

FREETHINKER

The Humanist World Weekly

Registered at the G.P.O. as a Newspaper

FOUNDED 1881 by G. W. FOOTE

Friday, May 31, 1968

VISIONS OF THE VIRGIN

Children squashed to death in rush

SEVEN children and either one or two adults have been crushed to death in a stampede to a church in the Shubra district of Cairo following a report of an appearance of the Virgin Mary on a plain glass window above the altar.

Mary first graced Cairo by putting in a series of appearances at a church in the Zeitoun district of Cairo starting April 2. This series of "visions" the Coptic patriarchate pronounced as "genuine" and crowds have been flocking to the Zeitoun Church ever since. The patriarchate warned against a second series of appearances, however, which took place in the Dahir district—not at a church but "in a copper tray".

It was inevitable, perhaps, that further appearances were to be reported at other churches, and, on May 19, the Church of St Michael the Archangel in the Shubra district was rumoured to have been blessed with a vision of the Virgin—first in glorious technicolour then, after a couple of minutes, in monochromish "shadowy outline" which soon after vanished completely.

This time the rush was enormous (Shubra is a poor and highly populated district) and the church was soon besieged by thousands of stampeding adults and children seeking cures and blessings.

Thirty people were reported injured and newspapers report the death of seven children and one adult or of six children and two adults. The children are said to have been aged between 5 and 12 years. In an effort to bring about order, the police and civil defence workers sealed off the area around the Shubra Church, while spiritual leaders appealing for calm to ease the religious hysteria. Obviously, they were now embarrassed.

Perhaps as a diversion (or was it to 'keep the fires burning?') the open-air cinema at Zeitoun announced that it would be screening *The Song of Bernadette*, the film with Jennifer Jones about Lourdes.

Believers may well ponder upon Mary's wisdom in deciding to visit Cairo in this way. Non-believers are left to dwell upon the six or seven children, the slow death by crushing which they suffered, and upon whom the final responsibility should rest.

THE SPORT OF KINKS

WHILE recognising the time barrier facing the Government in its legislative programme, the National Secular Society urges it to support Marcus Lipton's Stag hunting with Hounds (Abolition) Bill. This is not a matter of conscience, unless it be guilty conscience. Like bull and bear baiting it automatically invites the censure of all feeling men.

We acknowledge that sentimentality and hypocrisy often enter discussions of animal welfare, and that even vegetarians depend for their survival on some measure of pest control. Attractive and normally gentle animals like deer can sometimes breed into a nuisance. Some killing may be necessary.

But to turn this into a bloody spectacle of country lanes and on occasions of city streets and describe it as a sport of gentlemen is an intolerable disgrace to a supposedly civilised country.

DAVID TRIBE, *President, NSS.*

HOMOSEXUALITY AND THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

SINCE May 24, 1967, the day the Church of Scotland Assembly rejected a motion asking sympathy for homosexuals, *not one* homosexual has applied to the Church for help and advice.

Now the rejected motion is being brought back by the Church's moral welfare committee. While not condoning or approving homosexual behaviour, it urges that a more sympathetic understanding of those suffering from homosexual tendencies is needed; ministers should show pastoral concern and care, and the Government should consider whether homosexual acts between consenting adults should continue to be an offence under the law of Scotland.

The Committee underlines the fact that men coming to the Church for help never came back, and that "no fresh ones have appeared; thus any work of rehabilitation or pastoral care has ceased". Homosexuals in the Church have told the Committee that the Church's attitude "is one of unfeeling condemnation".

Last year a counter-motion said homosexuality was a "source of uncleanness and deterioration in human character".

PRESENTATION TO W. GRIFFITHS

MR William Griffiths, who was Honorary Treasurer of the National Secular Society, Chairman of Secular Society Ltd., The Freethinker Endowment Trust, G. W. Foote & Co. Ltd. and Managing Editor of the *FREETHINKER*, resigned recently after many years service to the movement. As a token of appreciation, it has been decided to make a presentation to Mr Griffiths at the Chapman Cohen Centenary meeting on June 29. Mr Griffiths was unable to attend the NSS Annual Conference last year due to an operation, and his friends in the movement will welcome this opportunity to honour a member who has done so much work behind the scenes.

All wishing to contribute to the presentation should make cheques and postal orders payable to the National Secular Society, and send them to 103 Borough High Street, London, SE1. All donations will be acknowledged.

FREETHINKER

Published by G. W. Foote & Co. Ltd.

103 BOROUGH HIGH STREET, LONDON, S.E.1

Editor: KARL HYDE

FREETHINKER subscriptions
and orders for literature

... The Freethinker Bookshop
01-407 0029

Editorial matter

... The Editor, The Freethinker
01-407 1251

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

12 months: £1 17s 6d 6 months: 19s 3 months: 9s 6d.

USA AND CANADA

12 months: \$5.25 6 months: \$2.75 3 months: \$1.40

The FREETHINKER can be ordered through any newsagent.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

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, SE1. Telephone 01-407 2717. Cheques, etc., should be made payable to the NSS.

Humanist Letter Network (International) and Humanist Postal Book Service (secondhand books bought and sold). 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 and MCRAE.

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

British Humanist Association, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1, June 8, 2.30 p.m.: REUNION MEETING for Harold Blackham. All welcome.

Bristol Humanist Group, Kelmescott, 4 Portland Street, Clifton, June 8, 7.30 p.m.: GARDEN PARTY.

Enfield and Barnet Humanist Group, 31 Windsor Road, London, N13, Saturday, June 8, 8 p.m.: Social evening with slide-show (bring your own).

Freethought-Humanist Film Club, 103 Borough High Street, London, SE1, June 5, 7.30 p.m.: A meeting to discuss future work of the Club. Please attend if interested.

NSS, West Kent Branch, Public Library, The Drive, Sevenoaks, Wednesday, June 5, 8 p.m.: Rev. OGILVIE, MARGARET MATTHES and others discuss "Religious Rights in Human Rights Year".

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H. J. BLACKHAM REUNION MEETING

TO mark Harold Blackham's recent retirement from Directorship of the British Humanist Association, the BHA are arranging a reunion meeting to be held at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1, on Saturday, June 8, at 2.30 p.m.

All friends and associates, and all who would like to acknowledge Mr Blackham's retirement, are invited to attend. In the main it will be a social event, with refreshments, lasting until about 5 p.m. There will be no charge for admission.

Professor Ayer, President of the BHA, has been invited to take part and to speak.

* * *

QUOTE

"APPLICATIONS are invited for two A. J. Wheeler Fellowships tenable from October 1, 1968. These fellowships have been established to encourage 'efforts for increased knowledge of Man and his physical make-up so as to enable him to make better use of his life here on earth', and are open to graduates of outstanding promise who will normally wish to undertake research in any of the following fields: Education, Life Sciences, Mathematics, Meteorology, Molecular Biology, Neurobiology, Psychology (especially in the fields of Psychophysiology and Educational Psychology), Social Sciences (including Economics and Geography)."

An announcement in the PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS columns of the *Guardian* (May 21).

* * *

OBSTACLES TO MORAL EDUCATION

THE two main obstacles to the moral education of children are religion, and the authoritarian attitude of many parents and teachers.

This challenging assertion was made by Maurice Hill, Vice-Chairman of the Humanist Teachers' Association, opening his talk on "The Development of Social Conscience" last week to the West Kent Branch of the National Secular Society.

Children are quick to see that society is dishonest in not following the rules it advocates, such as "thou shalt not kill" and "love thy neighbour" and the hypocrisy of daily worship in school.

The most effective moral teaching is rationally, rather than religiously based, and it is important to place emphasis on love rather than hate.

Report from Margaret Matthes.

RI AND SURVEYS

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By MAURICE HILL

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CIVIL LIBERTIES

National Council for Civil Liberties: AGM

A Report from G. N. Deodhekar

THE Annual General Meeting of the National Council for Civil Liberties was held at Mahatma Gandhi Hall, Fitzroy Square, London, W1, on May 4-5, 1968.

With the Government 'devaluing' the British passport, and dockers striking to express support for Enoch Powell, it was inevitable that race relations should figure prominently in the Emergency Resolutions of the Conference.

The Conference 'deplored' the Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1968, 'welcomed' the Race Relations Bill and expressed 'deep concern' at Enoch Powell's "racialist speech" in three separate resolutions. Serious humanists may care to study them in full:

Emergency Resolution: Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1968

The AGM deplores the Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1968 which was drafted in panic, passed without adequate consideration and with indecent haste, and which represents the complete negation of racial equality within the Commonwealth.

It calls for the repeal of the Act and especially those clauses which relate right of entry to birthplace of grandparents or other similar considerations.

It notes that the Act was not accompanied by the introduction of an appeals system as recommended by the Wilson Committee and that without this safeguard immigrants have no protection against the admitted prejudices of some immigration officers.

The NCCL renews its demand for a rational immigration policy based on national and local economic need and social capacity regardless of race or colour.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE.

Emergency Resolution: Race Relations Bill

This AGM whilst regretting the need for any group of the population to require protection from discrimination on the grounds of ethnic or cultural origin:

- (1) Welcomes the Government's recognition of this need, but
- (2) Regrets that the Race Relations Bill 1968 is inadequate for this purpose, and
- (3) Urges its strengthening by
 - (i) the prohibition of religious discrimination (clause 1),
 - (ii) vesting in the Race Relations Board power to compel the disclosure of documents and the examination of witnesses by due process of law to enable the Board to perform its investigatory function (clause 14(3)a),
 - (iii) the revocation of the provision allowing discrimination in the interest of preserving a racial balance amongst employees (clause 8(2) & (3)),
 - (iv) the vesting in appropriate County Courts the power to grant general damages to a person found to have been discriminated against (clause 21).

(4) Directs the officers and

(5) Requests all affiliated organisations and members to make immediate representations in the terms of this resolution to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Race Relations Bill and for this purpose appends hereto the names of the members thereof.

[There followed here an Appendix listing all 32 names including G. H. R. Roberts, the Chairman.]

FRANCIS DEUTSCH, ANDREW D. WATSON.

Emergency Resolution: Racialism

This AGM expresses its deep concern at the recent racist speech by Mr Enoch Powell, the wave of irrational prejudice unleashed by it, and the consequent revelation of the seriousness of the white problem.

It requests the Executive Committee to consider without delay the holding of a teach-in on racialism, and to seek the widest possible publicity through television and other media.

It also urges all NCCL members, local groups and affiliated organisations to use all their energies to combat racial prejudice, defend the civil rights of coloured citizens, and spread accurate information on this vital subject.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE.

Another minority was featured in yet another emergency resolution by which Conference condemned the unprecedented operation carried out by the West Midlands Constabulary to expel gypsy families from Walsall at dawn on March 27. Ivan Geffen's detailed and graphic description of the events ensured that resolution was passed *nem con*.

David Tribe moved a resolution on euthanasia on behalf of the National Secular Society. The resolution read:

Euthanasia

This AGM calls attention to the natural rights of individuals to seek euthanasia for themselves when their lives have become intolerable, and for their doctors to be able to help them without risking a criminal prosecution.

Mr Tribe's speech was persuasively delivered and to the point. The usual objections to euthanasia were not vigorously voiced and the resolution was passed by a very large majority, as was another resolution from the NSS, moved by David Tribe, drawing attention to the rights of children.

Of special interest to secularists and humanists was Ivan Geffen's resolution on Religious Instruction. Since a resolution on somewhat similar lines had been adopted the previous year, this resolution went through without any difficulty. It read:

Religious Instruction

This AGM affirms that to impose the giving and receiving of religious instruction on teachers and schoolchildren and the observance of acts of worship on schools is to attack a fundamental civil right of parents, teachers and children in a field where freedom of choice is essential, and calls for the amendment of the Education Act 1944 so as to provide for a daily assembly without worship and for the exclusion of dogmatic teaching about ideas and behaviour.

The British Humanist Association's resolution on broadcasting was moved by David Pollock and supported by David Tribe on behalf of the National Executive of the NCCL. The Conference accepted the resolution which read:

Religious Broadcasting

This AGM, noting that the Pilkington Report on broadcasting recommended that "non-religious bodies such as the Humanist Groups should be allowed their fair share of time in controversial broadcasting outside periods set aside for religious broadcasting", and that Lord Hill (Chairman of the BBC) in his letter to *The Times* (December 14, 1967) ignored this recommendation in his statement of BBC policy, calls for an immediate revision of BBC policy and practice.

A resolution which included a demand for legislation of marijuana was defeated; however, the Executive's resolution which included a demand for the withdrawal of extended police powers under the Dangerous Drugs Act 1967 was adopted.

To what extent should the State interfere in ordering the sexual behaviour of its citizens? This question has been debated at great length in recent years and the answer has been: within narrow and defined limits. The principle involved was stated in a pithy resolution moved by Edgar Wright and adopted by Conference which will bear quoting in full:

Sexual Offences

This AGM believing that the individual's freely chosen sexual

(Continued on page 176)

CAXTON'S PLACE IN HISTORY

Douglas Bramwell

A previously unpublished work by one of the most famous and prolific writers in freethought literature. Joseph McCabe (1867-1955) took a leading part in various rationalist organisations both in England and in the USA. For this article, we are indebted to Charles V. Bryan of Colorado who bought it from McCabe for a book he was writing; the article was not used and has been given to the "Freethinker" who now hold the copy-right.

UNTIL his forty-eighth year William Caxton was just one of dozens of London merchants who grew fat on their trade and died in complete obscurity, yet he is almost the only man of the stirring fifteenth century—the culminating century of the Renaissance—whose name is still generally known and respected in the entire English-speaking world. His thirty years as a merchant were, however, an important step in his rise to world-fame. He was a mercer, a dealer in textile fabrics, and the clothing of the upper tenth of England in brocades and velvets instead of the rough homespun of the Dark Ages was a symbol of the change that had come over it.

The awakening of the country after the heavy slumbers of the Dark Age was mainly due to stimulation by a brilliant Arab civilisation in Spain and Sicily, but the rest of Europe borrowed from this little more than its clothes, in the broadest sense; the superficial and artistic splendour, from architecture and art to such things as cleanliness and carpets, music and letters, silks and velvets. Underneath the glittering externals the general character was still vicious, cruel, and treacherous to an appalling extent. It is a shere myth that from 100 to 1400 A.D. Europe had enjoyed an Age of Chivalry, in the idealist sense; and, in the fifteenth century, as Caxton often deplored and most historians admit, the character of knights and princes had further deteriorated. But it was something that the love of beauty, to which mercers as well as artists contributed, should be fostered, and in helping to extend this to the stimulation of intellect and character Caxton's work as writer and printer played a notable part.

For centuries the soft green hills of England had bred countless flocks of sheep—the "Roast Beef of Old England" was not a national emblem until a later date—and the wool had been very largely shipped to the Netherlands, particularly Belgium. This part of Europe was, in Caxton's time, under the Duke of Burgundy, and, through France, the finer Arab arts of weaving had naturally reached Belgium before they were adopted in England. The wool came back as velvets and brocades and fine cloth, and many of the mercers of London were as familiar with Bruges, then the chief city of Belgium, as with their own country. Caxton had been apprenticed to the trade at about the age of seventeen, though this was a special kind of apprenticeship, separating him widely from the crowd of rowdy apprentices to the other trades. He lived, on family terms, in the house of his master, one of the richest merchants in the city, and doubtless he often met there the Flemish merchants who were hospitably lodged in it during their visits. He was, in fact, sent at about the age of twenty to the Flemish city of Bruges, which was then probably as rich as and more cosmopolitan than London. France was still languishing under the devastation of the Hundred Years' War with England, while the cities of Belgium and Holland prospered and grew. Bruges had then a canal to the sea, and vessels from Southern Europe

and the North as well as from England moored at its quays; and these cities were almost democratic in their pride and independence.

So the young merchant, having passed his apprenticeship, remained thirty further years in this stimulating environment and became not only prosperous but the governor of the guild or colony of English merchants. His importance in trade and in diplomatic missions led to friendships with high nobles of both the Burgundian and the English courts, and with some of the more important men and women of the time.

He explains that as his leisure grew he wanted wider occupations than trade, so he turned to literature and began to rise out of the merchant class. We may suppose that the aristocratic world in which he moved had not a little to do with this. For the heavy learning of the Germans and the Dutch he had no inclination. He preferred the sparkling romantic literature of the south—the long war with France was now over—and he decided to translate some of this for his culturally-backward countrymen. He had a thorough knowledge of French and, apparently, some acquaintance with Latin, and, in 1468, he forty-seventh year, he began to translate a French *Collection of Histories of Troy*. But he found, and complained, that the slow and laborious writing on white sheets of paper—the Arabs had discovered the making of paper centuries earlier and passed it on to Europe—tired his eyes, and he turned with interest to the news of a new German art of multiplying books by the use of a printing press.

The controversy as to whether the German Gutenberg had discovered this or had been anticipated in Holland has ended in a general recognition that Gutenberg has the honour, but that there had been some obscure experiments on that line in Holland some years before. Neither seems to have profited by the practice of printing in China from the first century B.C. onward. The medieval Arabs and Persians had had a far greater zeal for books than the Greeks and the Romans. Their royal library at Cordova had had about half a million beautifully-written and bound books, yet they never learned to print books. Either they did not hear of the Chinese invention, or they felt that what could be done with the Chinese language, in which each character is a complete word, could not be done with the polysyllabic western language. They therefore to the end of their civilisation had large numbers of copyists, generally young women, writing out, in beautiful script, their hundreds of thousands of books. Experts find that the single city of Cordova produced about 75,000 books a year, while the most zealous of the few large abbeys which undertook copying (almost entirely religious works) turned out less than 200 books a year. The invention of printing may be compared with the supercession of the hand-loom by the power-loom in the nineteenth century.

The early printed page was an exact copy of the written page, each letter being cut, at first in wood, in the same form as the scribe wrote it; they were so closely alike in fact that there is a story that, when Gutenberg's colleague Fust (or Faust, though he has no connection with the famous legend of Faust) found that sometimes a written manuscript sold for more than a printed book—some

suspected magic in this secret art—he fraudulently represented his printed book as hand-written. From cutting out letters in wood the industrious and very secret experimenters at Mainz, where Gutenberg lived, soon got to cutting them out in metal, impressing this in a mould of cement or paste, and pouring in a molten softer metal like lead. But some years before Caxton went to Germany to learn (or buy) the technique, one of the fighting bishops of Germany took Mainz and scattered the experimenters in the new art over Europe, from Italy to Holland. The art now made comparatively rapid progress. More skilful artists were engaged to cut out the type, harder metal was used in founding it, letters were cut in the pairs which were most frequently used (it, an, we, etc.) or groups, and the face of the fount varied.

It was already improved when Caxton set up his little workshop at Bruges, where, in 1474, he, or his assistant Colard Mansion, brought out the first book that was printed in English: *The Recuyall of the Histories of Troye*, which Caxton had long been engaged in translating. It really was a very popular romantic novel and had very little to do with the siege of the ancient city of Troy.

He had finished his career as a mercer, and his appeal was now to the small educated class of nobles and knights in England, so in 1476 he packed his paraphernalia, sailed for England, and began the period of tremendous industry which he maintained until his death in 1492. He established his shop in the precincts of Westminster Abbey, and from this some want us to infer that the monks and their abbot patronised the new art. But the abbot just drew rent from him as any other property-owner would and may not even have been aware what was being done in one of the shops round the fringe or precincts of the abbey, which were hired to traders who paid rent to the treasurer.

While Caxton was certainly an orthodox Christian—he even urged the king to organise a new crusade to deliver the city of Jerusalem from the Turks—and published a number of religious books, his patrons were chiefly found in the higher nobility. It was not a propitious time for launching a new invention upon England. The Hundred Years' War with France had barely ended when the great

struggle for the crown, the War of the Roses, a civil war that lasted thirty years, brought a new misery on the land.

Thus it was during twenty years of revolt, battle, and seething passion that Caxton performed the remarkable task of printing—remember how laborious the work then was—about a hundred books, of which he himself translated one-fourth from French or Latin. He was a good linguist and one of the best writers of English in his day; and the artistic conscientiousness of his work is seen in the surviving specimens, of which I have seen a number in the British Museum.

In spite of the turbulence of the times he was fortunate in having the support of several kings and very influential nobles. Edward IV, who financed one of his ventures, and Edward's sister, the Duchess of Burgundy (a warm personal friend), were greatly interested in his early ventures. Later, the short-lived Richard III and the powerful Henry VII encouraged him. Some of the highest nobles befriended him and doubtless went to admire the mysteries of his shop. Often he printed a book at the request of some noble, who helped to defray expenses.

He was very conservative both in his religion and in politics, and we might paraphrase the saying of Emerson about Luther and suppose that he would have cut off his right hand rather than print a line if he had foreseen how great a service printing would render to the Reformers of the next century. Writers sometimes express surprise that he never printed an English Bible, or part of it. The explanation generally given is that there was no demand for it. Certainly it was little read, especially by the frivolous English nobles before the Reformation, but it is possible that he saw how itinerant preachers in the streets of London already used it for violent attacks on the Church. Of service in the social sense he had no idea. Ninety per cent of the nation could not read and he had no mind to see them taught to read. He, in the old saying, "buildd better than he knew". He gave England the press, and within a hundred years English ships were taking printed books to the New World. And this was only the germ of a means of education which, properly used would rid the race of all its clogging prejudices.

DEARLY LOVED BELIEFS

MR. Ramon de Castro showed well his religious thinking when his article, *God and Nature* (*Philippines Free Press*, April 27, 1968) questioned my article, *Science v. the Supernatural* (*Philippines Free Press*, March 30, 1968). He asked:

"Did life give origin to itself? Did the constituents of the first forms of life—the atoms, protons, neutrons, electrons and chemical elements—come into being by themselves? A Supreme Being, one who is above nature, must have caused nature to exist."

Nature gave origin to life. The first forms of living matter were results of electro-chemical reactions and interactions in the sunlight among the earliest chemicals of the earth. The hydrocarbons interacted with ammonia and water, became amino acids and flowed into the seas. In due time, after thousands of years, the amino acids became proteins and protoplasm (with nucleic acid, the reproducer), the media of living forms.

For reference, please read the following books: *Origin of Life* by A. I. Aparin, *The Physics and Chemistry of*

Life, an anthology of a Scientific American, *How Life Began* by Irving Adler, *The Dawn of Life* by J. H. Rush, *The Structure and Evolution of the Universe* by G. J. Whitrow, *The Nature of the Universe* by Fred Hoyle, *The Universe at Large* by Hermann Bondi, *Biography of the Earth* by George Gamow, *The Birth and Death of the Sun* by George Gamow, and *The Stars* by Irving Adler.

Matter cannot come from nothing, nor can it be reduced to nothing. This, as many of us know, is the foundation of physics. The universe, therefore, has neither beginning nor end. Atoms and their electrons, protons, and neutrons are inherent in matter. Nobody created the universe in much the same way that nobody created time and space. The universe has always been in continuous flux, change, or cosmic evolution.

The ideas represented by the words "God" and "supernatural" were only inventions of primitive men in the remote past who knew nothing about nature and who spun myths to explain life and the universe!

THE LOGISTICS OF PROPHECY

A. J. Lowry

ONE of the surest proofs of the divine authority of the Bible, so the faithful diligently inform us, is the enormous number of fulfilled prophecies contained within it. In claiming such powers for their scriptures, of course, champions of the Bible are suggesting no more than has been advanced at an earlier age, for the divinity associated with the Sibylline Books of Rome, the Delphic Oracle of Greece and the astrological writings of ancient Babylon. As the majority of Christians appear quite happy in explaining away such phenomena in purely naturalistic terms, it would therefore be interesting to discover whether or not a similar process could provide a complete, and entirely secular explanation of the prophetic abilities regularly ascribed to the Bible.

To begin with, a prophecy, to be accepted as such, must be specific in its application; a condition which, in itself, immediately rules out the majority of the Biblical claims to fore-knowledge. The 'Messianic' Psalm 22, for example, is often accepted by Christians as an astonishingly accurate prophecy of the death of Jesus. And yet, in reality, it is nothing of the kind—a reading of the Psalm reveals that its author (David?) is speaking, apparently, of himself, and not of one to come. There is nothing, apart from the Gospel narratives themselves, to suggest any connection between the two, and hence it seems we must be ignorant as to which parts of the Old Testament are prophetic, until such times as Jesus fulfils them; a superb example of circular reasoning which does not prove anything at all.

Of the prophecies escaping this criticism, many more fail to be specific in time. Isaiah 19:18, for example, informs us that five Egyptian cities will speak the language of the Canaanites, and when, two and a half millenia later, this has still not come to pass, it might be considered fair comment to state that the prophecy was false. But this is not so, the Christians inform us, as Isaiah never said *when* this would take place, and there is still time yet. In this way, of course, such prophecies can never be disproved at all, and since they cannot, by any means, have their validity tested, are completely useless as a 'proof' of the truth of the Bible. Were I, for example, to set myself up as a prophet, and predict that Ashby-de-la-Zouch United would win the FA cup, I could never be exposed provided I were not so foolhardy as to state exactly when this wonderful event would supposedly occur. In a hundred years time, such an event may actually happen, and my disciples could at once spread the word that another of my prophecies had been fulfilled. But this would be no proof that I was a prophet: simply that I was a clever rogue.

It must also be remembered that prophecies concerning the Messiah cannot seriously be considered. Historically, we know nothing at all about Jesus of Nazareth, and the only accounts of his life with which we are presented were written by men who very much wanted him to fulfil Old Testament prophecy. In this, it is certain, their zeal very often exceeded their veracity; Matthew, for example, attempting to make the location of Christ's upbringing (Matt. 2:23) a 'fulfilment' of Judges 13:5, which is actually a command to Samson's pregnant mother not to cut her son's hair! Under the circumstances, therefore, it would seem no more than reasonable to view with gravest suspicion, the remaining prophecies which Jesus allegedly fulfilled.

When strictures such as these are applied, the numerical

value of Biblical prophecies dwindles almost to vanishing point. But one further condition remains, namely that there must exist proof that the prophecy was written *before* the event it prophesied occurred. Thus, for example, Ezekiel 26, one of the most celebrated examples of fulfilled prophecy, can be accepted as such if, and only if, there exists positive and independent evidence that it was committed to paper before Tyre was actually destroyed. It is an indisputable fact that the Jews were inveterate forgers (the 'Song of Solomon', for example, was not written until many centuries after its author was supposed to have lived) and, on inductive grounds alone, forgery would seem a much more likely explanation than revelation to explain the phenomenon under discussion. At any event, proof to the contrary does not appear to be forthcoming, and it is surely with the defenders of these 'prophecies' that the burden of proof must lie.

To these conditions must be added the tendency for prophecies to fulfil themselves independently of supernatural intervention. During the Wall Street Crash, for example, one of the most important factors in aggravating the disaster was the fact that people acted as though a disaster would occur. Similarly, the return of Israel to the Jews ceases to be miraculous when it is remembered that the multifarious prophecies relating to this in the Old Testament have played a considerable part in channeling the Hebrew's energies and aspirations in this direction. The fall of the Aztec Empire occurred largely because it citizens implicitly believed in its imminence: there appears no difficulty in believing that the rise of the modern Jewish state is not simply the operation of the same powers in reverse.

The workings of chance may easily account for the few prophecies which remain. Isaiah, for example, in his twentieth chapter, prophesies the Assyrian conquest of Egypt and Ethiopia. History reveals that he was correct in his first guess, but wrong in his second; a performance which, particularly in view of its unspecified time limit, hardly requires the assumption of a divinity to furnish its explanation. The Bible, as any casual reading will reveal, abounds in prophecies which have, for the most part, been disastrously mistaken, and, by the law of averages alone, one would naturally expect some to be correct.

It can thus be shown that the enormous number of 'fulfilled' Biblical prophecies confidently asserted by the Fundamentalists, are the result of nothing more marvelous than a failure to apply the scientific method to their claims. Of course, even if verified prophecies did appear in the Scriptures in considerable numbers (which they do not), they would not, in themselves, prove divine authorship. The theories of J. W. Dunne, and modern research into the phenomenon of precognition would have to be examined, to see if they produced more credible explanations. As it is, however, the number of totally erroneous prophecies contained in Holy Writ dismisses forever the claim of its divine inspiration, and provides those with a more scientific frame of mind with an explanation for them all, both true and false, far surpassing in its clarity and simplicity, the Christian's own. It is therefore true to conclude that the question of prophecy in the Bible remains one of the strongest of the many arguments in favour of its explanation in totally naturalistic terms.

THE ART OF SELF-DECEPTION

Sonja Biersted, USA

MANY diverse roads lead to self-deception and more often than an Man pays heavily for the "modern" thinkers advise. The alleged healers of our times should stick to healing, if they are so able, and refrain from writing books which all too often expose their own dichotomous thinking. Currently the new "saint", Joel S. Goldsmith (supposedly anti-orthodoxy) propounds the truth that Man is enslaved because he believes in two powers: good and evil. He goes so far as to say that there is no power at all; so much for that!

Goldsmith rightly asserts that unless scriptures are decoded we are in a bad way. However, we ascertain he has not been able to find the key with which to unlock the code as we become aware of his literal approach to the allegories, parables and myths in the scriptures.

He accepts the Adam and Eve allegory as historical fact!

But the most deadly blow to his own wisdom is inherent in his insistence on the fallacy of good and evil power. Here he is in pitch darkness and negates his own preachments:

"We know that a Christian child is indoctrinated with deadly fear of evil power even before he is able to understand and protect himself. He is not allowed to forget that men with evil power crucified the alleged Jesus Christ. He is moulded, in a captive audience, with the horrible crucifix plastered everywhere to remind him of the power of evil."

At this juncture Goldsmith runs into his own ruin since he accepts the historicity of Jesus Christ and in so doing he accepts the power of evil which was able to crucify the Christian "saviour". Inadvertently, he also accepts the alleged Jesus Christ as a double-minded man, over whom evil men had power. Here Goldsmith's basic teaching is destroyed at the very root.

True, Western Man suffers from many illnesses; two of which are schizophrenia and cancer. Mental disorders caused by schizophrenia are now at epidemic proportions.

Man's dichotomous thinking is the responsible factor for all our ills. It seems logical to assume that split thinking will sooner or later affect the body cells which are also splitting uncontrollably in cancer!

Today, March 3, 1968, I am treated to a large news-photo on the front page depicting grown men and some boy scouts posing with a large placard reading: THOU SHALT NOT KILL—while the killing in Vietnam and (elsewhere) is going on around the clock. Can we point to a more lucid example of schizophrenia? The participants look deadly serious and of a self-righteous mien—it is stark raving madness; and a regurgitating sight it is!

The art of self-deception is deeply rooted in the Christian psyche. Straight thinking is difficult for most because it is often painful, but so is dichotomous thinking and that leads only to insanity. Straight and fearless thinking is our only hope.

Goldsmith has written a number of books, one of which is entitled *Spiritual Interpretation of Scripture*; in view of his obviously carnal understanding about Adam and Eve and Jesus Christ I shall not waste my energy on reading this one.

Putting a new patch on idolatry only makes the idols more hideous and has the dubious power of further solidifying Man in error and evil. Much is made of the still small voice of conscience; which in truth is turned into a deadly weapon against mankind. Conscience is learned and it is used to harness Man to his particular persuasion. A false conscience keeps mankind in bondage to tyranny. Every conscience-seller should be exposed for what he is—a fraud!

Albeit Joel S. Goldsmith did rediscover some truisms, but it is the synchronization of the rediscovered truisms with the deadness (insane) literal concepts of scriptures which must eventually prove harmful.

CHEMOCRACY VERSUS DEMOCRACY

"CHEMOCRACY versus democracy was the choice facing mankind", said Dr Paul Rom the Adlerian psychologist in his opening address to the Luton Humanist Group.

Paul Rom (chairman of the International Association of Individual Psychologists, and author of the recently published *Alfred Adler and the Understanding of Human Behaviour*) coined the term 'Chemocracy' to describe a possible human society controlled by drugs—an autoocracy imposed by chemical means. He considered that this term was particularly relevant after recent press comments that human aggression could be controlled by the addition of chemical agents into the water supply. If this and other chemical means of controlling society were not eventually to be implemented, mankind must learn to be truly democratic. Democracy was 'order with freedom' as opposed to the autoocracy (order without freedom) practised in the past throughout society and now, in Paul Rom's opinion, still practised in most schools. If mankind was to progress from an autocratic society—and Dr Rom thought England's present political system was more autocratic than democratic—to a democratic society, the beginning to the reform must be in the schools.

In Dr Rom's opinion, the autocratic system in schools and in universities throughout the world was collapsing

and corporal punishment no longer achieved its objective of unquestioning obedience. If autoocracy was not to be replaced by anarchy (freedom without order) a more democratic and humanistic attitude was required of teachers towards pupils.

Dr Rom, a disciple of Alfred Adler, felt that the whole education of children should centre round the treatment of each child as an individual organism with its own goal in life. For, according to Paul Rom's thesis, each child has a different goal and attitude. Discipline in the usual sense of the word was wrong, and only led to further problems for the child and society. If bad goals could be recognised in a child at an early stage, action could be taken to guide the child towards a more responsible attitude within society. If a teacher noticed a child making power, attention or revenge his goal, he could call, if necessary, on assistance from parents and psychologists to assist the pupil in overcoming his particular problems.

Dr Rom cited many examples where he had utilised his methods in dealing successfully with children in the classroom and approved schools. He summed up his talk by stressing how essential it was for religious education to be abolished in its present form, and for it to be replaced with a more humanistic attitude of social responsibility and personal discipline.

Report from Clive H. Godfrey.

CIVIL LIBERTIES

(Continued from page 171)

behaviour is his or her private and personal concern and not the province of the criminal law, welcomes the Government's intention that there should be a review of the laws relating to sexual offences, urges that this should be based upon the principle that the State has no cause to interfere with or punish sexual behaviour which does not involve assault, interference with children below the age of puberty, or an affront to decency causing annoyance or nuisance in public, and calls for continuing vigilance and protest by the NCCL against laws, prosecutions and sentences which infringe upon the citizen's right to pursue sexual happiness as he sees fit.

There were still other resolutions on censorship, rights of silence, privacy, legal aid, etc., and there was organisational business to be dealt with: the Annual Report, accounts, and elections of the Executive Committee, etc. (David Tribe was among those elected). The Conference had foregathered for a wine and cheese party; altogether, a weekend when one's time was valuably spent.

Letters to the Editor

NOTE: Letters exceeding 200 words may be cut, abbreviated, digested or rewritten.

Religious Humanism

IN your issue of May 17, E. C. Vanderlaan (USA) does less than justice to the Fellowship of Religious Humanists which was founded in Yellow Springs, Ohio, in 1963.

In particular he says rather disparagingly "They have begun to publish a small quarterly to which I have not cared to subscribe". This would seem to imply that he has not seen the magazine *Religious Humanism* to which he refers.

The five issues of the magazine which I have had all contained articles and other material of a very high standard, of interest to all Humanists whether or not they consider themselves to be of the "religious" variety. It is ably edited by Dr Edwin H. Wilson who previously edited the (American) *Humanist* so successfully for many years. Recent issues have contained articles by Martin A. Larson, A. Eustace Haydon and Corliss Lamont.

The subscription is \$3 a year and the address of the Fellowship is Box 278, Yellow Springs, Ohio 45387. ALAN E. WOODFORD.

[I share your admiration for this magazine's very high standard.—Ed.]

Reply to E. G. Macfarlane

MAN AND COMMUNITY (May 10) was based upon 32 years' consistent study of Marxism although I did not mention Marx by name. E. G. Macfarlane wonders "how many modern freethinkers now accept this quite unrealistic statement" (that "In emancipating himself in the material sphere man also emancipates himself in the reflected mental sphere, in his religious consciousness"). It's doubtful if many freethinkers have studied Marx. Only one passage from the old genius himself: "Does it require deep intuition to comprehend that man's ideas, views and conceptions, in a word, man's consciousness, changes with every change in the conditions of his material existence, in his social relations and in his social life? What else does the history of ideas prove than that intellectual production changes its character in proportion as material production is changed?" (1848). 1968: Space-age science has destroyed the religious conception of God being "up there". Transplant surgery is destroying the conception of man possessing a soul. Discoveries around DNA are revealing the origin of life and possible creation of life.

"The Russian workers are being educated to be Russians first". Precisely. Proof of what I wrote: neither the workers nor their rulers are socialists. R. STUART MONTAGUE.

Racialism

I AM surprised at the almost complete silence from the FREETHINKER re the recent race issues. One would have thought that this paper would have been in the forefront in the attack on racialism. I consider that at the moment this should be given greater priority than the attack on religion.

If Mr Enoch Powell's odious doctrines are to prevail, then the FREETHINKER and Humanists movements will suffer a setback from which they will find it difficult to recover. L. LAZARUS.

Discrimination on the Middle Way

I MUST confess that I find Michael Cregan's attempt to discover a Middle Way twixt sense and nonsense more amusing than enlightening. Should he insist on historically unviable parabolic accounts of actual events, it is only fair to distinguish between those accounts which so distort history as to be meaningless, and those which manage to salvage a kernel of truth. The latter sort, like *Animal Farm* merely change the names of the principal participants, "only the story remains the same", whilst the former are as philosophically valuable as *The Wind in the Willows* or *The Book of the Frozen Herd*. R. H. COMAN.

Confrontation

"... Although I am not an atheist, I would very much like to send you some questions from the Christian viewpoint..."

R. M. SIMPSON.

"... If the opportunity arises for me to take part in the proposed confrontation I will certainly do so, however, I was rather alarmed at the suggestion made in your article about removing from contributors articles that which was thought of as repetitive—one sometimes has to do this to stress a point. In fact your suggestions, or better, proposals on the conduct of the confrontation seemed to me at times to advocate a form of censorship. No doubt I am right off the mark in this but that was the impression I got..."

REV. CHRISTOPHER STROTHER.

"... I wish you luck regarding your 'Confrontation' scheme..."

D. MOLYNEUX.

"... I think highly of your proposals for a 'Confrontation' with the opponents of atheism. It is right that they should be given a chance to meet their opponents on what might be called 'equal terms'. I shall be delighted to contribute to the atheist side, although I know the other side very well by personal experience..."

PETER CROMMELIN.

Secular churches

ONCE in the pulpit one can get to work on it with an axe; this is the strategy of their Reverends Edwards and Thompson in the formation of their secular churches. To aid in their "holy crusade", I too have decided to don the chasuble with the hacksaw hidden in the sleeve, and therefore announce the formation of my own new Church. There are, of course, some difficulties; a church should have a bishop—and then where are my archbishops and cardinals? Promotions pile up, and, albeit reluctantly, I find that nothing remains but for me to declare myself Pope.

Our first service will be held on St Bradlaugh's Day, in a reconverted vegetable warehouse in Penge. After an eloquent address by myself on "Unconverting the converted", the congregation will kneel for a short period of freethink, and will then rise to sing from *Secularism Ancient and Modern*, the moving hymn "On Foote our help in ages past".

We will then leave the building (NSS Truth Society pamphlets available *en passant*), confident that by our activities and service we really have shown the light of rationalism to the world.

POPE (formerly MICHAEL) CREGAN.

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