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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

The Freethought Movement—1949

AS the year Anno Domini 1949 opens its ambiguous course, it may be opportune to do, as it were, a little historical stocktaking with regard to the prospects of the Freethought Movement in the coming year. How stands Freethought to-day? What are its current prospects? Who, to-day, are its enemies? And where are we to look for its friends?

The present is rooted in the past, that at least is certain. The very "freest" of Freethought is, like all that lives, conditioned by its origins, by the historic circumstances under which it arose. That is a truism.

The organised movement of modern Freethought is the offspring of the Liberal Age which dates from the French Revolution. Its founders and prototypes: such men as Thomas Paine, Robert Owen, Holyoake, Bradlaugh and their continental and American counterparts, belonged to that age, not only physically, but emotionally and intellectually. They associated actively with its forward-looking movements in other spheres besides that of religion: the services of Paine to Republicanism, of Owen to Co-operation and Socialism, of Bradlaugh to both political and to legal reform were not less conspicuous than their concurrent activities on behalf of Freethought.

Whilst the Atheism of earlier centuries tended to be Tory and aristocratic in its political and social outlook (as the American historian Thomas Franklin Mayo has demonstrated in his "Epicurus in England") the nineteenth century Freethought Movement was one that was radical, even revolutionary in every sphere.

If this radical role was clear and unmistakable, no less clear were the enemies of Freethought during this same era. Here we speak in particular of the Anglo-Saxon world. Its chief, almost sole opponent was organised Protestant Christianity, with its crude religious dogmas of the verbal inspiration of the Bible and Hell-fire, literal, hot and strong.

It was in particular over the Semitic legends in biblical literature, in particular relation to Creation versus Evolution, that the Freethinkers joined battle with the Churches in the great days when Huxley laid "the impregnable rock of holy Scripture" in the dust, and when the then Editor of the "Freethinker" demolished the biblical legend of the "two asses," Balaam and his ass, with a wit as brilliant as his incomparably graceful style.

One can add that whilst contemporary Toryism, like its ablest political leader (Benjamin Disraeli) was "on the side of the angels" in the evolution controversy, yet the nineteenth century conflict of religion versus rationalism was fought in the main with intellectual weapons, and, outside at least the most reactionary Catholic countries where the traditions of the Inquisition still lingered, the "secular arm" of the State did not intervene on the side of the religious protagonists. This age

was, after all, one of *laissez-faire*, in cultural no less than in economic matters.

And now, midway almost through the so dissimilar twentieth century, how stands the world to-day, in relation to Freethought and to Freethinkers?

The age in which we live is quite other than the nineteenth century. The old crude Bibliolatry which was the primary force of nineteenth century Rationalism, and which Thomas Paine riddled in the "Age of Reason," has ceased to occupy the centre of the stage, "Monkeyville" has now departed from Oxford to the crude American Middle West, the ass of Balaam is only found in Salvation Army meetings, and flogging dead asses is surely as futile a pastime as "flogging dead horses." Jonah's famous fish is nowadays a fish out of water. We, even the Bench of Bishops, are evolutionists nowadays. "To explain away" dogmas without too much loss of face is now the principal occupation of the theologians: to be sure, the best-known bishop of the Established Church owes his fame almost entirely to his skill in this flexible art.

Thus, the old Bible-banging Protestant Christianity against which nineteenth century Freethought directed its brilliant and vehement attacks, has been effectively disposed of. Freethought has successfully penetrated the old theological entrenchments, and the defenders of the Bible have been driven from the theological lecture-room to the street corner. However, the task of Atheism is not yet finished. Far from it. "New foes arise, threatening to bind our souls with secular chains." And as in the days of Milton, "New presbyter is but old priest writ large." The most menacing enemy of Freethought to-day is totalitarianism, which by the very fact of its existence makes free or, indeed, any real thought impossible.

And it is the most totalitarian of the Churches, the Church of Rome, which to-day has succeeded Bible-banging Protestantism as the primary foe of Secularism in both the officially Catholic and the ostensibly Protestant worlds. It is not likely to be a less dangerous enemy. Indeed, with a then extraordinary lucidity already in the heart of the Victorian Age Bradlaugh had foreseen that the final clash would be between Rome and Reason.

And in such a conflict, unlike that with nineteenth century Protestantism, we cannot rely upon the Secular reaction and the State remaining neutral. For the principle of the Inquisition has returned in our day.

In the Fascist States, the totalitarianism of the Right in Germany and Italy yesterday, and in Spain and the Argentine to-day, religion is buttressed with all the power of the Absolute State: Freethought is illegal, and like the Puritan zealots in the days of "Hudibras" Catholicism "proves" the truth of its doctrines "with apostolic blows and knocks." The political police, and not the human intellect, is the final arbiter of religious truth.

And even the totalitarian Communism of the Left, whilst professedly atheistic, claims a dictatorship over culture and thought that is absolutely destructive of all genuine mental freedom. Freethought cannot long co-exist with any cultural State monopoly.

In such an absolutist age the very existence of Freethought is inseparable from the existence and extension of Democracy in every sphere. In this, Freethought in 1940 runs true to its best tradition. For the greatest of English Freethinkers was the author both of "The Age of Reason" and of the "Rights of Man": in this age of authority in Church and State, the two are henceforth inseparable.

THE ECLIPSE OF MEDIEVAL MISCONCEPTIONS

SCIENTIFIC studies in classical centuries were suspended by the triumph of the Christian Church. Indeed, 2,000 years prior to the close of the Middle Ages, a system of methodical inquiry and dispassionate observation had been pursued by Greek philosophers whose results were later expanded and developed by Aristotle. It was not until ancient culture had been revived in the 15th century of our era, that the scientific spirit returned to Europe.

Salvation in the next world was the sole Christian hope for mankind and the Keys of the Kingdom were in the hands of the Church alone. As Mr. John Bowle observes in his "Unity of European History" (Cape, 1948, 18s.): "The world was no place to be controlled and organised for the betterment of man's estate, and life an ephemeral time of tribulation and temptation, the prelude to eternity."

Restored Pagan ideals, largely introduced by Moslem scholars into Christendom, slowly undermined medieval misconceptions. The writings of Aristotle liberated the minds of the more intellectual classes as early as the 13th century. Heresies grew apace and the embittered conflict between Papacy and Empire, the political decline of ecclesiastical institutions with the advent of trading interests, all conspired to free men's minds from blind obedience to sacerdotal authority.

On the eve of the 14th century, the sceptical Emperor Frederick II welcomed Arab, Greek and Jewish scholars to his court. Also, in many Mediterranean cities old classical traditions had survived and were now sustained by the revival and expansion of industry and commerce. Bologna, Venice, Rome and, above all, Florence, became celebrated centres of the Italian Renaissance. From Italy it spread later across the Alps where, for the first time, the legacy of Greece cast its spell over the hardy Northern races.

The Italian Renaissance began in the Middle Ages in the peninsula's city communities. Dante in the 13th, and Petrarch in the 14th century, were pioneer Humanists. Mental distinction has always been highly regarded in Italy where men of outstanding merit found less difficulty in obtaining wealthy patrons than elsewhere.

As Bowle notes: "The Italian rulers—the Visconti, the Sforza, the D'Estes, the Medici—were highly civilised; they needed skilled diplomats and administrators; humanistic culture became the fashion and was indeed essential to political success."

Italy's striking pre-eminence in science, art and letters, at this time, was as outstanding as the literary achievements of England in the Elizabethan Age. The glosses and fantastic allegories imposed on classical manuscripts by clerical commentators were rejected by

Humanist scholars, and their texts studied and rectified. The literature of pre-Christian centuries then became available and Renaissance scholars moulded their style on ancient masterpieces that had survived the ravages of barbarism and religion.

Venice had long been intimate with Byzantium, but with the fall of Constantinople, in 1453, Greek refugees brought new texts into Italy which increased knowledge of the splendours of ancient letters. Again, the revived interest in the past led to studies of Pagan antiquities and new light was thrown on the ruins of Rome.

Florence became the chief intellectual centre of Europe. Giotto and Botticelli were great pioneer modern painters, while Donatello's sculptures recalled those of ancient Athens. Leonardo's and Michael Angelo's paintings are world famous, as also Angelo's sculptures and sonnets. But the supreme intellect of the Renaissance was that of Leonardo da Vinci who ranged through the entire territory of science, pictorial and plastic art, engineering and military affairs. Raphael, who died in 1520 at the early age of 37, was an eminent architect as well as a painter of enduring fame. Subsequently, the finest painters were Venetians and one has only to recall the immortal names of Titian, Tintoretto and Veronese to rest assured of the splendours of the Venetian school.

In addition to men of genius there were many gifted personalities. Competition for court favour became keen, and able if disappointed Humanists carried their credentials to Northern princes. The quarrels of artists and authors in Italy are recorded in Benvenuto Cellini's Autobiography with all their envies, hatreds, scorn and resentments. Yet, the artist was not merely admired but venerated in Italy. Moreover, "The long line of European artists who, in affluence or in poverty, have defied through the centuries the conventions of their age, begins with the Renaissance, and how great has been the legacy of this cosmopolitan and unrepentant fraternity to the world!"

Thus Italian initiative revived the classical tradition in the arts and, in the 16th century, leadership in music passed to Italy with Palestrina (1525-94) at its head. The clavichord and violin became favoured instruments, vocal efforts were applauded, and the foundations of future opera were laid.

While the persecuted Roger Bacon stood solitary in the 13th century, the studious Italians in the 16th contested conventional explanations of physical phenomena. Scriptural assertions and Church dogmas were alike subjected to scrutiny. The study of the writings of Hippocrates, Pliny, Democritus and other ancient sages soon led to the questioning of accepted traditions. The Fleming, Vesalius, studied at Padua and became the greatest medical authority of the Renaissance and laid the foundations of modern anatomical science. Paracelsus also acquired fame as an innovator in restoring the methods of Hippocrates, the most rational of Greek physicians.

Copernicus, a Polish mathematician who was trained at Padua, overthrew the geocentric theory and proved that the sun and not the earth is the centre of the Solar System, thus restoring the old Greek heliocentric hypothesis so contemptuously scorned by the divinely inspired Church. Tycho Brahe, the Dane's researches led to further developments. But to Bruno we are indebted for the greatest cosmological advance. This brave spirit was burnt alive by the Inquisition after seven years' incarceration in a dungeon. Still, he must be acclaimed as a far-seeing pioneer of modern astronomy. As Bowle

testifies: "Bruno first broke the traditional box-like cosmology; his short tract, published in England in 1584, on 'The Infinite Universe and its Worlds,' shook the foundations of ancient belief. Basing his hypothesis on the Copernican theory, he declared that the Universe is boundless in space and time, informed with an innermost soul, and containing worlds outside the solar system. . . . Bruno was tracked down and perished, a martyr to truth and his own genius. In half a century his theory dominated the learned world. The medieval cosmos shrivelled before the immensities of his revelation; the background to the modern outlook had been defined."

After the Italian Renaissance had spent its force, it was suppressed by Spanish invaders, the machinations of the Church, and its myrmidons, the Jesuits.

T. F. PALMER.

BLESSED ARE THE MEEK

"BLESSED are the meek," said Jesus, "for they shall inherit the earth."

Christians are fond of this passage, and of those others in the gospels that extol submissiveness. They delight in depicting their Redeemer as himself a meek man, suffering as the meek suffer, a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief, having no where to lay his head, dumb before his accusers as a sheep before its shearers, and finally led as a lamb to the slaughter.

Jesus had lapses, however. He called people a generation of vipers, an evil and adulterous generation, and he cast out of the temple those that sold and bought therein, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those that sold doves.

Jesus is, however, for all. His character is, indeed, so complex that the idealist takes therefrom the attributes that he admires, and forgets the rest. That is a convenient course.

Then that Christian who has made an ideally meek Jesus desires us to look upon meekness as the authentic mark of his religious brethren. He brings forward many stories to illustrate it, some true, others false; Christians in the den of lions, in the torture chamber and at the stake.

However, it is impossible for any great organisation to be formed, or maintained, by only meek men, and Christianity has necessarily had a fair share of people of the opposite type.

Think, for example, of Fray Fernando de Talavera, afterwards Archbishop of Granada, when he had been appointed confessor to Queen Isabella of Spain, a woman described by Prescott as exhibiting independence in all secular affairs. Attending her for the first time in that capacity, the priest continued seated after she had knelt down to make her confession, which drew from her the remark "that it was usual for both parties to kneel." "No," replied the priest, "this is God's tribunal; I act here as His minister, and it is fitting that I should keep my seat, while your Highness kneels before me."

Still, meekness was there, but in the kneeling woman; for, as the historian observes, in her spiritual concerns she uniformly testified the deepest humility, and deferred too implicitly to what she deemed the superior sagacity, or sanctity, of her ghostly counsellors.

In one of Prescott's chapters on the Inquisition, in his "History of Ferdinand and Isabella," he provides a remarkable object-lesson of the sure result of the preaching of the gospel of meekness, for he draws attention to

the policy of the Roman Church being shown in the discouragement of all free inquiry in its disciples, whom it instructed to rely implicitly in matters of conscience on their spiritual advisers. "The artful institution of the tribunal of confession," states the historian, "established with this view, brought, as it were, the whole Christian world at the feet of the clergy, who far from being animated by the meek spirit of the Gospel, almost justified the reproach of Voltaire, that confessors have been the source of most of the violent measures pursued by princes of the Catholic faith."

Talavera was not the worst; and the worst of Isabella's quondam confessors was soon to exercise great power. In her early days the charge over her conscience had been committed to a Dominican monk, Thomas de Torquemada, a man condemned to infamous immortality by the signal part which he played in the tragedy of the Inquisition.

This man is described by Prescott as concealing more pride under his monastic weeds than might have furnished forth a convent of his order. He was one of those "who testify their zeal by a fiery persecution of those whose creed differs from their own; who compensate for their abstinence from sensual indulgence, by giving scope to those deadlier vices of the heart, pride, bigotry and intolerance, which are no less opposed to virtue, and are far more extensively mischievous to society."

He laboured to make Isabella's heart glow with the same spirit of fanaticism that burnt in his own, a task greatly hindered by her natural good understanding and kindness. He urged her that should she ever come to the throne, she would devote herself to the eradication of heresy, for the glory of God, and the exaltation of the Catholic Faith. The time arrived when the fatal policy was to be adopted.

The Queen, having endured the repeated importunities of the clergy, particularly of those reverend persons in whom she most confided, seconded by the arguments of her consort, Ferdinand, consented to solicit the Pope for a bull allowing the introduction of the Holy Office of the Inquisition into Castile. Sixtus the Fourth, then the occupant of the pontifical chair, discerned the sources of wealth and influence which this measure opened to Rome. He readily complied with the royal petition, and expedited a bull dated November 1, 1478, authorising the appointment of two or three ecclesiastic inquisitors for the detection of heresy, and its suppression throughout their dominions.

Thus was established in Spain that most odious institution which has stamped the Roman Church with perpetual infamy.

The hatred excited by the unsparing rigour of Torquemada roused up so much opposition in the form of accusations that he was compelled to send an agent thrice to Rome to plead his defence. At length Alexander the Sixth, in 1494, moved by the reiterated complaints, appointed Torquemada condjutors, out of a pretended regard to the infirmities of his age, to share the burdens of his office.

"This personage," states Prescott, "who is entitled to so high a place among those who have been the authors of unmixed evil to their species, was permitted to reach a very advanced age, and to die quietly in bed." He lived, however, in constant fear of assassination, and is said to have kept a reputed unicorn's horn always on his table, which he imagined to have the power of detecting and neutralising poison; while for the more complete protection of his person he was allowed an escort of fifty

horse and two hundred foot in his progresses through the kingdom.

Prescott concludes his chapter by a passage reminiscent of Bacon's opinion that Atheism does not disturb states, for after suggesting that Torquemada's zeal was of so extravagant a kind that it might be described as insanity, he gives his opinion that his history might be held to prove that, of all human vices, there is none productive of more intensive mischief than fanaticism. "The opposite principle of Atheism, which refuses to recognise the most important sanction to virtue [*sic*]," does not necessarily imply any want of just moral perception, that is of discrimination between right and wrong. "But fanaticism is so subversive of the most established principles of morality that, under the dangerous maxim, 'for the advancement of the faith, all means are lawful,' it not only excuses, but enjoins the most revolting crimes, as a sacred duty."

"Many a bloody page of history attests the fact, that fanaticism, armed with power, is the sorest evil which can befall a nation."

We see, therefore, that the meekness of Isabella was part of the means by which the arrogance of the ecclesiastic subjugated the Spanish people, and extinguished the free spirit of inquiry, so necessary to the progress of society.

Blessed are the meek; but to whom?

J. G. LUPTON.

LAMBETH CONFERENCE, 1948

THREE HUNDRED AND TWENTY bishops of the Church of England have issued, Papal-wise, an Encyclical Letter, anent their doings at Lambeth this year. In style precious, it is in content precious little, for all its 40 pages and 118 articles of faith. In the tradition of the Book of Common Prayer, the Conference adopts in its Encyclical the same air of vagueness, so as to be all things to all men. Perusing this document one is left with the impression of the feebleness of increasing age; though 1,200 years younger than its parent, the Roman Church, the Church of England displays none of the perennial vigour of its forbear.

Unlike its parent, the Church of England has no liking for doctrinal definition, but prefers the sonorous phrase of impeccable piety and laudable intention. It is indeed more definite in its negative than in its positive aspects; it is anti-war, anti-racial, anti-gambling, anti-divorce, anti-revolutionary and anti-Marxist, and it is difficult to say off-hand in what it is pro-anything. One of the few subjects on which it expresses itself positively is, curiously, in the matter of Jerusalem; it thinks the city should be declared international territory to please the Christians. Now, whatever our views on Zionism, wherever our sympathies, with Jew or Arab, lie, it is clear that Jerusalem is the only possible capital for Palestine and that this excision from the Palestinian body would only be a disaster for all.

But let us return to the broader if negative views of my Lord Bishops. War! We are informed that "Christians must hate war, as utterly incompatible with the teachings and example of Jesus Christ" (p. 8). It seems a little late in the day for Christianity to discover that! How different were the pages of history, from the First Crusade onwards, and what an infinitude of suffering had been spared, had they found it out sooner! In Article 10 the Conference asserts the duty of governments to be "to work for" the reduction and eventual abolition of armaments, "except those that may be necessary for

international protection; but until such time as this is achieved it recognises that there are occasions when both nations and individuals are obliged to resort to war as the lesser of two evils." This seems to leave the door open wide enough for even the most squeamish of warmongers, and it is nice to think the Irishman will still be able to have his private fight. In the matter of practical steps to enforce the cessation of warfare, the wordy Encyclical is for once wordless, except for the expression of a hope that U.N.O. will do the job for them.

As regards the racial question its sentiments are above cavil, but it forbears to apply its principle in any practical manner, such as, for example, enjoining its followers among the white police and officials of West Africa to invite negroes to their homes, sign them up as members of their clubs, or consent to their marrying their daughters (assuming, of course, that both parties are good practising Christians).

When it comes to gambling and divorce, Conference opinion hardens; it wants action, it proposes to call on the might of law and order. The sporting parson also passes out of the parade and the penny points pool is no more for the devout believer. On the matter of divorce it still refuses to marry you a second time according to the Church's sacramental rite; if, however, you were not church-married the first time, you may enjoy the Christian way on your second venture. It is worth quoting Article 97 on the subject:—

"Inasmuch as easy divorce has gravely weakened the idea of the life-long nature of marriage, and has also brought untold suffering to children (?) this Conference urges that there is a strong case for the reconsideration by certain States of their divorce laws."

Here we see, for a moment, the mask removed and the cruel, ruthless features of the tiger beneath, long in tooth, diseased and decrepit maybe, but still the vicious man-eating beast he ever was. Not content with denying divorce to its own devotees, on the false assumption of the misery of the children (if any), and with the cynical order that the unhappily married should "remain steadfastly faithful to their marriage vows" (Article 92), it wants to impose its ban on *all men*, calling in the aid of the secular authorities, with their police, prisons and punishments, for its physical enforcement. You and I, too, should have this gateway to freedom and the rectification of human error barred—not only Christians but also those who do not ascribe to and even those who oppose these superstitious practices! All are to be thrust in their strait-jacket of sex-frustration, surely the most onerous of all the banes which this monstrous institution has brought upon mankind?

So we become aware of the real purpose behind this barrage of precious talk with its circumlocutory phrasing, wrapped up in unctuous piety. The *right* to accurate information (Article 7), to change one's belief (Article 5), to a just social order (Article 21), to education without racial distinction and without privilege for wealth (Article 27)—are the comforting assurances of our worthy prelates. When we read on, however, we observe that all these apparently so liberal sentiments are hedged and turned in such a way that their ultimate purpose is revealed to be but the tyrannical domination by this sect over the whole of our society.

The Church is against revolution; we must behave like little gentlemen and not get rough in changing the social order. The true road to "a just social order" is fairly well signposted by the bishops; they have become converted, apparently, to the (very) gradualist policy.

Article 21 is couched in the following obscure phrasing: "recognising that . . . the differences, between those who value tradition and those who feel most urgently the need for change and reform, may provoke enmity, the Conference believes that . . . the fellowship of the Christian community should contain them, and that, in times of controversy, Church members can make this significant contribution of unity in Christ to the life of neighbourhood and nation." If the reader can make head or tail of this sentence he is cleverer than I.

P. C. KING.

(To be concluded)

POUND OF TEA

"I'd like to go to Linker's Stores," said the woman as her husband swung the car round the corner into Main Street.

"Hm," murmured the man and nodded, checking speed till he saw his way clear for a few seconds, when he steered deftly across the road and halted outside the big shop.

He opened the door for his wife. Stepping on to the sidewalk she said, "I'll be as quick as I can."

"Twenty minutes allowed by the police," Munro Clark told her smiling.

She smiled too, saying, "That'll be plenty of time."

"If not I shall go the length of the street and back to get another twenty minutes," explained Munro Clark.

"So if I'm not here when you come out wait till I return."

"Yes." And Mrs. Clark sped into the shop, her husband's gaze following her contentedly, for she was a comely woman.

Shutting the door and settling back Munro Clark prepared to amuse himself watching the passing pedestrians. Faces, dress and gait were all entertaining.

Out of the same doorway as Mrs. Clark entered came two nuns. The watcher coned them carelessly, then suddenly sat upright.

The two turned to walk along the pavement. The stream of people had momentarily slackened, and on the spot where the nuns turned lay a pound packet of tea.

Munro Clark gazed at it astonished, trying to realise whence it came. The coloured printed wrappage was familiar, making more startling its sudden appearance. Nobody had passed over that patch of paving since the nuns walked away.

Getting out of his car Munro Clark picked up the packet of tea. Its wrapping was clean, evidently fresh off the shelf. Into the shop Clark looked, then each way along the footpath. None came to claim the lost tea.

Following a few seconds hesitation, recollecting the circumstances, Munro Clark came to the obvious conclusion and acted on it. Walking rapidly he overtook the nuns.

Turning when a step in front of them he said, "Excuse me, but I believe you dropped this."

The pair stood and looked at the packet of tea which the man held out to them. Under their great projecting hoods, their necks swathed and a band across their foreheads the remainder of their faces seemed masks, expressionless save the eyes.

Her face lined and her irises grey the elder one said softly, "No. It is not mine."

Munro Clark looked appealingly into the younger face and brown eyes of the other, but she merely shook her head gently after a sidelong glance at her companion. Both walked on, oblivious of aught else save walking forward.

"Well, I'll be damned!" muttered Munro Clark in perplexity.

Going back to his car he seated himself again, holding the packet of tea in his hand.

With the other hand he opened the door five minutes later for his wife. As she shut it and sank back in the seat she looked at the pound of tea, then inquiringly at her husband.

He asked, "What d'you think of this?"

"Where did that come from?"

"D'no."

"Don't know!"

"No. I picked it up off the pavement."

"Munro! Don't try to be funny."

"I did. A few minutes after you went into Linker's two nuns came out and walked away. Immediately they'd gone I saw this lying on the path. For the moment nobody was about. I jumped out, picked it up, waited a few seconds, then went after the nuns and offered it 'em. One said 'No. It's not mine.' The other shook her head and both walked away leaving me with this."

"How strange! What're you going to do with it?"

"D'no. What d'you suggest?"

"Take it back into the shop, or to the police."

"Not likely. D'you think they'd believe my tale?"

"I'm afraid not."

"I'm sure they wouldn't. I'm more likely to be charged with stealing it."

"D'you think the nuns did?"

"They're only human."

"You mean they might suffer from—what's the big word for it?"

"Kleptomania, if you want to be polite."

"We must commit it instead."

"And risk results. So I'll drive off."

Which he did, both he and his wife, still mystified, further discussing possibilities.

A. R. WILLIAMS.

UNWANTED

If you have read "Les Confessions"—Rousseau, you will remember how he put his and Thérèse's five children into the "Enfants Trouvés." (Now generally believed to be a fairy tale on his part as friends later tried to get them out, but neither he nor she could remember anything about them. It was supposed that he was impotent.) Well, corresponding to the "Enfants Trouvés" here, and in Spain, was a place called the "Roda" where unwanted infants were put. "Roda," which just means wheel, was a round revolving iron tray where the baby was placed, the bell was rung and the person who left the baby made off, while a nun came and turned round the tray and took in the infant. The "Roda" existed here till done away with by the Republic in 1910. I believe it still exists in Spain. Having had much to do with the placing of illegitimate children when a teacher, I thought the "Roda" a good idea till I began to read details about it. The children were kept to the age of six, when they could be bought for about £5 each; if not sold they were transferred to another convent where they were hired out for work. As a baby, the child was branded on the arm with an "R," and all its life, under penalty of death, it had to wear the "Roda" medal round its neck. N. F.

THERE WAS ONCE—

A SMALL SHOPKEEPER. By successfully cheating his customers over a number of years he was able to invest his ill-gotten gains in profitable slum property. His ability to kick the pants of the poor was only equalled by his artistry in licking the boots of all the rich and influential citizens.

Naturally, in the course of time, this pompous little ignoramus became a Worshipful Mayor and a Justice of the Peace—enjoying the right to sit in judgment on his fellow men!

W. H. Wood.

ACID DROPS

The Dean of Durham, in the "Church Times," quoted an author "of far greater learning," he adds, "than himself" (which does not prove much anyway) that "the birth of Christianity is unintelligible unless we believe that the historical Jesus impressed those who lived with him as God made manifest in the flesh." We hate teaching the Dean his Gospel, but in actual fact, the people who lived with Jesus, according to his Divine biographer, Mark (and one, incidentally, who could never tell a lie), thought he was mad, and not at all God made manifest in the flesh. The actual words are "He is beside himself"; while the "scribes" said, "He hath Beelzebub," in other words, the Devil was in him. Surely the Dean does not believe that God made manifest in the flesh had a Devil in him—or does he?

We congratulate the "Church Times," however, in having the courage to reproduce a drawing by a coloured artist of the Adoration of the Magi—Jesus being a dear little pickaninny, held by a typical Zulu mother; and there are a number of witch doctors offering elephant tusks as presents, all surrounded by some scantily-dressed coons and a couple of negro angels. We should like to see the same scene drawn by Chinese or Japanese artists—perhaps with Mary as a Geisha girl; after all, the picture, whoever drew it, would ring as true as Miss Sayers' boring "The Man Born to be King," and would be much funnier.

One religious writer assured his readers that this Christmas Christ was revealed "as a robe to the naked, health to the sick, strength to the weak, wealth to the needy, the bread of life to those who hunger and thirst after righteousness." No doubt all religious writers and speakers like writing such hopeless bilge, or something similar, given the opportunity—but what a ghastly commentary on modern religious intelligence! Surely in the face of this kind of thing, the work of Freethought has never been more necessary?

Another religious writer, while admitting that "the Universe is tremendously ancient," and that "for centuries beyond count man can cast back his eyes upon its history," yet "the greatest deed ever done since the world was made" was the birth of Jesus. We wonder sometimes whether some of these religious boosters are quite sane—yet year after year they are allowed to publish or yell from pulpits this kind of unmitigated nonsense.

There was a time when venereal disease was considered to be the "finger of God," but this was, of course, before God was found to be without "body, parts or passions." It seems now that the finger of God is atomic energy, that, at least, is the opinion of Mr. Lionel Curtis. Mr. Curtis runs true to the Christian tradition. If there is no answer to certain problems, drag in God; if accidents happen to which there is no obvious cause, call them an Act of God. How well Spinoza had it when he said that "God is the asylum of ignorance."

The World Council of Churches at Amsterdam cannot be said to have had a poor press, the Conference has been reported in almost every newspaper, from the "Times" to obscure parish magazines. One point, however, stands out from the many reports that we have read, and that is, an air of surprise at the Roman Catholic Church's

refusal to co-operate. For our part, we are surprised that the Protestant Church expected the Catholics to take part.

It must surely be known to Protestants that the Catholic Church still regards the Protestants as a schismatic body. The Roman Catholic Church has always insisted that it is the only true Church, with a mandate from God, through Peter right down to Pius, without a break, and that salvation is only possible through the "true Church." One could therefore hardly expect the "one and only" to have any dealings with what are, after all, mere splinter groups. However, the Conference is yet another instance of the *unity* of Christianity.

The "Burnley Express" reports that "an Angel and two Shepherds were stolen from the Christmas crib" at St. John's, Gannow. The vicar appealed for the return of the articles and promised that "all would be forgiven and forgotten." This forgive and forget attitude should point a moral somewhere. Some will see a further decline in morals in what, after all, may be just a boyish prank; yet others may see in it that religion is becoming quite humane. In olden times, such a sacrilege was punishable by flaying the culprit and nailing his skin to the Church door. Ah, those good old days.

In an address the other week on the question as to whether prayer and intercession had any effect on disease, Mr. E. M. Richards, who is the Aural Surgeon at the North Stafford Royal Infirmary, made it quite clear that he saw no evidence that they had any control whatever. "There was no cold, scientific 'proof'," he declared, "that the course of disease could be influenced by prayer." And he added that "most of his colleagues considered that the clerical uniform was an obstacle to effective intercourse with the laity." We congratulate Mr. Richards on his courage in saying what he thought before an audience of parsons and priests—not an easy task even in these days.

We knew it would come at last. A nun has been cured of a spinal complaint at Fatima—and this should silence all infidels for ever. How could there be such a cure if the story of Fatima was a hoax? Doctors had given up the case, and the poor nun was on a stretcher in intense pain; so she was taken to the shrine, nearly dying all through Mass, and then after the priest had given her the Blessed Sacrament, she suddenly got up completely cured. Thus, the Blessed Virgin must have appeared at the Shrine, the sun, moon, and stars must have had a dance through the skies, and the Roman Catholic Church is completely vindicated. Even Lourdes has not produced a more sensational cure—certainly not these days. But what we never have understood is why such cures never take place, say, in England, and never under the eye of an infidel doctor? Perhaps some all-believing Catholic will tell us why?

A very difficult question faced some Czechoslovakian factories recently. They have been manufacturing Rosaries, and the question arose as to whether their manufacture was compatible with Marxism and Leninism? The sale of these Rosaries brought in some hard currency, and therefore could not be suspended. However, an answer was forthcoming: it was decided that the Rosaries should be made for export only. And everybody is satisfied.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

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J. C.—Thanks for your interest. The extra paper should make it easier for every library to stock "The Freethinker," and we hope that every reader will follow your lead in petitioning their library committees.

N. McLEOD.—Meslier's "Good Sense" (Saladin) is completely out of print. We are sure that Haeckel's "Riddle" can still mostly be relied upon, though science has moved since those days.

For "The Freethinker."—A. Addison, 5s.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1, and not to the Editor.

THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, 17s.; half-year, 8s. 6d.; three-months, 4s. 4d.

Lecture Notices should reach the Office by Friday morning

SUGAR PLUMS

It is now three weeks to the N.S.S. annual dinner in the Criterion Restaurant, Piccadilly Circus, and those who wish to join the party had better hurry with their applications. Besides the dinner there will be speeches, and a musical programme has been arranged. Tickets are 12s. 6d. each and cash should be included with application for tickets to the General Secretary, N.S.S., 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

The slight increase in our quota of paper will make it possible to print extra copies of the "Freethinker," and readers should no longer have any difficulty in obtaining the paper. Please note, however, that to avoid further disappointment, the "Freethinker" *must* be ordered; the "No Returns" order is still in force, and an advance order will enable newsagents to estimate the number of copies required. If any difficulty is experienced, please communicate with the manager of the "Freethinker," giving the name and address of nearest newsagent.

"J.C." (not Jesus Christ) writes to tell us that he has been successful in petitioning his local library to show the "Freethinker" in the reading room. We urge that other readers follow this example. Four or five enthusiastic Freethinkers in every locality should be able to convince Library Committees of the necessity of a counterblast to the pile of religious weeklies that are usually on show. Make this a New Year "Resolution." A "Freethinker" in every reading room for 1949. We shall have enough copies to supply libraries at special rates.

Mr. Archibald Robertson visits Nottingham to-day (January 9) and will address the Cosmopolitan Debating Society at 2-30 p.m., and at 7 p.m. he will lecture in the Co-op. Hall, Parliament Street, Nottingham, for the local N.S.S. branch on "A Marxist Looks at Life." Mr. Robertson's matter is always good and his subject provides an added attraction.

PERSONAL

It will be almost impossible to reply individually to all the letters of good wishes and sympathy that I have received from readers of "The Freethinker" on behalf of Mrs. Cohen and myself. Will all friends, therefore, accept this as an acknowledgement. I am pleased to report that Mrs. Cohen, although still in hospital, is progressing satisfactorily, and that I will soon be "back in harness" and resume writing my usual weekly article.
C. C.

FREETHOUGHT AND THE NEW YEAR

THE advent of a new year marks the occasion when Freethinkers often look back and try to assess the progress made in the cause of Freethought. How far have we advanced? Is the world, or that portion of it which we influence, more ready to embrace the principles for which we stand? Are we, in fact, making converts?

Both Christmas and New Year bring opportunities to Christians which are seized with both hands. On the radio, in our newspapers, and from our pulpits Christian spokesmen keep up a barricade of propaganda for their religion with an intensity and an earnestness which show no relaxation. In the days before wireless became their greatest ally, religion could always hold its own in these holidays, for the mixture of piety and feasting which Christmas always called forth was something very hard to combat. Moreover, the feasting and entertainment side of the festival was—and is—a relic of Paganism, going back, in all probability, thousands of years. There was not holly or mistletoe in Palestine, or even yule logs there 2,000 years ago; and it must be a great shock to many pious people who refuse to look at the facts to find such a thoroughly religious paper as the "Daily Mail" on the eve of Christmas publishing an article where the debt our Christmas owes to pagan customs and superstitions is frankly admitted. In fact, the article in question could well have been written by G. W. Foote.

But with the help of the radio, Christianity at Christmas gets a new fillip—a new life. The story of the Virgin Birth is repeated over and over again in carols, in prayers, in readings, and in sermons, as if it were absolute truth—the only "absolute" in history. Whatever adults may think about it—and few married women really believe the story in their hearts—it is dimmed into the children continuously and almost ferociously; and it is bound to take a long time to counteract such lying propaganda.

Moreover, not a word is allowed in rebuttal. One can fancy the horror with which a proposal merely to read such an article as appeared in the "Daily Mail" would be received by Miss Dorothy Sayers, or Cardinal Griffin, or the hordes of priests and parsons who spread the fable of Jesus Christ so assiduously over the air.

I am all for Christmas holidays, and present-giving, and greetings and feasting. It is good to relax in this way, not only in mid-summer but in mid-winter. Life should have its compensations in pleasure-taking and pleasure-giving, it should not be only hard slavery and worry. But for me and all Freethinkers, Christmas is a festival which comes down to us from remote "Pagan" times and has no more to do with Christianity than it has to do with the moon. It has been taken over by Christians, and is now used, and very cleverly used, to

impose the curse of religion still further upon us. And what can we do about it?

The answer is, of course, by making Freethinkers. It is easy to say this, and those of us who have been in the movement for many years know at least some of the difficulties surrounding a cause which offers no material rewards, or at least very few, and which therefore can have only a limited appeal.

It is useless for us to hide the fact that political advancement is always a great incentive to the younger generation, especially if our sons and daughters feel that only through politics and economics can the race win through. They may be ready to assent to our plea that the war of ideas, ideas of truth as against those of lies, is very important for humanity; but they insist that nothing much can be done without power—political power—and they brush aside as relatively unimportant what they call Bible-banging or such an academic discussion as to whether Jesus did or did not exist. If Marx said that religion was the opium of the people—well, we can throw overboard religion, call ourselves Atheists, and get on with the job of obtaining political and economic power. That will free men from the thralldom of religion much quicker than its slow disintegration at the hands of academic Freethinkers.

I think I have put the issue between "political Atheists" and "Freethinkers" fairly and squarely. And it is now as well to assess the progress made by the political attack on Christianity. I have no wish to begin a long discussion in these columns on Russia, but it is a fact that though we can say that the majority of its leaders are Atheists, Christianity there is once again taking sides, and seems to be as active, or almost as active, as in the days of the Czar. The Russian Church feels strong enough to attack the Roman Church and even the Church of England. These are not following the Divine Teachings of Christ as well as the Greek Orthodox Church, and they must be properly told so.

And there is no real incompatibility between, say, such a creed as Communism and Christianity. Were not "the early Christians all Communists?" And, it can be shown that politics, Tory, Liberal, Radical, Socialistic, or Communistic, has always had as its most staunch adherents fully-believing Christians; in Christ all, all, are equal.

I submit that the work of Freethought has still a long way to go and a tremendous deal to accomplish. Look at the almost sickening orgy of religious bunkum which the Press and the radio poured forth this last Christmas. Most of it had nothing to do with politics at all. It was supposedly based on goodwill on earth, but a goodwill impossible of accomplishment if not accompanied by the most childish belief in God Almighty coming down to us as a Little Child and growing up as our Lord and Saviour. I am sure that there are lots of people who believe that Miss Sayers' "The Man Born to be King" is literally true—certainly as true as "Gospel," and Miss Sayers herself may gladly assent.

But the worst aspect of the matter is the way the children have been fed on lies and lies. It will not be easy to undo the harm done on immature minds so easily impressed by people whom they trust.

Are we progressing? Personally, I feel that Secularism has permeated the daily life of our people to such an extent that, however much God and Jesus may be invoked, it is what we are doing on earth, here and now, which, to the majority, really matters. It is the Secular which has won the battle. But that that can be called a victory of "Freethought" may still have to be argued.

H. CUTNER.

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY IN SPAIN

DURING the summer of 1948 the Archbishops and Bishops of Spain issued their first joint pastoral letter since 1936 and the civil war. It dealt with the right to freedom of conscience and worship, and referred specifically to Article 6 of the Charter of Spanish Rights, the relevant Article in the constitution. The pastoral pointed out, as was to be expected, that problems relating to religious freedoms are not solely political and social in their significance, but dogmatic, that they touch upon the right of the Roman Catholic Church to protect the integrity of Christian faith. The pastoral states:—

"Jesus Christ founded only one Church. A church born centuries later could not be founded by Him, just as a church which does not remain united with the successors of Peter cannot be true. For this reason, the faithful are not free to adhere to any church. It is first of all a sacred duty to belong to the only true Church founded by Christ, which vividly stands out and is known for its qualities of being One Holy, Catholic and Apostolic." (*Catholic Times*, 2nd July, 1948.)

What about those who deny this "sacred duty"? What is meant by "not free to adhere to any church"? In present-day Spain non-Catholics are too "insignificant" in number, the pastoral states, to merit the resort to a public law to define their position. Nevertheless, the presence within Spain of many foreigners who come from countries where Protestantism counts, entirely changes the position. For the sake of these, we are told, Article 6 is important, which states:—

"The profession and practice of the Catholic religion, which is that of the Spanish State, will have official protection. No one will be molested for his religious beliefs, nor in the private practice of his religion. No exterior ceremonies or manifestations other than those of the Catholic religion shall be permitted."

This means in practice that private worship in the home or the gathering together of communities for private worship by non-Catholics is not to be penalised, but beyond this nothing will be tolerated. The few chapels and Protestant meeting-places that exist are forbidden to display notices or announcements outside which might indicate a place of worship "since this constitutes a menace to the public life, and offends the well-ordered feelings of almost the whole nation." Even for such private gatherings a licence must be obtained, and no reference to Protestant worship is allowed, either in street directories or in telephone books. That is not enough, however, for warnings that the Protestants should not go too far have accompanied the discussion on Article 6. The pastoral itself points out that the religious liberty which is being accorded does not mean "that a public campaign of proselytism and of attack against the Catholic Faith might not endanger certain incautious persons." Even more outspoken is the statement which was made by the Catholic Action paper *Ecclesia*, from which the *Manchester Guardian* quoted on November 10, 1948:—

"It would be an error were anyone to believe that the Charter of Spanish Rights is a legal justification for the opening of chapels, the publication of reviews and pamphlets, or the distribution of Bibles which are not Catholic, or any propaganda of this kind. Any weakness of the authorities in preventing such propaganda would be against . . . our fundamental laws. . . ."

And in response to the protest of progressive Catholics abroad, Mgr. de Vicarra, leader of Catholic Action, declared:—

"There is all the difference in the world between holding to a wrong conviction and propagating it, as there is a difference between having leprosy and infecting other people

with it. To a Catholic nation, such as the Spanish nation, erroneous teaching is a greater evil than leprosy, and thus all measures which are necessary to prevent error from spreading are legitimate." (*Geist und Tat*, August, 1948.)

Some people may be inclined to believe that this attitude of mind is confined to Spanish Catholics, that it is a case of political illiberalism breeding clerical illiberalism. Quotations from Catholic theoreticians and practicians that would challenge this interpretation can be cited from every quarter of the globe. Only recently the Jesuits' fortnightly in Rome, *La Civiltà Cattolica*, made a clear statement about the Roman Catholic position. It declared:—

"The Roman Catholic Church, convinced, through its divine prerogatives, of being the only true Church, must demand the right to freedom for herself alone, because such a right can only be possessed by truth, never by error. As to other religions, the church will certainly never draw the sword, but she will require that by legitimate means they shall not be allowed to propagate false doctrine. Consequently, in a state where the majority of the people are Catholic, the church will require that legal existence be denied to error, and that if religious minorities actually exist, they shall have only a 'de facto' existence without opportunity to spread their beliefs. If, however, actual circumstances . . . make the complete application of this principle impossible, then the church will require for herself all possible concessions. . . . In some countries, Catholics will be obliged to ask full religious freedom for all, resigned at being forced to cohabit where they alone should rightfully be allowed to live. But in doing this the church does not renounce her thesis . . . but merely adapts herself. . . . We ask Protestants to understand that the Catholic Church would betray her trust if she were to proclaim . . . that error can have the same rights as truth. . . . The church cannot blush for her own want of tolerance, as she asserts it in principle and applies it in practice." (*The Rationalist*, Australia, August, 1948.)

There are thousands of Roman Catholics in the world who will not or cannot believe that this is what their Church holds to be religious liberty and freedom of conscience. British Catholics may quote the late Archbishop Hinsley, who in a broadcast in 1944 on the Four Freedoms of the Atlantic Charter stated that all men and women "should be granted equal opportunities to follow the religion of their conscience, and allowed to have their churches, their schools and their ministers"; he did not mention the question of propagating a non-Catholic faith. Nevertheless, in defining the freedom to worship according to one's conscience, he, too, emphasised that this

"does not mean that every man is in fact free to worship God in the way he thinks fit; for God Himself has told us how we are to worship Him, and we have therefore the obligation to worship Him as He desires. But no man may be forced to embrace the truth against his will." (*Catholic Times*, 6th April, 1944.)

Everything hinges on the last sentence, whether or not it is accepted by the Church, and what exactly it means. What amount of compulsion can be considered legitimate, and what amount not? The fundamental issue at stake was declared by the *Catholic Times* of November 12, 1948, to be: "is the right to truth to be superseded by the right to freedom?"

As far as we know, no authoritative statement has been made which would render null and void the ruling on this fundamental issue made by Pope Leo XIII, when he stated in the encyclical *Libertas Prostantissimum*.

"And, first, let us examine that liberty in individuals which is so opposed to the virtue of religion, namely, the *liberty of worship*, as it is called. This is based on the principle that every man is free to profess as he may choose any religion or none . . . when a liberty such as we have described is offered to man, the power is given him to pervert or abandon with impunity the most sacred of duties, and to exchange the unchangeable good for evil; which, as we have said, is no liberty, but its degradation, and the

abject submission of the soul to sin . . . any liberty, except that which consists in submission to God and in subjection to His will, is unintelligible. To deny the existence of this authority in God or to refuse to submit to it, means to act, not as a free man, but as one who treacherously abuses his liberty. . . ."

And in *Immortale Dei* Leo XIII stated:—

"Since, then, no one is allowed to be remiss in the service due to God, and since the chief duty of all men is to cling to religion in both its teaching and practice—not such religion as they may have a preference for, but the religion which God enjoins [Roman Catholicism] . . . it is a public crime to act as though there were no God. So, too, is it a sin . . . out of many forms of religion to adopt that one which chimes in with the fancy; for we are bound absolutely to worship God in that way which He has shown to be His will."

The Church holds with Leo XIII that "the possibility of sinning is not freedom, but slavery." Freedom means, in short, obedience to God as interpreted by Roman Catholicism. That is why illiberalism is not a chance feature of the Church, but the very oxygen which sustains it.—(*Socialist Commentary*).

EDITH MOORE.

SENECA

BESIDES paying tribute to Lucretius it is worth while taking a glance at another poet-philosopher, Seneca.

At one time Seneca was highly regarded, but he is little read to-day. In any case, observes a critic, his drama is second rate. So be it; but the plays are interesting to peruse. His three best are "Hercules Furens," the "Troades" and "Medea." At the conclusion of "Medea," Jason says decisively, "There are no gods"—to Medea—(but in order to avoid a half translation or statement, which is as bad as a half truth, one must add the line ended by the remark) "where you are going."

But then the gods are omnipresent, aren't they? So then, the remark is atheistic.

In "Hercules Furens," or "Mad Hercules," Juno has a long monologue as regards her husband's amorous exploits among mortal maidens. Juno regarded the latter as "gatecrashers," most indignantly, since they, and their progeny by Jupiter, became "caelicolæ," "heaven dwellers," and constellations were named after them. She runs through quite a long list, determined on revenge, especially on *one* son of Jove's by Almena, viz., Hercules. She succeeds. Hercules becomes mad. Hence the title.

But to turn to the "Trojan Women." There is in the "Troades," a remarkable chorus in which the women query the possibility of a future life, and decide there is not as per the first couplet:—

"Verum est an timidus fabuli decipit, umbras . . ."

"Is it true, or does a fable deceive the timid in that the souls live on, although the bodies are buried?"

Soon after comes the question:—

"Is it not a benefit to deliver the soul to death?"

And this speculation:—

"An *toti* moremus nullaque pars manet nostri."

"Or, do we die *altogether* (in every sense of the word) and no part of us remains?"

Twenty lines of reflection follow, embracing many aspects of heavenly movement, also terrestrial, and then abruptly, and in the most emphatic utterance, this is said by them:—

"Post mortem nihil est, ipsaque mors nihil!"

"After death there is nothing, and death, its very self, is nothing!"

"Death is the last goal of a swift race, the greedy have hope in it, the anxious fear, but Greedy Time and Chaos devour us. Death is indivisible, destructive to the body, not sparing the soul. As for entrance to another at Taenara, as for the border realm under the harsh lord, Pluto, and his consort, Proserpine, these are empty words, vain reports, their value visionary."

The last few lines, after all, give a sort of satisfactory summary to any inquirer. This translator finds them so, anyway.

"Do you ask in what condition you will be after death? The same as you were in before birth."

There is nothing repulsive, or apprehensive, in that conception. On the contrary, a serene philosophy is in it! *Non ita illa res se habet?* Of course!

GEORGE F. LAWS (Canada).

PEOPLE VERSUS FOOD

WE hear a great deal to-day about there being too little food for the hungry people of our world. But we don't hear half enough about the fact that, although our food resources are hopelessly inadequate now and are hardly being increased at all, twenty million more people are being added to the total population of the world every single year. So that the simple truth is there are millions too many babies being born to-day, babies who will be condemned to pitiful and heart-rending lives of hunger or to actual starvation.

The facts and figures I'm using here are those of Guy Irving Burch, the Director of the Population Reference Bureau in Washington City in America, and it seems to me that they are most especially important for us rationalists and freethinkers. For we are the only group in modern society who will face this issue properly and who will unhesitatingly lay part of the blame squarely where it belongs: with the anti-birth-control policy of the Church of Rome.

It is difficult to realise the appalling truth that, even in what people are pleased to call "normal times," two-whole-thirds of our world's human beings suffer from actual undernourishment. For to-day there simply isn't nearly enough food to go around. Furthermore, it is estimated that between twenty and thirty million human beings in the world die every year quite unnecessarily and solely from lack of proper and adequate food and health and medical care. Of course these figures don't consider new agricultural production possibilities of the future. But they do deal with to-day's stark realities.

Nor did the last dreadful war even partially solve this problem through killing off people. For, while this senseless war killed over twenty million people as well as wasting vast supplies of vital natural resources and tremendous means of production, there was still such an overall world population increase that, according to Guy Burch, the demand for these supplies has gone up almost seven per cent. Which means that a great many more millions of our fellow humans must now go forever hungry.

Says Guy Burch: "The welfare of mankind is balanced on the two great realities of birth and death. It cannot be too often emphasised that where low living conditions and increasing numbers push a hungry people toward starvation, relief which lowers death rates without a corresponding lowering of birth rates must in the end compound disaster."

In this connection let us consider, for example, India. To-day in that country one out of every four babies dies in the first two years of life. Yet if the people of India

were to go on having so many babies and those babies were to receive sufficient food and other care to enable them all to survive, within only a hundred years India's population would be at least twelve billion—five times the whole earth's present total.

And this is the potential threat of merely one single country alone to the world's food resources and overall human security.

Plainly the problem is one of humane and intelligent population limitation. That the Roman Catholic Church, in spite of such an important consideration as this, should go on encouraging its followers to pour forth millions of children and that it should blindly and sweepingly condemn all rational birth control merely through some petty whim of its own, seems to me monstrous. The Church is, in effect, guilty of the most inhuman cruelty to millions of little children, condemning them to lives of starvation.

We rationalists and freethinkers must realise this. As I say, we are the only ones who will. While Martha Morrow interviewed Guy Burch in the well known American weekly science magazine "Science News Letter," of course she made and he made no least mention of the most obvious implications against the Roman Catholic Church. Popular science journals, like the press, must bow to Catholic pressure against realistic presentation of news and information. So I certainly hope Guy Burch's facts and figures prove of real value to such Freethought authors and lecturers as my friends Fred Hornbrook, Archibald Robertson, John Rowland and William Kent. For only from such rationalists as these can these facts and figures and their full implications receive the true publicity which they so rightly deserve.

Guy Burch recommends that a realistic programme of population limitation be developed by our nations as a whole. And here the peoples of our earth are most fortunate that so outstanding a biologist and rationalist as Julian Huxley is the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation. The full significance of these facts and figures now given here may be realised from the fact that, following the recent publication of this article in "The Freethinker" in America and in "The Rationalist" in Australia as well as in "The New Zealand Rationalist," Julian Huxley wrote to tell me of being especially glad to have this article as he is personally much interested in this issue and hopes to be able to include it in Unesco's future programme.

GORDON CAULFIELD.

"MY KINGDOM IS NOT OF THIS WORLD"

(St. John 18, 36).

IN the early part of March, the official "Osservatore Romano" reported that the prelate Edoardo Prettnet Cippecio, an official of the Vatican State Department "had been expelled from the priesthood and placed in the custody of the Papal Guard." He was found guilty of

"forgery, swindle and theft of valuables amounting to 100,000,000 lire,"

he admitted his crimes and then—"escaped."

"We are authorized to state—reported the official communique—that the Administration of the Property of the Holy See was completely ignorant of this affair."

Pope Pius XII entrusted the investigation of the case to his nephew, Prince Pacelli. The latter, being a director of several banks involved in the financial transactions of

the "Administration of the Property" of the Vicar of that God who had not "where to lay his head" (Luke. 9, 58)—in short, Pacelli was naturally interested in erasing the traces of the crime and hushing up this ugly piece of swindling.

But the Italian papers showed an interest in Cippico and it became known that he was a protégé of the Pope, a confidential aid of Montini, the acting Secretary of State, and an agent of Giudetti, the commissioner of Apostolic Properties. During the German occupation of Rome, Cippico acted as the Vatican's agent for all its big financial and profiteering operations, including black-marketeering. These operations involved large sums of foreign currency and valuables which found their way to the "Holy See" from all parts of the world.

It was also brought to light that he had shady deals with Ustashis and Chetniks, with Gestapo agents of all kinds, and industrialists who were eager to transfer their capitals to Swiss, British or American banks. He provided funds for the pro-fascist Qualunquist movement, financed several cinema companies—notably the Ocean Film which the Vatican had commissioned to produce a movie on the life of St. Francis—and was the owner of several buildings and "treasures on earth" that could not be corrupted "by moth and rust" (Matth. 6, 19-20). For a handsome commission he engaged in transferring large sums in Italian lire to foreign banks through the good offices of Catholic orders, missions and other "spiritual" institutions. These operations netted very considerable profit for Edoardo Prettnier Cippico. Involved in these transactions were the Banco Santo Spirito, L'Union des Banques Suisses in Berne, the National City Bank of New York and the Banco di Roma (to pick out just a few of a long list).

In the last few months of his saintly activities, this prelate "made" four billion lire, of which two billions went to the Vatican exchequer, one billion remained in the hands of Cippico, whilst the rest was deposited in Italian and foreign banks in different names. Thus we have a highly enlightened picture of profiteering and smuggling of capital abroad (without any compensation to Italy's economy) in which the top layer of the Vatican was involved.

TOM HILL.

THE CURATE'S DILEMMA

Three scriptural folk of most unusual origin
(With whose career each puzzled curate grapples)
Were, firstly, Adam: he who sinned a sorry sin.
And cursed the human race by eating apples.

Of common clay (God built him, then contrived to
Convert a rib to Eve—(how very odd!)—
At least that's what all curates have subscribed to,
Or risked damnation at the hands of God.

And third was he who had no human father,
Whose parent was a ghost that spoke in dreams.
(This plunges curates in a shocking lather.
The more they read the sillier it seems).

Such myths as these all curates have to mumble
From fiction pages out of Holy Writ:
But down to dust and dreams such stories crumble
When subjected to common sense and wit.

"PIONEER."

CORRESPONDENCE

THE SOVIET UNION.

SIR,—I write to protest against the mis-statements and inaccuracies about the Soviet Union, made by Mr. F. A. Ridley on page 499, "The Freethinker," 19th December, 1948; and express my dismay that they should be printed in your periodical, with its high reputation for accuracy and objectivity. For example, his use of the word "totalitarian" is demonstrably false; he surely cannot have read the Soviet Constitution drafted in 1936.

As to his other charges "dogmatic intolerance, etc., etc.," he should go to Russia and see for himself; or if this is not practicable, to question those who have seen how Russians really behave.—Yours, etc.,
F. H. WALKER.

SOUTHWARK CATHEDRAL.

SIR,—I read with much interest Mr. Victor Neuberg's contribution under the heading "Epitaphs in Rhyme." I am sorry though that when he made an umbrella of the Cathedral he had not with him some reliable guide to London. Perhaps he is amongst the fifty thousand purchasers of my *London for Everyman*, but had omitted to put it in his pocket.

The bones of John Gower—a contemporary of Chaucer but much less read—have not been moved. There is evidently a confusion here with Lancelot Andrewes, Bishop of Winchester, whose finely adorned effigy is on a tomb on the other side of the building. Andrewes was one of the translators of the Authorised Version of the Bible, and his linguistic ability was such that Thomas Fuller, the Church historian, said he might almost have been made interpreter-general at the confusion of tongues.

The James I married here was James I of Scotland (1423). The king referred to in Trehearne's epitaph was James VI of Scotland and James I of England (1603-25).

Lockyer's pills were said to be made of extracts from the rays of the sun; to be an antidote against London fogs; and to make old age comely!—Yours, etc.,

WM. KENT.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon: Messrs. J. G. LURTON and L. BERRY.

LONDON—INDOOR

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, January 11, 7 p.m.: "Marxism and Intellectual Freedom," DR. OLAF STAPLEDON, M.A., Ph.D., and Prof. HYMAN LEVY, M.A., D.Sc.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "Law and Religion in Modern Times," Pro. G. W. KEETON, M.A., LL.D.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: "The Past, Present and Future Economic Insecurity," Mr. J. G. LURTON.

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Glasgow (Brunswick Street).—Sunday, 3 p.m.: Messrs. S. BRYDEN, E. LAWASI and J. HUMPHREY.

Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barker's Pool).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. A. SAMMS and others.

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Glasgow Secular Society (East Hall, McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Freedom in Social Research," Mr. J. D. BELL, B.A.

Halifax Branch N.S.S. (7, St. James Street).—6-45 p.m.: A Lecture.

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Cooper's Hall, 12, Shaw Street, Liverpool 6).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "The Danger of Christian Unity," Mr. W. PARRY (Liverpool).

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespear Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: "A Marxist Looks at Life," Mr. ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON, M.A.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Co-op. Hall, Parliament St.).—7 p.m.: A lecture, Mr. A. ROBERTSON.

SECOND-HAND BOOKS, Wants List Welcomed. Michael Boyle, 21 Rosslyn Hill, N.W. 3.

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