turn to remind me of what Free-thought really means. You seem to think it means Free Licence. So do most of your contributors.

Miss Gillian Hawtin made the distinction very well against Michael Gray in a recent letter. I do not consider myself a follower of Mrs Whitehouse, but values are worthwhile preserving. A stable social order in which freedom is to flourish demands a recognition of basic standards, not a worship and encouraging of debased perversions.

You are placing on a pedestal a type of conduct that would result in a degenerate social order, and I want no part in this.

A. ALLMAN.

### Words of comfort

I THINK I can give some comfort to Cynthia Blezard. When she asks, "But do we really want to appeal to a wider audience

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## ANNOUNCEMENTS

Items for insertion in this column must reach THE FREETHINKER office at least ten days before the date of publication.

National Secular Society. Details of membership and inquiries regarding bequests and secular funeral services may be obtained from the General Secretary, 103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1. Telephone HOP 2717. Cheques, etc., should be made payable to the NSS.

Humanist Holidays, Art Holiday, Burton Galleries, Wirral Cheshire, 29th July to 12th August. Small Youth Camp near Yeovil, Somerset. Details of both from Mrs M. Mephram, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey.

Humanist Letter Network (International) and Humanist Postal Book Service. For information or catalogue send 6d stamp to Kit Mouat, Mercers, Cuckfield, Sussex.

### OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch NSS (The Mound)—Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. CRONAN, McRAE and MURRAY.

Manchester Branch NSS, Platt Fields, Sunday afternoon, 3 p.m.; Car Park, Victoria Street, Sunday evenings, 8 p.m.

Merseyside Branch NSS (Pierhead)—Meetings: Wednesdays, 1 p.m.; Sundays, 3 p.m. and 7.30 p.m.

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

### INDOOR

Birmingham Branch NSS (Midland Institute, Margaret Street), Sunday, July 2nd, 6.45 p.m.: Speaker, ROY LEWTHWAITE (Society of Friends).

Havering Humanist Society (The Social Centre, Gubbins Lane), Tuesday, July 4th, 8 p.m.: Speaker, Miss JEAN ATKINS, Secretary of Havering Council for Social Service.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1), Sunday, July 2nd, 11 a.m.: Professor T. H. PEAT, "A Psychologist's Views on Debates"; Sunday, July 9th, 11 a.m., Joseph McCabe Centenary Lecture by RICHARD CLEMENTS.

again?", she seems to believe, unaccountably, in some Homeric golden age of secularism from which we have degenerated. The truth is very different. Admittedly there is no one in the NSS today with the personal notoriety of Charles Bradlaugh—and it is a tribute to the success of our ideas that this is so—but never before has the society reached so many people. Only in recent years have spokesmen been heard and seen on radio and television by audiences of millions, and official statements been reported in mass circulation newspapers. Never before have so many sympathisers of international distinction actually joined the society and spoken on its platforms. Though great care is needed in its management and more money is passionately sought, the society is now, for the first time in its history, financially stable and the owner of its premises. HQ propaganda is geared to public forums and debates, press releases and submissions to official bodies, where the maximum of external influence will be achieved, rather than ritual occasions for the faithful.

It is though, necessary to be realistic, however unpopular this may be. There is clearly a market, even in ostensibly rational circles, for *braggadocio*, glib promises and spurious prognostications. The world abounds in cults of the new and the grandiose, the fashionable "isms", the bouncing slogans, the offers of instant success and satisfaction. Fortunes are to be made by quack faith-healers, "psychologists", nationalist politicians, clairvoyants, mediums and hot-gospellers telling people what they want to hear. But, apart from being dishonest, this attitude is ultimately self-defeating in a freethought organisation. The only *raison d'être* of such a body is that it seeks for truth and a balanced judgment. That means it must not only state what is ideal in a political and sociological vacuum, but it must find out what are the psychological obstacles to progress. It cannot simply use heroic phrases as emotional catharsis. After censuring me for pessimism Mrs Blezard goes on to list just those causes of malaise I had in mind. They will certainly not be remedied by meaningless, pseudo-profound phrases like "inventing the future". Nothing is easier to play than a march, but one may find that only Blimps and Hamelin rats are following.

Of course Cynthia Blezard is right about the population problem. All this and much else besides is already set out in NSS leaflets and the FREETHINKER. But are secularists distributing the one at street corners or as paid advertisements in newspapers, and selling the other in pubs as Salvationists sell the *War Cry*? They are not. By comfortably deciding the tide is flowing in our favour and resting on the oars, too many are doing nothing constructive about countering the huge—and increasing—expenditure or irrationalism, but are sitting around in irrelevant committees and letting off steam in the journals. The population explosion is a world issue. The NSS is more than pulling its weight. But the problem is not nearly as simple as has been suggested. Apart from the positive obstructionism of Roman Catholicism and other religions, there are the natural egocentricity of the average family and cults of fertility (by no means confined to primitive communities) and of sexual "naturalism". The world containing a lot of very poor, apathetic disease-ridden people and a lot of very affluent, selfish people. One group has bags of children as an insurance policy against neglect in old age, the other as a badge of their easy affluence or—it must be faced—in response to a eugenics argument, real or imagined. I hope that in concert with the Conservation Society we shall be able increasingly to bring these points out.

DAVID TRIBE (NSS President).

### Confusing

MAY I wholeheartedly agree with C. H. Godfrey's letter (June 9). It would be deplorable if any general impression were to be given that Secular Humanists believe in awarding or denying 'positions of authority' to people on account of their beliefs, especially as Mr Micklewright is probably in a minority of two.

It is also confusing when he enthusiastically opposes a NSS 'Submission' which he (as a member of its Executive Committee) has presumably already ratified.

KIT MOUAT.

## OBITUARY

WE regret to announce the death of Mr Gilbert Vaughan Creech, at the age of 64. He was a lifelong freethinker, and a member of Manchester branch of the National Secular Society. Mr W. Collins, secretary of the branch conducted the committal ceremony at Manchester Crematorium.