

# **FREE THINKER**

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## **A MATTER OF SUFFERING**

**A CHILD** cries from the emptiness of its stomach. It breathes unlivingly nearer death. It exists and hangs tearfully onto existence without knowing why . . . whilst away in the heat its father penetrates his passion into another vehicle of misery.

The priest intones. The incense permeates the air as Christ is eaten by devout devourers. The flesh and blood renew the souls of the sinful, refresh them, fill them with strength.

**The belly blows out vacuously. The spindly legs lengthen their bones.**

The blood drips from the protruding stone heart and Mary's eyes are swollen with virginal tears.

**It wilts to the ground, listens to the birds squawking, chirping, lending the agony dreamy peace. It tries to remember the joy of eating, tries to fill its belly with insubstantial hope. Not long ago it had seen another eat, had been hopeful then as it watched and grew painfully hungrier.**

"It's good to suffer", drones the microphonic voice in the cold church. "Despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth".

**"But are they empty up there in God's heavenly home? Are they empty up there in the kingdom of happiness?"**

"Do not deceive yourself with doublethink, my child. Suffering nourishes the soul and mitigates the sinfulness".

**It's raining now.**

**Its unwanted being will cease pure with the cleansing of pain.**

**It is alone in its final phase of existence.**

**No matter. Death has the advantage.**

**Suffer time is over.**

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## **IN MEMORIAM**

**THE VICTIMS OF  
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Harry Lamont

## Speaking Personally

FROM time to time people call on me with the intention of saving my soul. When I tell them I haven't got one they look puzzled, but refuse to take no for an answer.

A few years ago two American young men, full of beans and radiant *bonhomie*, came to my door and said they were Latter-day Saints or Mormons. They produced the Book of Mormon, a sacred history of the ancient inhabitants of America. This record was translated by Joseph Smith Jr, a native of Vermont, through the gift and power of God from golden plates hid in Cumorah Hill, near Palmyra, New York, by Moroni, one of the ancient prophets. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was organised on April 6th, 1830, at Fayette, Seneca County, New York. Its members claim that through apostasy the pure gospel of Christ was contaminated but restored for Joseph Smith Jr by heavenly messengers sent for that purpose. They practise baptism by immersion and the laying on of hands for the reception of the Holy Ghost. They believe in all the gifts and powers of the primitive church. These two youthful missionaries called on me regularly and I grew very fond of them. They paid their own travel and hotel expenses while preaching the Mormon gospel.

I hated hurting their feelings, but had to confess that I was an agnostic. They asked if they could try the laying on of hands, and I agreed, although I must have looked a gormless ass as I sat there in my study with a sky pilot's hands across my bald napper. They asked if I were willing to be baptised, urging that faith would come in the process. It was my birthday and I'd had a bit of a binge. For a joke I agreed, so we went up to the bathroom. I undressed and got in, while the Mormons did their stuff. But suddenly I realised they had me there under false pretences, so I hopped out and refused to complete the performance. I attended several of their meetings. They were very good chaps and even considered it sinful to drink tea or coffee. Of course they never touched tobacco or alcohol. They thought they had me hooked, but I jibbed at the crucial moment.

Suddenly I decided to see them no more. I refused to answer the door, so they shouted through the slit in the letterbox: "We know you are in. Is the fate of your immortal soul a matter of indifference to you? Where will you spend eternity? Jesus died to save sinners. Repent before it is too late". I capitulated at length because the neighbours were complaining. In my study the Mormons renewed their attack. They persuaded me to read the Book of Mormon, which I did and found it unconvincing.

I could see they would give me no peace, so I went away for a holiday in Ireland. I absented myself for ten days, but no sooner had I returned than they called again "Will you join us in prayer?" they asked. I agreed, so we knelt at the sofa in my study while they implored God to lighten my darkness. I felt dreadful, knowing they were doing their best for me, but I found it quite impossible to have the sort of faith they wanted. There kept going through my mind: "Wash me in the water where you washed your dirty daughter and I shall be whiter than the whitewash on the wall".

## SALVATION ON THE DOORSTEP

They taught me to sing:

"Begone, unbelief, my Saviour is near,  
And for my relief will surely appear,  
By prayer let me wrestle, and He will perform.  
With Christ in the vessel, I smile at the storm."

One evening they brought a kind of supervisor, Earl K. Ephraim, suave, smart and self-assured. He sneered at my incredulity and said only nit-wits doubted the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. I took a great liking to Earl and to please him pretended I was beginning to have faith, but I realised I was a terrible humbug. Finally I escaped by going on a long journey.

Some of my friends resent holy callers on soul-saving expeditions, but they provide me with much quixotic amusement. Although they sometimes infuriate me, I admire the zealots who are determined to overcome all obstacles so that they can add another scalp to their collection of trophies.

This morning I received a visit from a middle-aged woman with a flat face, muddy complexion and glassy eye. She pushed a very ancient battered pram containing a gramophone on which she played records of speeches by Judge Rutherford. She announced that she was a Jehovah's Witness and gave me some pamphlets that I promised to read.

In my study she stared at me anxiously and suddenly said:

"But perhaps you are saved already?"

"No, I don't think so," I replied, "you see, I'm an agnostic".

"Oh dear, how dreadful! Shall we pray that God will show you the error of your ways?" So we knelt while she wailed: "Oh Creator of the world, redeem the heart of this sinful man. Send Thy Son Jesus Christ, so that he may be saved. Take from him all evil thoughts and in their place put purity and holiness. May he accept salvation before it is too late." She then sang, out of tune:

"Come ye sinners, lost and hopeless,  
Jesus' blood can make you free.  
For He saved the worst among you,  
When He saved a wretch like me;  
And I know . . . yes I know  
Jesus' blood can make the vilest sinner clean."

I watched her as she trudged away with her pram down the road. When she was out of sight I walked to the *King's Head* for a quiet pint, and as I sat there recovering from the latest attempt to save my mythical soul I wondered if the Jehovah's Witness woman ever relaxed. I felt sorry for her. She looked so intensely serious. What a strange way to spend one life's, pushing a battered pram, playing records of speeches by Judge Rutherford and praying for sinners! Suddenly I heard her strident tones again. She had parked her forlorn pram outside the pub and was inviting the boozers to come and get saved.

I stood up and peeped out of the window at her. She was offering tracts to all who passed. Some to whom she handed an invitation to salvation threw it to the ground, a gesture that seemed calculated to provoke divine wrath.

## MYSTICAL MIND-FURNITURE

F. H. Snow

ROMAN CATHOLICS, this article will meet the eyes of few of you, but I hope that regard for truth in religious matters, which devotion to Mother Church may not have annulled, will enable that few to honestly consider the observations impelled by my perusal of a *Universe* composition (December 31, 1965).

The composition in question sets out to demonstrate that loss of God, with its concomitant anguish, was what Christ alluded to when speaking of the fires of hell, and that this "simple and awe-inspiring idea" was obscured by theologians who interpreted it as physical burning. They took, the reverend author declares, most of the symbolic ideas, "particularly that of fire", with which loss of God was expressed, and turned them into literal facts. Now, that is contrary to the truth, there being no foundation for the claim that Jesus was speaking symbolically when stating that the damned would be cast into a furnace. He spoke emphatically of God's ability to destroy body and soul in hell, and the Church, by no statement, indicated that his references to hell meant anything but what they expressed. He would surely not have concealed it, had they been symbolic, nor theologians disguised that they regarded them so.

The article proceeds: "To see God face to face would be a worse state than to be separated from Him totally. Sheer goodness and evil are utterly and finally incompatible, separation the only solution. Is it possible for anyone, by the end of human life, to have such hatred for God and every form of goodness? The teaching of Jesus is quite clear that it is possible".

I disagree that Christ's teaching indicates that, and who, save a lunatic, would hate God? There are those who, like myself, detest a deity that could impose on humanity the cruel conditions it suffers, but they do not believe in such a deity's reality. If one believes in a god who is able to punish hatred of himself with eternal pain, to entertain such hatred is the essence of idiocy. Breathes there such an idiot?

The article advances sheer evil as necessitating the separation from God symbolised, according to its priestly writer, by hellfire. This signifies that, unless the vast majority of people are heaven-bound and Divine Wisdom was so undivinely foolish and unjust as to create an infernal dungeon for a few imbeciles, a very large number of utterly vile persons exists. Reason rebels against the notion. It is God's invidence that fosters wickedness, and, were his power demonstrably evident, evil would be awed almost out of possibility. The greatest villain would wilt before the indubitably miraculous. How, then, could malice live in the almighty Presence? If God be what his worshippers believe him to be, confrontation with him would be destructive of whatever evil survived resurrection and of the alleged reason for banishment from heaven.

The reverend contributor of the *Universe* article endeavours to justify rejection of hellfire as opposed to modern thought. Why not reject the whole biblical account of things supernatural, on that ground? Religion cannot be modernised without destroying its bedrock of 'sacred' truth. It must remain incompatible with modern thought or lose the God-made nature assigned it by believers—its sole claim to credence. To make Christ's inferno figurative, in order to align it with current conceptions, is to make all his literal statements suspect, and stamp him as a mere moralising mystic.

Which brings me to the astounding assertion by a priest of the most fundamental of faiths, that "heavenly visions of a private nature, however supernaturally genuine, are necessarily expressed by means of the mind-furniture of the seers". The implication is that the flames designed for the damned were the imaginings of contemporary-minded prophets, unable, through cultural inefficacy, to truly translate the divine will on the subject.

The Church has not refuted the assumption, read by thousands of her flock, though months have passed since its publication. By the omission, she tacitly sanctions it, and differentiates between the biblical seers and others. She says, in effect, that whilst the visions of the latter were conditioned by earthly associations, those of the former were not, and must be accepted as expressing God's truth. She puts God in the position of speaking with divine clarity to the writers of Scripture, and allowing his voice to be erroneously heard by later 'holy men'—that is, those whose mind-furniture caused them to teach that Jesus' hellfire was literal. We are invited to believe that centuries of seers, but for this cultural hindrance, would have understood God to vouchsafe that his Son had wrongly construed hell's pains. Is it soberly conceivable that an Almighty would suffer a communication of his to be falsely comprehended by the mental apparatus of any recipient?

Think, Catholics, can anything be more dishonourable than this attempt to obscure the true authorship of hellfire, in order to get rid of it? If your Lord's clear word may be robbed of its literal meaning in this instance, it may be in others. Those who would have you believe Christ did not mean what he said about hell, insist that he spoke literally when, at the Last Supper, he declared that the bread and wine consumed were his flesh and blood. Your precious sacrament of the Mass rests on exactly the same authority as hellfire.

We sceptics want to see the absurd and abominable threat of eternal burning wiped from the mind of everyone, but seek to accomplish it with honest logic, and detest the sophistry employed by the *Universe*. As freethinkers, we aim to reason our fellow men out of their religious delusions; as humanists, to free them from the horrors, hardships and oppressions prolonged by superstitious beliefs. As for the contemporary-mindedness cited by the *Universe* as subversive of God's truth, it was the mind-furniture of Moses, Abraham and other scriptural visionaries that invented Jehovah and his bloody deeds and afflicted humanity with a fantastic and intolerant creed. It is the mind-furniture of rationalists and scientists that is forcing the churches to forsake or modify certain tenets, and will finally—though only through uncompromising exposure of religious artifice—rid the world of their preposterous doctrines.

### Flashback

A DISCUSSION took place at the Marylebone vestry on Saturday, regarding the conduct of the Reverend Mr Bacon, of All Souls' Church, who refused to afford religious consolation to a dying woman when asked. In defence of the clergyman it was urged that the sick person lived in another district, and that it was contrary to the orders of the Bishop of London for any clergyman to officiate out of his own district, unless at the solicitation of the pastor of it. Mr Hume, MP, said if that was the system it was high time to alter it. A motion for a committee to investigate the matter was lost by a majority of eight.

(*The Leader*—February 22nd, 1851)

## NO ATHEIST

ACCORDING to many I am a total atheist. I never go to church. I never say any prayers. I have no fear of Hell and no hope of Heaven. I have for a long time ceased to regard the Bible as containing any proof or demonstration of anything supernatural or miraculous. I share with those who are professed atheists that all the religions of mankind constitute a formidable obstacle to the progress of human well-being. I believe that the human race could be and would be much better and much happier without bishops, priests or other ministers of religion, all of whom could be much better employed.

And so I am well qualified by conventional religious standards to be classified as an atheist. Yet I do not call myself an atheist. Indeed I regard atheism as the most dangerous of all those fruits which are the product of religions. It is not science that produces atheism. It is not even the conflict of religions with science. Atheism is a product of religion itself. It is a perfectly natural reaction to the tyrannies practised in the name of religion. There were atheists long before the dawn of what we call modern science. And in our day there are some doctors of science who support traditional religious beliefs. My own father was a doctor of science who gave support and encouragement to the most unpleasant of all religious tyrannies, that of the Roman Catholic Church.

Having been baptised and confirmed and eventually ordained a priest in the Roman Catholic Church, it would have been perfectly natural if I had ended up as a complete atheist, as I believe many priests are, in fact. I have ceased to be a subject of the Pope, and have not embraced any alternative religious obedience. But I have not given way to the strong temptation to profess atheism.

I believe that dogmatic atheism contains those same seeds of tyranny that have bedevilled religion throughout the ages. I believe that compulsory atheism could be and would be just as oppressive as compulsory religion, and would lead to the same deplorable results in human behaviour. Contrary to the unjust accusations of the "free

world", I believe that Russian Communism has never attempted to make atheism compulsory. All that Russian Communism has done has been to wage war against one very old and very corrupt State religion that was an obstacle to the new State. In its attitude to religion I believe that Russian Communism was right in principle, although some of its methods have been violently offensive to humanitarian feelings.

I do not call myself an atheist for exactly the same reason that I do not call myself a Roman Catholic. I abandoned Roman Catholicism when I acquired sufficient knowledge of my own mind to be sure that I could not continue to profess the Faith without intellectual dishonesty. For the same reason I am unable to profess atheism.

Three things I have discovered by personal experience that I am unable to doubt are the existence of matter, the existence of mind, and the existence of God as equally necessary both to matter and to mind. I cannot imagine the finite without the infinite, or time without eternity. I cannot imagine evolution without creation or creation without a creator. I do not believe that creation has had a beginning or that it will have an end. I believe that creation is the eternal life of the creator. Since God cannot be classified at all, it is obvious that God cannot be classified as a logical necessity. Nonetheless I believe that in a godless universe, logic itself would be devoid of ultimate meaning or significance.

One reason why I cannot profess atheism is that I have read, not once only but several times, from beginning to end *The History of Western Philosophy* by Bertrand Russell. In this great history of the human mind I have discovered very few atheists but many opponents of religious orthodoxy.

Even if I could profess atheism without intellectual dishonesty (as in some moods I can), I would not make use of atheism in the war against religion. Religion should be attacked as an obstacle to the peace and happiness of mankind. Religion should be attacked as a promoter of social injustice and a patron of war. But religion should not, in the opinion of this freethinker, be attacked for preaching an ethical monotheism merely on the ground that there is no physical proof that God exists outside the mind of the believer. Moreover a believer in God has a right to attack religion on the ground that religion encourages superstitions and idolatries that obscure the reality of the eternal and the divine. But if reality contains nothing beyond physics and chemistry, it is difficult to see what moral objection can be made to the deliberate encouragement of illusion. If there is nothing beyond physics, it must follow that illusion is better and richer than the very poor reality.

*Cogito ergo sum.* I think therefore I am. This freethinker wants to think freely and does not want to be stopped from thinking freely by any authority, whether secular or sacred. With all due respect to those freethinkers who have arrived at an atheistic or agnostic conclusion, I do not believe that such a conclusion is rendered absolutely necessary by the actual facts of the human situation.

\*(ex-Roman Catholic priest)

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## THE LAW OF GOD: IV

A. C. Thompson

SUPERNATURALISM is one type of ethical theory, which maintains that morality is God's 'will', that God knows what is right and wrong and lets us know, in actual practice, chiefly through religious officials—priests, medicine men, etc. The doctrine rests upon many assumptions. It assumes, first, that a god exists. If one denies this, he denies the moral principle, and is presumably free in conscience to do whatever he pleases. If he doubts that a god exists, then he doubts that any act is ever right or wrong. If he does not know whether a god exists, he does not know whether any act is ever right or wrong. If in fact no god exists this principle is void, and no act is right or wrong, at least not for this reason. The doctrine assumes further that God has a will. God desires. Then, God has unsatisfied desires. It assumes that human acts can be contrary to the will of God. If this is so, God's will is not omnipotent. If man's will cannot contradict God's will, then it is not possible for man to do wrong, and we have no need for a morality. Did God will to give man a will which could contradict his own will, and then will to punish him with torture if and when such an event happened? Why? Is such a God just? An omnipotent God, if he willed man to obey certain laws, could have made man automatically to obey those laws, and be relieved of the need for commanding, judging, rewarding and punishing. If he constructed man to be free, then why not leave him free?

Is it that an act is right because it agrees with God's will, or that it agrees with God's will because it is right? If the former, then God could have willed not to make a law. If the latter, then right and wrong become logically independent of and prior to God's will. Consider the act of murder for the sake of robbery. Is there something wrong about this act which makes it wrong in itself, or is it wrong only because God has declared it to be wrong? If it is wrong in itself, it is wrong independently of the will or command of God—because of the nature of things, the nature of man, the nature of society, the nature of conduct—and when God forbids it, he simply acquiesces to the fitness of things which he cannot alter. In giving a law, then, God is merely teaching what this superior natural law of morality imposes. Then, why should he not teach the superior law or principle itself, instead of merely its conclusions? To know this principle would be to know the nature of good and evil, and man would no longer need specific commands from God.

If, on the other hand, murder for the sake of robbery is not wrong in itself, but wrong only because God wills and declares it to be wrong, then he could, if he had wished, have instituted it as a holy and a righteous act, even, forsooth, an act of worship. If morality is wholly within the pleasure of God, he could presumably declare any act at all to be right or wrong, as he wished, bound by no necessity of any sort. Then, why is murder for the sake of robbery wrong? Has God no reason whatever? If God has no reason he is irrational. If he has reasons, such reasons, whatever they are, would be independent of God's will, would justify his will, and would be the actual basis of right and wrong. Hence, to know these reasons would be to know the ultimate basis for defining right and wrong. For the sake of a clear understanding of the basis of human morality, would it be amiss to ask God what his reasons are either for making a natural law of morality, or for conforming to it, whichever he did? What makes a right action right and so

worthy of being commanded by God? If we could know the reason why acts are right or wrong, then we do not need commandments or revealed, divine law.

Most religious people probably believe that God is bound by no law, that he created all natural laws, and had it entirely within his power to make all things quite different from what they are. He could have made to be virtuous the acts we now consider to be abominable crimes, and he could have declared sinful the acts we now admire and extol. Then, why did he select the acts as he did to classify them as right and wrong? To this question, two replies are commonly given. The first is that the will of God is inscrutable; there is nothing wrong in asking, but the quest is vain, for the answer will never be found. The second reply is that one commits an immoral act in asking, for he is disrespectful or presumptuous. The latter attitude prevailed in the Middle Ages, when the doubter, the inquirer, the reasoner, was considered a more serious menace to morality than the most atrocious criminal.

Why does God concern himself with human actions, instead of merely permitting the universe to operate according to natural laws, whether he made the natural laws, or whether the natural laws are independent of him and he must recognise them, whichever way it is? For this there exists no ethical reason. Some reply that it is because God wills man's happiness. If this were so, an omnipotent God could have created a happy race of human beings, happy without condition of observing moral precepts. But if one supposes that the reason he did not is that the natural laws of human nature, which control the conditions that make a person happy, are something to which God must conform, then God would be unable to create a human nature which would be happy without fulfilling the conditions imposed by the natural law. But if this is so, then God has nothing whatever to do with man's happiness, for it is really the natural laws of human nature and not the providence of God which can make a man happy. Bible scholars of course aver that God did create a happy race originally in the Garden of Eden, and brought unhappiness into the world after the first disobedience of eating a forbidden fruit. But one can hardly accept this as the creation of a happy mankind if man's nature was so prone to sin that he fell from his original happiness on his very first day on earth.

Next, why must we obey the law of God? We are told that obedience to law pleases, and disobedience displeases God, and that hence he will bestow favours upon those who disobey. This belief, held since earliest times of which knowledge exists, originated among our primitive ancestors of prehistory who feared unseen spirits. Rituals, ceremonies, prayers and sacrifices were intended to appease the spirits and to win their benevolence. Here may be noted a difference of the Christian religion, based on the New Testament of the Bible, from the older Hebrew religion, based on the Old Testament, which preceded it. The Christian religion reintroduced the idea of reward and punishment in a life after death, which had been a doctrine of the religion of ancient Egypt. The Hebrew religion, on the other hand, even though Bible scholars maintain that it was adopted from the monotheism of the Pharaoh Akhnaton (Amenhotep IV), contained no idea of a Heaven for the good or a Hell for the bad, or even of a life after death, and this grave difference between the religions of

Israel and Egypt leads many to assert that the whole story of captivity in Egypt is pure fiction. Surely, there are many impossibilities in the Biblical account. Throughout the whole of the Hebrew Scriptures, from beginning to end, there is not one single promise of Heaven for obedience nor one single threat of Hell for violation. Moses, in his last speech to the Jews before his death, reported in Deuteronomy, reviewed the law, and he promised long life, health, happiness, prosperity and other good fortune to those who keep it, and disease, pestilence, famine, conquest, slavery, sorrow and suffering for violation. But, while racking his brain for the most lovely rewards and the most horrible penalties, he never once mentioned a Heaven after death for the good nor a Hell for the wicked. All his rewards and tortures are temporal and end with death; in the grave one is at rest.

Supernaturalism thus provides a selfish motive for unselfish conduct: for conforming, one is promised personal gain. This was the motive why Abraham was willing to kill and sacrifice his own son, Isaac—to obtain the favour of Yhwh (Gen 22, 1-13). Mundanely, one is promised a feeling of 'being saved' for accepting Christ as his 'personal saviour'. But if one says, "Obey this rule or God will punish you", he is not giving an ethical reason. Whether an act is wrong and whether it will be punished are separate questions. To declare that God punishes evil is not to say what constitutes evil and why. It is conceivable that one could do right, or think he does right, in flouting hope of Heaven and fear of Hell. For example, suppose one were to write an article for the FREE-THINKER advocating a non-religious principle of ethics, and that the supernaturalist should tell him he is preaching heresy, and for it will burn in Hell. He might reply that he is trying to contribute to human understanding and perhaps eventually to human welfare and advancement, and if for doing this, God will send him to Hell, then so be it. He may prefer to do what he believes right, even if for it he sacrifices Heaven and condemns himself to Hell. He may accuse the other of practicing his faith, or becoming a priest, solely for expectation of perpetual bliss for himself, rather than for concern for his fellow men. In motive, though not in principle, supernaturalism is egoistic Hedonism. One obeys to obtain a reward and to avoid punishment. It thus tends not to be altruistic. Christianity, for example, through the centuries, has emphasised man's duties to God rather than to his fellow men.

A further important question is, why should one not only obey the Divine Law himself, but also impose it on others? Why can he not obey, enjoy the promised reward, and not care what others do? Is the law a guide to individual conduct, or must it be enacted into human law to be enforced by man upon man, and why? A morality is enforced by criminal law in every country; does God require this? Supernaturalists have surely been of all persons the most frantic in forcing their doctrines and standards upon whomever they could reach. They have spread their faith with fire and sword, they have tortured and murdered unbelievers, they have burned heretics to death at the stake. They maintain organisations, employ people full-time to preach their doctrines, divide the earth into parishes, erect buildings for congregations of their converts, require weekly attendance to hear the doctrines preached, knock on everyone's door, keep careful records. Why? And unbelievers have resisted in spite of dungeon, fire and sword. Do some principles of theology require one to war against, to persecute, to kill, those who do not believe certain supernatural theories of morality? The Hebrews warred against and

killed unbelievers, but did not try to convert them; Christians and Moslems have been most zealous to convert the world.

A supernatural ethics cannot be a self-contained subject, but must borrow its foundation from another subject, theology. This necessity creates the difficulty that he who denies the base, eg, the existence of God, rejects the whole moral system. This event is not merely theoretical; indeed it is often asserted that many today are giving up religion, and since their moral ideas were based on their religions, they give up their moral persuasions also. There is hence a distinct need for an ethics based on a self-contained, a natural, principle. Surely there must exist a natural principle of ethical conduct. Morality is surely bound with the survival of society.

The theory that the ultimate universal principle which decides right and wrong is that of the survival of society avoids the difficulties of Supernaturalism. It displays the reason for morality which, with the divine-will postulate, remains inscrutable. It offers an altruistic rather than an egoistic motive for its practice; while Christianity has emphasised a supposed moral relation of man to God, rather than to his fellow men, the Social-Survival theory restricts the domain of ethics to those acts which involve others.

Essentially, Spiritism has no reason why one man should impose morality on another, for in theory each man is working out his own salvation. It is true that positive law, that is, human statute and common law, has echoed religious precepts; but the question here is not whether and why civil and criminal law agrees or should agree with allegedly divine law, but rather why man-made law should exist at all in addition to a divine law—why divine law is not sufficient in itself and why it is necessary for individuals or society to impose and enforce any morality at all upon one another. Why should anyone, or society, care what any person does, to such an extent as to maintain legislatures, law-courts, police, prisons, why should a church maintain an inquisition which condemns persons to be burned alive at the stake, why should adherents of Supernaturalism go to war against the infidel? Why impose morality on others? This question Supernaturalism does not answer, whereas the Social-Survival theory provides an answer which is logically imperative and inescapable: people impose on others the conduct which they believe, correctly or mistakenly, to be necessary for the survival of their society. Religion is covert practice of the Social-Survival principle.

The supernaturalist insists his is the only theory of ethics which is able to secure compliance—the only one which proposes motives sufficient to withhold men from gratification of lust, greed, hatred, envy, revenge, and to direct them to justice and charity. No other principle of ethics, they say, imposes sanctions which compel people to do good, and if religion is removed from morality, people will do evil for their own self-interest. There are many who adhere to religion not because they believe it to be true, but because they think it curbs crime; some say frankly that they do not care whether it is actually true or not. The fact that religionists make these statements betrays that their real principle of morality, which they are following implicitly, is that of the survival of society. Indeed all human beings everywhere, as long as they have existed on the earth, have implicitly followed the Social-Survival principle, because it is a logical imperative, without explicitly declaring or even realising their true motive, however

(Continued at foot of next page)

## A WRITER OF POWER

Peter Cotes

PERCY Robinson, whose death recently passed almost completely unnoticed, was a playwright of searing power and heart-felt feeling. He was a busy playwright in the 'thirties and early 'forties when, after the West End production of his best known play, *To What Red Hell*, which was thrice made into a film — once with Sybil Thorndyke enacting, on the screen, the role of "Mrs Nolan" (one of the theatre's great "mother" roles) which had been created by Kate Rorke before being played in the 1928 Wyndhams production by Sara Allgood — he wrote a number of pieces, in collaboration with others, which were generally good, most of which had some social conscience and none of them completely valueless. They included *Whispering Gallery* at the Garrick, *Wanted for Murder* at the Lyceum, *The Crime of Margaret Foley* at the Comedy; all above-the-average thrillers. And a number of "near misses" as well.

But it was with *Red Hell* that Robby, as he was known to his group of friends amongst whom I was proud to count myself a member, came into his own. The late James Agate described it as "a thundering good play" in the *Sunday Times* — it was probably much more. Described as a "Drama of Two Families", it anticipated the terrible Evans murder case, and the hanging of a possibly innocent man, by over twenty years. By its contention that the law relating to murder trials is all too fallible where the individual is concerned, in relation to circumstantial evidence, Robinson's best known play — graphically told in the purest theatrical terms and with wonderfully written roles for its actors (the dramatist was once an actor) — was one of the first important plays to deal with Capital Punishment to be produced after the First World War. It paved the way for many others that followed; some of them tracts, and little else, were too doctrinaire to hit the West End "bullseye" and, in the majority of cases, they failed as pure entertainment. But the author of *Red Hell* poured his life long convictions as a firm abolitionist into his masterpiece, wrote it with his heart's blood and utilised that rare theatrical knowledge that comes from having been an observer of life whilst tramping the roads and slogging the "smalls" during his early life as a touring actor.

Robby was the kindest of men; self effacing, modest, quick to spring to the defence of those unjustly treated and never afraid to express passionately the most unpopular view when he believed in it. There were others who jumped on the bandwagon when it became the popular thing to join the movement to rid society of its gallows; that they were able to do so was owed in no little measure to the pioneering work of those departed like Chapman Cohen, Clarence Darrow, F. A. Hornibrook and the author of *To What Red Hell*.

I knew Robby well; first when as a boy actor, in a not very funny farce he wrote a long time ago, I appeared to poor advantage (the date was 1930); and later when he appeared in the year 1946, this time as an actor himself, and now approaching his sixties, in a hit play I produced in the West End just after the last war. Between these two engagements, when each of us employed the other, as well as before and after, I was his pupil in many matters where youth can benefit from its contact with age and experience. Not that my old friend ever patronised or "talked down" to his junior colleague. He was too wise and gentle to do this. But he did have an influence upon a man a good deal younger than himself, chiefly I suppose because we were both of, as well as in, the Theatre and presumably — if one looks back in retrospect to decipher the reason why — because his own vision was wider than the one enjoyed by most members of our "profession", in its rationalism, internationalism and radicalism.

Born in Bandon, Co. Cork, my friend was cremated at Barham, near Canterbury, early in July. Aged 78, and a lifelong freethinker, as at least one of his friends is prepared to testify, Robby leaves a widow, who was his loyal companion and friend, as well as a nephew who we are fortunate to have as an enlightened Minister of Health in a not always, or so it seems, enlightened government, and whose imagination and humanitarianism are qualities possibly inherited from an uncle to whom this nephew has acknowledged owing so much. And although the national press with one exception failed to report our friend's departure as a matter of public interest, which it surely was, a few folk, including his widow, nephew and the writer of this wholly inadequate line of appreciation, were there to speed on his way a notable artist and noble human being.

### THE LAW OF GOD: IV

(Continued from previous page)

they fabricated mythical spirits instead. One who follows strictly the religious theory would not say, "Divine law makes other people law-abiding; therefore we cannot relinquish it" but rather, "Divine law makes me law-abiding; therefore I shall go to Heaven". Hence it must be obvious that he who declares that we had better teach the Christian religion whether it is true or not, in the hope that believers will not commit crimes, is really concerned for the survival of society. The basic principle of morality has ever been the survival of society, and religion has been a bogus bogey-man fabrication which entices people with promised rewards and frightens them with threatened punishments into avoiding acts which imperil, and performing acts that promote, the survival of society. There is nothing in Supernaturalism that requires human law and law-enforcement. Throughout the entire Bible, neither Yhwh nor his reputed son Jesus ever clearly perceived or enunciated the social function of morality. If supernaturalists acknowledge it today, they discard the need for a supernatural basis of morality; for, with the Social-Survival principle, man can know the nature of good and evil, and no longer needs specific commands from God.

(Concluded)

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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. Mepham, 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, August 6th, 6.45 p.m. "Freethought Past and Present". Speaker: David Collis (editor of FREETHINKER).

National Secular Society (103 Borough High Street, London, SE1), Sunday, September 3rd. Tour of "London for Heretics". Coach fare, luncheon, refreshments: 25/-. Book now.

West Ham Branch NSS (Wanstead and Woodford Community Centre, Wanstead, London, E11). Meetings at 8 p.m. on the fourth Thursday of every month.

**LETTERS****Harry Lamont**

I WAS shocked to read of the death of Harry Lamont. It is only latterly that I have become acquainted with his writings through his contributions to the FREETHINKER, and I have been charmed with their style and simple commonsense. The experiences of his early life among village methodism were so similar to my own, though he was eight years younger than I, that I felt a close sympathy with his ideas. My first thought on receiving my weekly FREETHINKER has been to look for Lamont's article which I read at once and put the rest aside for later perusal. I shall certainly miss him, as will no doubt many other readers.

H. J. BATTY

**Perjury — or perversion of law?**

IN the issue of *The Sun* dated Monday last (3rd July), there was a curious letter from Mr McIlroy — Secretary of the NSS. "How many atheists take the oath in court because they know they would stand no chance at all, even on a driving offence, if they affirmed before a bench of magistrates virtually representing the local council of churches?" — thus Mr McIlroy. That does not say much for the atheist! But the remedy — in the courts — is not to push affirmation, now merely a form of being, in terms of the Perjury Act, "lawfully sworn", but to advocate the complete abolition of any form of religious tests — in court and generally — so far as the ordinary citizen is concerned.

The Law Commission are even now considering reform of court procedure, although when the matter will be finalised cannot be said! It is therefore to be hoped that Mr McIlroy and freethinkers generally — agnostic or otherwise — will write to the Commission. It is monstrous that the courts should, now, have no power to question the unsworn, and record what is said.

H. E. EVANS

**Corporal Punishment of Children**

MANY people must have been disturbed recently by disclosures of children being beaten. The National Union of Headmasters has approved of corporal punishment. It appears to be a duty which teachers must not shirk.

In olden times the threshers beat the corn so that the good grain could be used for food. Beating children produced good conduct. In those days our forefathers delighted in double-thinking and found out that beating drove out evil also.

P. G. HUSBANDS

**Standard not lost for good**

MAY I state my complete agreement with the sentiments expressed by your correspondents, June 30 issue, J. G. Cartwright and A. Allman. The only difference being that I shall continue to take the FREETHINKER, as I am sure the standard is not lost for good.

No longer is the paper the pugnacious opponent of organised religion, which first attracted me. It has ceased to refresh me each week with arguments which, as an uneducated man, I need to stimulate my own personal battle against the degrading effects of supernaturalism.

Please let the FREETHINKER do, what I am sure it was originally intended to do, namely, fight the cause of Secularism; don't let it continue to be a platform for intellectuals.

KENNETH J. EAD, Secretary Plymouth Humanist Group.

**THE FREETHINKER FIGHTING FUND**

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