

THE

FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Editor : CHAPMAN COHEN

Vol. LXIX.—No. 18

[REGISTERED AT THE GENERAL
POST OFFICE AS A NEWSPAPER]

Price Threepence

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Christianity in the 4th Century

IN the 2,000 years of the Christian Era two centuries in particular stand out pre-eminently: the fourth century and the seventeenth. The former marked the definitive conclusion of the secular civilisation of Antiquity and its effective replacement by the Catholic Theocracy of the medieval millennium; whilst the latter marked the resurrection of secular culture in its modern form: for against the perspectives of World History, it is obvious that it was the seventeenth century, the century of Spinoza, Newton, and the Royal Society which was in reality the creative century of modern times that laid down the germinal seeds which subsequent centuries have developed.

However, reserving consideration of this glorious resurrection for some future occasion, we will direct our attention to the religious revolution of the fourth century which buried the spirit of rationalism for twelve centuries, and imposed upon European civilization the stranglehold of the medieval theocracy, the final passing of which is, we may reasonably hope, destined to be consummated in the present century.

We may begin by noting the somewhat curious fact that this literally epoch-marking century, and the memorable religious and cultural revolution which it witnessed, is one of the least known periods to the students of history, even of ancient history. For every student to whom "ancient" history means the age of Julian "the Apostate," Athanasius, and Theodosius, there must be a hundred to whom it connotes the earlier classical age of Pericles, Alexander and Julius Caesar.

This curious fact seems to extend also to Rationalists, for the religious revolution of the fourth century, which changed the face of Europe more permanently and profoundly than any revolution before or since, has never been adequately described by a great historian steeped in the spirit of historical materialism and of critical rationalism. Edward Gibbon may be cited in disproof of the above assertion, but in the light of the now available knowledge, his celebrated analysis of the decline of secular, and the rise of ecclesiastical Rome, must be regarded as inadequate.

Why, in the first instance, did Christianity triumph in the fourth century? Or rather, why did religion triumph at all over reason in the fourth century? The short answer to which "leading question" is, because the Roman Empire, which was by then the political protector and equivalent of the classical civilisation, finally collapsed in that century.

But why did it collapse? In the present writer's opinion, the oft-repeated statement of idealist historians that its "decline and fall" were "inevitable," is just mystical balderdash, which merely begs the whole question. Why must we regard it as "inevitable" that the Roman Empire had to collapse in the fourth century,

when the still older Chinese Empire, based upon almost identical economic techniques lasted almost unaltered down to our own times? Until this last question is satisfactorily answered, the theory of "inevitability" goes by the board, or rather, does not arise.

In actual fact, secular Rome perished because a number of political, economic and cultural factors happened to coincide.

And now for our earlier question: Why did religion triumph over the rational culture of Antiquity? The answer to that is at least clear: it triumphed because the classical culture was a class-culture of the narrowest kind; which only affected the small governing-class and its immediate entourage, and which passed unnoticed over the heads of the slaves and proletarian "poor whites" who made up the great bulk of the inhabitants of the ancient world.

Due to a number of operative causes, the relative importance of which is not yet entirely clear, but in which war and pestilence probably played the most important roles, this selective ruling-class steeped in the rationalistic schools of the Stoics and Epicureans died out, along with these self-same philosophical schools themselves, between the age of Marcus Aurelius (161-180) and the fourth century.

By the end of the fourth century, only a single family in the Roman Senate could trace its descent from the times of the Republic (First century, B.C.). And what a sharp intellectual descent from the Imperial Rationalist, Marcus Aurelius, to his successor only a century later, who put a bystander to death because the sacred chickens refused to disclose the future in his presence. And this was *before* the victory of Christianity!

The victory of religion over reason in the fourth century was essentially the victory of the illiterate slaves over the dying educated ruling class. It was the inevitable result of the narrow concentration of culture in the hands of an aristocratic oligarchy and a small "upper middle class." This fact is undeniable, though it is quite illegitimate to draw, as does, for example, the "White" Russian historian, Rostovtzev, reactionary conclusions from it with regard to our so different contemporary world. The ex-slaves, ex-shepherds, soldiers of fortune and offspring of prostitutes, who were the Roman emperors that actually conducted the religious revolution of the fourth century which established Christianity, were entire strangers to the classical culture of Julius Caesar and of Marcus Aurelius.

So much for the victory of religion: and now, why was it that it was Christianity which prevailed? This, like the contemporary decline of the Roman Empire, was due to an accidental combination of circumstances: it cannot be stated too strongly that there was nothing "inevitable" about it. Christianity had of course its qualifications for survival, the "survival of the fittest" though still unrecognised, was already operating in the fourth century.

In particular, the Christian Church had the precise advantage over Paganism that, in modern business circles, an amalgamation always has over a multitude of individual competitors. Its One God gave it a decisive advantage over the myriads of mutually conflicting deities of the Pagan world.

However, it was a political cause, the capture of the totalitarian State of the period by the Christians which finally decided the issue as between Christianity and the Pagan cults. And here it was obviously an accident that it was the Christian emperors, Constantine and Theodosius who succeeded, and the Pagan emperors, Diocletian and Julian who failed.

Incidentally, the modern Christian-inspired view of Julian "the Apostate" is not confirmed by the actual language of his Christian contemporaries: far from regarding his failure to destroy Christianity as inevitable, they were frightened out of their wits, and one can almost hear them gasp with relief at the great "Apostate's" untimely death in what may well have been one of the most decisive battles in human history.*

Paganism did not succumb peacefully to the "higher morality" of Christianity, as in the now accepted myth. Contrarily, the victorious Church bloodily exterminated the cults of the old gods with the sword of the State power under Theodosius (378-95), who, rather than the opportunist Constantine, deserves to be styled "the first Christian Emperor." Therewith was accomplished the most successful reaction known to human history, "the Christian Revolution." Thereafter, night fell upon "the glory that was Greece," the lights of secular civilisation went out for 12 centuries over the Western World.

F. A. RIDLEY.

*cp. "Julian the Apostate and the Rise of Christianity." F.A.R.

ENGLAND AND THE ENGLISH

THE Character of England, edited by Sir Ernest Barker (Oxford University Press, 30s.), consists of a comprehensive series of essays written by authorities on the many themes under discussion. This important volume extending to 575 pages of closely-printed matter, is concluded by its editor with *An Attempt at Perspective*. In this laudable effort, he notes the likelihood of contributors being too historically minded in any study of national affairs and approvingly cites Thomas Paine's contention that: "Every generation is, and must be, competent to all the purposes which its occasions require." And, indeed, let us hope so.

The opening chapter in this book provides an excellent study of *Land and People*. Our country's soil, mineral resources, climatical and geographical phenomena and the composite character of our people are all surveyed. Also, the far-extending changes wrought by incoming settlers in our island from prehistoric centuries to the present day, with the conversion of forest, fen and heath into the smiling agricultural landscape which still persists, despite the encroachments of urban life necessitated by the Industrial Revolution and the enormous increase in our town-dwelling population.

The Individual and the Community, is the theme of Richard Law, and he emphasises the fact that nothing of value to the people has ever been initiated by the State, but has arisen through independent enterprise. Germany is instanced as an example of popular subservience to authority, whether under Bismarck, Hitler or Frederick the Great. When the German thinks of his fatherland he speaks of the Reich. "When the Englishman thinks

of England he thinks of home, not of 10, Downing Street, or the Palace of Westminster or County Hall.

Mr. G. M. Young has contributed a sagacious essay on *Government*, which furnishes much food for thought. Concerning the future in store for us, he says that "no man can ever guess." It must be noted, however, that Young's chapter contains the surprising statement on page 102, that "Karl Marx was a vestryman of St. Pancras." Is our esteemed essayist confounding Marx with Bernard Shaw?

Lord Simond's chapter on *Law* is a model of lucidity in which he stresses the necessity for complete independence of the judiciary from Governmental encroachment and the maintenance and extension of equity, if our boasted liberty is to be preserved. As this eminent legist warns us, an uncontrolled bureaucracy is a public danger. "Let it not be forgotten that to no man, or body of men, ministers or others, can arbitrary power be safely entrusted."

The Organisation of Industry is examined by Sir Henry Clay, while its *Human Side* is sympathetically considered by Sir George Reid. Sir George Schuster unfolds the mechanism of *Commerce and Finance*, while *Childhood and Education* are competently dealt with by Lady Violet Bonham Carter. She deplores the sad experiences of the children of early Victorian days, such as those depicted in Butler's *Way of all Flesh* and Gosse's *Father and Son*. Pious Puritanical parents were the worst offenders and the "moral" stories they then inflicted on their children's sensitive minds, then taken so seriously, would amuse one now. Lady Violet avers that these tales seem "hardly less distant, hardly less barbarous than that of the Old Testament, when the innocent gibe, 'Go up thou baldhead!' addressed to Elisha (an undeniably bald prophet) was followed by the instant devouring of 42 children by two she bears out of the wood. One cannot help feeling that Victorian parents must in some respects have been very like the God of the Old Testament stories, who devised this type of retribution."

Still, in the later decades of the 19th century, the days had departed when, as Max Beerbohm recalls, "all nurseries were the darkened scene of temporal oppression fitfully lighted by the grim reflection of hell fire." Child study and care became a popular pursuit, both in domestic and industrial life. Yet, at one time, even the charming story of Cinderella was deemed improper and, quaint as it seems, it was stigmatised "as perhaps one of the most exceptionable books that was ever written for children." Moreover, it appears that "this protest was supported by a manifesto from the Society for the Suppression of Vice, denouncing such stories."

The influences of Oxford and Cambridge on science and culture, in the days gone by, are reviewed by Sir Maurice Powicke, who notes their slight impression until recent decades. Chaucer, Shakespeare, Pope, Grote, the great historian of Greece; scientific pioneers such as Priestley, Dalton, Davy and Faraday, owed little to academic thought. "From Sir Walter Raleigh and Francis Bacon," Powicke observes, "and the great antiquaries, to J. S. Mill, Buckle and Herbert Spencer, they appear as men of the world, like Gibbon as publicists, like Macaulay, as ecclesiastics, lawyers, bankers, and the like, not as university dons. They fed the universities, and were not fed by them."

Science is adequately surveyed by Sir William Dampier. The Press, our Language and Literature, are all dealt with, while Basil Willey, in his essay on *Thought*, stresses the sceptical spirit of the 19th century intellectuals. "This severance of religious consciousness

ness from religion," he states, "seen already in Carlyle, was indeed a phenomenon most characteristic of the English mind in the 19th century; it was the result of two predominant traits in the natural mind and temperament: intellectual honesty and a deep sense of moral obligation. Most people know about George Eliot's exclamation about God, Immortality, Duty: 'how inconceivable the first, how unbelievable the second, and yet how peremptory and absolute the third.'"

James Laver furnishes an interesting and instructive essay on *Homes and Habits*, in which he traces the evolution of customs and dwellings from Anglo-Saxon centuries. He reminds us that forks were first used at meals in Elizabeth's reign, "and even then were regarded as foreign and effeminate—an impious attempt to improve upon the work of the Almighty, who had made the fingers on the left hand so supple and prehensible."

Rebecca West's satirical gem, *The Englishman Abroad*, presents a ludicrous picture of our compatriots in foreign climes. She smiles at and dismisses the pious tales of early English pilgrimages to Palestine and Rome, that were long accepted as sober history. In more modern times, the Grand Tour became fashionable, which embraced visits to France and the art treasures of Italy. In the 18th century, Paris was the intellectual centre of Europe where, despite the swarms of bugs that infested her apartments, Mrs. Elizabeth Montague enjoyed her days while she conversed with Buffon, Diderot, Madame du Deffand and other scientists, wits, and sages. Also doubting David Hume "was as happy as a king in his post at the British Embassy."

Shelley, Byron, Keats and others, sought solace in Italy, while subsequently, Carlyle and Matthew Arnold were greatly influenced by their travels abroad. But Rebecca West contends that the ordinary English tourists, despite their endearing qualities, are usually obtuse when they try to understand the viewpoint of Continental peoples. She cites the case of an Anglo-Irish lady, a widow with three sons, who met a youthful teacher named Elysée Reclus—afterwards world renowned as a geographer. Reclus was then a refugee from France in Switzerland. The lady we read "leaped to the conclusion that he must have been a pious Protestant who had been driven out by the wicked Papists, and engaged him as tutor for her sons. He was in fact an Atheist Democrat who had had to leave France after the *coup d'état*. When the young man discovered her error he was also surprised, having thought as she had engaged him she was probably a Free-thinker. . . . During the two years he spent in the post he was careful to do nothing to disillusion her or to betray her trust in his instruction of her sons, who to the end of their days remembered him with delight and reverence."

T. F. PALMER.

THERE WAS ONCE . . .

A SPORTSMAN. He hunted tame stags, defenceless hares, and shot down birds deliberately sent up in front of his gun. So naturally, he went to Church on Sundays to praise the Creator of all living creatures.

AN ANIMAL-LOVER. He loved all dumb creatures and devoted his whole life to their welfare. He waged unceasing war against cruelty to animals and was ever striving to alleviate their sufferings.

One day he was kicked in the stomach by a grateful horse, and died in horrible agony.

W. H. W.

"WHOM GOD HATH JOINED"

A LITTLE while ago Lord Mancroft who is a barrister and a Conservative, introduced a Marriage (Enabling) Bill into the House of Lords. The purpose of this measure was to enable a person to marry the sister or brother of a divorced spouse.

In the end the Bill was withdrawn largely on the Lord Chancellor's indication that, in connection with the problems of the artificial insemination of human beings the Government would shortly have to deal with what he called "the whole problem."

The dead Bill as such, then need not detain us. But several of the Bishops of the Church of England, led by the Archbishop of Canterbury, expressed the Church's opposition to re-marriage after divorce. Even the Bishop of Winchester (who dissented from the Primate's attitude to the Bill) was against re-marriage after divorce. But Dr. Wand, the Bishop of London, went further. He attacked all divorce altogether, suggested English divorce legislation was a "great mistake," and he suggested that the time had come to "close the door" on divorce.

Answering this Bishop, the Lord Chancellor disagreed. He said he would not be prepared to destroy facilities for divorce or to do away with divorce; we had travelled too far to contemplate going back. Indeed the idea of any Lord Chancellor, or anyone else, being allowed, either by the Government or the English nation "to do away with divorce" is grotesque. Divorce is here to stay.

But attacks on divorce ought to be answered. The Bishop of London is at least 300 years out of date since prelatial objections to divorce as un-Christian were irrefutably answered by the great Christian poet John Milton in four pamphlets: "The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce," "Tetrachordon," "The Judgment of Martin Bucer Concerning Divorce" and "Colasterion."

Milton's case for divorce still stands. It ought to be known by Christian and non-Christian alike.

His remarkable pamphlets are not easy reading to-day for the majority of English folk, though they can still delight the literary, containing as they do much close reasoning and many lightning-flashes of genius. Briefly, Milton showed the ecclesiastical idea of a sacramental sanctity in the marriage relation to be a clerically invented superstition, repugnant to the Scriptures, the Early Fathers and the Protestant religion. What the Church of England marriage-service puts first—the bodily function of procreation—Milton put last; and what the Church puts last—the spiritual and mental function of mutual help, solace and comfort—Milton put first. He argued, therefore, that incompatibility of character or contrariety of mind in two married persons was a perfectly just reason for divorce—even more than adultery. "God," he declared, "never joined error, fraud, unfitness, wrath, contention, perpetual loneliness, perpetual discord."

Milton's ideal of marriage was far nobler than our Church's "sacramental" one. Because he emphasised the spiritual rather than the physical, he rejected the vulgar idea (still prevalent in England and embodied in our law) that marriage should be dissolved only on physical grounds such as adultery, impotence, insanity, cruelty or desertion. Incompatibility of temper was worse than adultery because "solace and peace" were "the main end" in marriage "not discord and variance." So divorce should be allowed at the will of either party, the Courts only intervening to secure equitable conditions for both parties and their children.

How nobly right John Milton was!

He addressed his great plea (for marriage-freedom and for divorce as a Christian right on the grounds of charity) to the Parliament of his day. That compulsion should chain two human beings together when love and sympathy had gone was disgusting to Milton—as to all decent minds—and excited him to lofty, eloquent and passionate denunciation of any Church which insisted on it as hostile to Christ's real teaching. He pointed out that the wrong Canon Law view was arrived at by construing a single cryptic and dubious sentence in St. Matthew as a rigid rule of law and a sacramental principle.

But Milton's strenuous attempt to reconcile scripture and divorce (important though it may be to modernists) has lost interest for the average English person to-day. Most people do not ask now: "Is divorce Scriptural?" They do not care whether it is Scriptural or not. They ask: "Is divorce right?" And they believe that what is necessary is right. The voice of human necessity is the voice of God.

It is so easy (as Milton pointed out) for those who have no domestic trouble of their own to deny relief to their afflicted neighbours. But if our Bishop of London was cursed with a syphilitic, a homicidal, a maniacal, an adulterous or a Lesbian spouse, would he really believe that his God (Almighty Love) had joined him beyond dissolution to such a female horror? Would he not rather attribute such an evil to Satan, the father of Evil? It is surely a blasphemy to attribute ill-assorted marriages (by State registrars for instance) to the act of God.

On the hypothesis of Omnipotence surely God had better be kept out of most marriages, unless they are such soul-unions as that between Dante and Beatrice or Robert Browning and Elizabeth Browning or any similar union. The average marriage is a poor, conventional, affair-of-habit, compromising thing; nasty, brutish and over-long. If divorce were cheaper, completely private, and did not involve "maintenance" or "alimony" and sickening newspaper-pulp publicity, the majority of English marriages would not last for life, especially where there were no children. They would last no longer than liking.

The truth is that divorce is a boon and blessing in the case of marriages that are a curse. Divorce really needs no defence. It is an elementary right like the right to marry. No one would ever doubt that self-evident truth but for the historical lunacy of theologians and ecclesiastics in denying it. For just consider the point coolly, without prejudice, and without religious prepossessions. What sort of man is he who is forced by outside compulsion to keep company with one he wishes to get away from? He is a prisoner and a slave. Can there be a more horrible imprisonment or a more desperate slavery than unwilling companionship "at bed and board." What! You shall sleep and feed with this creature no matter whether you will or no. Such religion or law which essays to enforce this slavery is a monstrous usurpation, a tyranny beyond all political tyrannies that have ever existed amongst humanity.

The only justification for marriage is happiness and betterment. If any marriage makes any human life unhappy or makes it worse, that marriage should be painlessly and privately killed.

The horribly low religious and legal standard of English marriage (which makes it dependent on "consummation" after ceremony, thereby admitting copulation to be its reality since if you are married even in Church and no copulation follows, the marriage is declared both by the Church law and the law of the

State to be a "nullity," i.e., no marriage at all and liable to a decree of nullity) ought to be raised to make marriage not a union of the flesh but a union of the mind and spirit. Let the text "They twain shall be one flesh" be altered to "They twain shall be one heart and soul."

But meantime few English folk have the courage to defend divorce. Even many of the liberal-minded regard it with suspicion and a regrettable necessity only to be given as a last resort, especially to the lower-classes. Yet it is one of the chief rights of mankind and as such should be stoutly defended against all its assailants. A person's marriage and divorce is his, or her, own business and that great English lawyer, John Selden, observed "Of all actions in a man's life his marriage does least concern other people, yet of all actions in our life it is most meddled with by other people." He knew that "Marriage is a desperate thing" and desperate diseases require a remedy.

"Whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder." By all means. But when Error hath joined together (whether by the lips of a Registrar of Births, Marriages and Deaths or a parson in a State-licensed building) let a High Court or County Court judge or a Commissioner or even the parties themselves put asunder as quickly as possible.

C. G. L. DU CANN.

MR. HUXLEY AND A NEW DANGER

FROM that day, twenty-odd years ago, when Mr. Aldous Huxley emerged as the writer of *Crome Yellow*, a cynical, disillusioned critic of humanity, to the present time seems a very long period. Certainly in the life of Mr. Huxley himself it has been a period of enormous change. From a position of something not unlike the more iconoclastic school of Rationalism and Freethought, Mr. Huxley has come round to a belief in the value of mysticism and a somewhat vaguely religious attitude to life. And his latest book, *Ape and Essence* (Chatto and Windus; 7s. 6d.), is perhaps the most stimulating and mentally disturbing that his modern mood has produced. It is in a curious form—that of a film script, allegedly recovered from the rubbish-heap of a Hollywood studio, but is nonetheless absorbing.

To Freethinkers it will be especially noteworthy for presenting, in highly dramatic form, a problem which the majority of thinkers of to-day have not yet faced frankly. The picture which it presents is of the world about two hundred years hence, after a war with atomic and biological weapons has sent all the civilized nations (save New Zealand, which was sufficiently off the beaten track to escape) back into a state of barbarism worse than anything which has been endured for centuries. The main theme of the work is a visit by a group of New Zealand scientists to California, which, in the twenty-second century, is a home of a comparatively small number of people, who have somehow contrived to escape the atomic catastrophe. The group from New Zealand are, of course, more or less analogous to the men of science whom we know to-day. Those whom they visit are incredibly barbarous, their germ-plasm injured, even after generations, by the rays emitted by the atomic bombs. Many of the children are born with deformities of one sort or another, and a strange religion has emerged. The main occasion in the religious year is a ceremony at which the deformed children are ritually slaughtered, and there is a sort of inverted Christian worship, which emanates from the belief that the Devil has taken control of the world.

All this, when thus briefly summarised, may suggest that the book is a purely fantastic picture of the future, in the same class as H. G. Wells's *The Time-Machine*; it is, however, in a different class altogether, in that it is clearly intended to have a lesson for the human race—a lesson which is only damaged by Mr. Huxley's almost pathological hatred of sex, that emerges in every page in which he deals with the sexual relationships of his Californians of the future.

And what is that lesson? This, incidentally, is where I feel that his book has an especial interest to Rationalists of all schools at the present day. It is that with the enormous powers of destruction which science has placed in man's hands at the present day—powers that may well be used within the next few years—there is a definite chance that science may no longer mean progress. And if people as a whole get hold of the idea that the developments of science may involve retrogression then there is a definite danger that some new religion, as barbarous as any that has degraded a savage tribe, may emerge with resultant evil effects on humanity as a whole.

Rationalism, with all that it has done for the human race, has, therefore, a great responsibility in this year and age. Only if men can be made to see that science has to be controlled will there be any worthwhile future. And if the destructive powers of science are once used in their extreme forms of atomic and biological warfare, there is a very real chance that some evil beliefs may possess the remnants of humanity which may be able to survive what the people in Mr. Huxley's book call "The Thing," i.e., the atomic war.

The savage religion around which the life of California in the 22nd century revolves, in *Ape and Essence*, may seem to us so totally impossible as not to be worthy of any sort of attention. But, after all, things have happened in the past 20 years which would have seemed equally incredible to those of our predecessors who founded the N.S.S. and the R.P.A. in the last century. Political persecutions and the police state are things which, 50 years ago, seemed to be passing, if they had not already passed, out of the realm of the possible. But they are still with us. And the revival of a religion of blood and fire, outside the ranks of declining bodies like the Salvation Army, seems an impossibility to us to-day. But, given a big enough catastrophe, these things might again emerge.

That, as I view it, is the problem with which Mr. Huxley has presented the world. His new book is written with a clarity and brilliance such as we have now come to expect of him. It is in some respects a moving book, and it is at the same time a most uncomfortable book. But Rationalists have never sought comfort; they have sought truth, whether it be palatable or not. For that reason I feel that Mr. Huxley's volume deserves the attention of each and every one of us. It is probably the most important work of fiction (with the possible exception of Albert Camus's *The Plague*) to be published since the war. And it has its value to thinkers of all schools from Rationalism to Roman Catholicism. The Roman Catholics will probably regard its worship of Belial as pure blasphemy; many Rationalists will likewise think it the most complete heresy directed against those views of the value of scientific applications. But it is a book which men will disregard at their peril. In spite of the weakness it shows in some directions, it does face up to a very real peril that humanity has to take into consideration for the next few years. And, comparable to it in sheer intellectual power, I cannot place any novel of recent years. JOHN ROWLAND.

"OUR RADIO SPIRITS"

WHEN Mr. Wood accuses me of lack of knowledge, he probably overlooks the fact that I know exactly as much about Spiritualism as he does—and that is Nothing! The theory that People (not spirits) who have died are crowding this planet was mentioned by me when I pointed out the infinite number that must have "passed over" since man made his appearance. Even now I do not see why other forms of living life should be excluded from the scheme. I am quietly amused by Mr. Wood's statement that the spirits are "a little annoyed by cheap jibes and ridicule." Would he tell us how he knows this? It is not impossible that they are laughing at him. It will be noted that Mr. Wood does not accept the theory he so carefully explains.

The analogy of the Radio Set, however, shows that the Spirits are progressing with the times; but all the same I am curious as to "Who turns the switch?" And why all the hullabaloo of banging tambourines, clanking chains and ghostly visitations when the spirits can tune in at any time to the B.B.C. and thus get a wonderful broadcast free of charge.

What intrigues me, however, is that Mr. Wood claims to be an Atheist and says he does not believe in flapdoodle. Now survival after death is the basis of most religions. The resurrection of the body (complete with spirit) is to be found in all the Christian creeds and having been reared in the State Church I have a better appreciation of this belief than he has. He cannot, however, have it both ways, and if he prefers to "sit on the fence" with his peculiar beliefs (or lack of them) then he must be honest and give up the title of Atheist.

When I mention that I have read the "Freethinker" for over forty years, Mr. Wood will understand that I have read lots of books about the "Occult" (whatever that is) and I am not interested in reading those he mentions. On my bookshelves are tales of the Spirit World that would make the hair rise on the head of a wooden doll let alone an adult were it not realised that they need not necessarily be true and that fiction is not confined to Deadwood Dick Tales. In other words I am not to be bamboozled by clever writers. If I may make a suggestion here, it is that books on Religion and connected subjects should be classified "Fiction" until the contrary is proved.

If any of the Yogi would like to demonstrate their alleged superiority, then I suggest as an old cyclist they come over here and attempt the Lands End to John o' Groats cycle record, or swim the Atlantic from Liverpool to New York. Even a small record would be a start and there's plenty of scope for their talents outside the covers of a book; but it's deeds we want, not words.

The best proof that Mr. Wood has not shed his religion is that he objects to humour. As I said in my article, this is one thing religious people do not like; but how anyone can read the miles of drivel on religion without breaking out into smiles is more than I can understand.

Mr. Wood wants me to believe that "Nothing" has body, parts and passions and in all his remarks I see only a re-hash of the religion I gave up when a youth; and with all his experience I am surprised that he is so gullible.

T. D. SMITH.

"The greater part of mankind are angry with the sinner, and not with sin."—SENECA.

"The more virtuous any man is the less easily does he suspect others to be vicious."—CICERO.

ACID DROPS

Councillor Townend, Secretary of the Southport Trades Council, deplores the fact that the Church is not interested in Trade Union affairs in Southport. Actually, he ought to be pleased, for experience has shown that the Church's influence is disruptive. In any case, on what common ground can the Church and Trade Union meet? The Trade Unions' function is to better conditions in this world, and the Church is concerned primarily with the next world and the sweet by and by. Southport Trade Unionists are lucky. Others have all their work cut out to keep the parson out.

Now that the noise of the shouting and tumult has quietened a little, it is possible to see a gleam of light in the hysterical outburst over the Mindszenty affair. We were vastly interested in the way in which the various Christian sects dropped their differences and solidly backed the Pope's rallying cry, and we have been waiting patiently for someone to point out that Catholicism is not interested in Freedom in the general sense but only when it affects them. We are glad therefore that "Illico" (British Weekly) has managed to see through the Catholic smoke-screen and notes "with surprise and consternation that the Protestant world is in danger of subjecting itself to the lead of the Pope." We are just a little surprised that no other Protestant newspaper has seen it, but then, truth will out, and even Rip van Winkle woke up at last.

At the risk of boring Freethinkers, we think it is still necessary to point out again and again that no problem has but two clear cut facets, and the fact that we lose no opportunity in attacking Catholicism does not line us up with Catholicism's opponents. We will attack them also if we think it necessary. There is usually another aspect—the Third Front—which opposes all forms of totalitarianism, and that is the Freethinker's chief task to-day.

Something seems to have gone wrong with the "Call" that Christians receive from God, and we feel sure that the *Manchester Evening News* will not be thanked for drawing its readers' attention to that fact. St. Michael's School, near Oldham, is closing down because Sister Grace, the Headmistress, is retiring and a successor cannot be found because of the damp climate and bleak surroundings of the school. God had better put through another call, and point out that although he likes his worshippers to sacrifice everything for his sake, he will be satisfied with a little less, seeing that times have changed since men gave up all and followed his Son.

The Dean of Durham has discovered yet another way of confounding the sceptic. In his book, just published, *Sense and Non-Sense*, he points out that you cannot judge decisively "the greatest mysteries of human life"—mysteries like music or any of the arts; sense or common sense cannot solve them. And in exactly the same way you cannot solve such Christian mysteries as God, the Incarnation, Miracles, Sin, the Holy Spirit, and the Church. This being the case, sceptics should go bodily over to Christ, and accept everything told them by their betters. It is a wonderful argument and we pass it on to Dr. Wand for his campaign due to start any moment. The Dean might well feel that with such a smashing onslaught, Dr. Wand would probably win before he starts. Or would he?

Easter always brings boring discussions on Jesus and the Resurrection from every possible angle. The latest example of this is in the *Church Times* which solemnly discusses whether Joseph of Arimathea had any right to ask Pilate for the "body of our Lord"? The incident is naturally taken for granted—it is in Holy Writ and must be true; but in case there comes a tiny doubt on the matter, we are told it will be found discussed also in the Gospel of Peter and in the "apocryphal" Acts of Pilate; and no doubt if it had been mentioned in the Arabian Nights, we should also have been sent there. The whole incident is just plain fiction, but of what use is Easter if the death and burial of a God were not discussed? It was so in primitive times and custom dies hard.

According to two children who vouch for the facts, the Virgin appeared to them two years ago in a cave near St. Paul's Basilica in Rome. Unfortunately, the Holy See must have felt it was going too far to be expected to believe that the Lady appeared before a couple of kids when she might have shown herself in full regalia to the most important Personage in Christendom, His Holiness the Pope. So up to now, wholesale grovelling in the holy cave by pilgrims has been forbidden by the Vatican—though, of course, "private acts of worship" can always be indulged in. In Fatima and Lourdes and even in Mexico, the "apparition" certainly appeared; but in Rome, the Pope and the Pope alone would have been thus honoured; and anything to the contrary might well be the invention of the Father of Lies.

The gigantic efforts necessary to convert England to the true Faith must have been too much for Fr. McCoy, a Liverpool priest, so he is going to Nigeria in a terrific attempt to bring 1,000,000 natives to Christ—and the Pope. Well, he must admit it may be a much easier job there than here in England. After all, natives have grovelled to witch doctors so long that at least in that they won't have to be taught anything; and no doubt the Lord's Prayer in Nigerian will bring about miracles quite as well as if mumbled in English.

On the other hand, Fr. Marchi, of Portugal, has been reporting "extraordinary success" in converting Africans. He claims that there are already 15,000,000 Catholics in Africa and he is going to double the number in ten years or so. What a shame it is that Jews, Arabs, and Protestants are so obstinate and prefer wallowing in infidelity than accepting the only true religion God has given to the world. However, better to make converts of any kind than no converts at all, and so we hope the Vatican's next approach will be to the Pygmy tribes and to the Australian aborigines—both excellent material.

Priests and nuns are banned for ever from teaching in New Mexico State schools through a decision by Judge Hinsley of the Sante Fe Court. He pointed out that by so teaching they had violated the U.S. Constitution—by which Church and State are separated. Good for the Judge!

High Mass will be celebrated on Preston North End football ground at Whitsun. To be in keeping with the venue, will the Altar server use a football rattle instead of the sanctus bell?

The *Catholic Times*, the *Catholic Herald*, and the *Catholic Digest* are amongst the six London papers on the Czechoslovakian blacklist. The biter bitten.

"THE FREETHINKER"

Telephone No.: Holborn 2601.

41, Gray's Inn Road,
London, W.C. 1.

G. JONES.—The late J. M. Robertson certainly was an Atheist—like Bradlaugh and d'Holbach.

R. MASON.—Thanks for cutting of "Portraits of Jesus." We shall probably deal with this in an article.

R. S. ASTHURY.—Thanks, will be dealt with.

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.

The following periodicals are being received regularly, and can be consulted at "The Freethinker" office: THE TRUTH SEEKER (U.S.A.), THE FREETHINKER (U.S.A.), THE LIBERAL (U.S.A.), THE VOICE OF FREEDOM (U.S.A., German and English), PROGRESSIVE WORLD (U.S.A.), THE NEW ZEALAND RATIONALIST, THE RATIONALIST (Australia), DER FREIDENKER (Switzerland), LA RAISON (France), DON BASILIO (Italy).

When the services of the National Secular Society in connection with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, R. H. Rosetti, giving as long notice as possible.

SUGAR PLUMS

The N.S.S. Annual Conference at Nottingham is rapidly drawing near, and will those who intend to be present and require hotel accommodation notify the General Secretary of their needs. Branch secretaries will help by sending in names and addresses of delegates, also with any requirements for hotel accommodation. The Conference will be held during the Whit. week-end, and it is hoped that as many as possible will attend. All members of the N.S.S. with the current card of membership can attend and vote.

The vicar of a Midland parish wrote to the *Church of England Newspaper* expressing his surprise that so few of his parishioners knew of such things as religious newspapers, despite the fact that there are four Church of England weeklies. We, too, have received letters from people who have only just discovered that Freethought issues one weekly newspaper—and it has been published without a break from 1881 through three wars, air raids, and all the attendant difficulties of modern publishing. We are not too proud to take lessons from a parson, and offer herewith to send the *Freethinker* for four consecutive weeks, to any address in the world, on the receipt of four penny stamps. If every reader of the *Freethinker* would do this, we are certain that many of these potential readers will become permanent ones.

We are surprised to note that the Czechoslovakian National Assembly has passed a Bill forbidding any individuals to publish books, and approves the suggestion that printing and publishing, including music, should be under the control of the State. A significant exception is that Churches and religious societies will be allowed to publish as formerly. Does the Czech National Assembly fear the individual more than the Church? Or do they think that the Church will obey orders with less trouble than an individual?

We are pleased to report that Mr. J. Clayton is opening his outdoor lecture season on Friday, April 29. Details will be found in our "Lecture Notices" column. Owing to illness at home, Mr. Clayton has had to restrict his syllabus so we hope his beginning next Friday means good news from the home front.

The Bradford Branch N.S.S. re-opens its outdoor season with a lecture by the Branch President, Mr. Harold Day, at the Car Park, Broadway, Bradford, at 6-30 p.m. All members and friends could help the branch by attending the meetings, and Mr. Baldie, secretary, will be pleased to receive offers of help. The branch will hold meetings every Sunday throughout the season.

IS IT MUTILATION?

NO religious ritual has caused so much discussion among anthropologists as circumcision, and so far its actual origin is quite unknown. It has been practised for thousands of years in various parts of the world but it has always been associated with Judaism as of the greatest religious importance and, in a lesser degree, with Mohammedanism. The problem is how could such a dangerous rite have persisted and why is it so fanatically defended and observed?

In Joseph Lewis' *In the Name of Humanity* (Eugenics Publishing Co., New York, 1949, two dollars) will be found a very thorough analysis of the whole rite from the Biblical, medical, and anthropological standpoints, the author bitterly attacking it as a religious mutilation of the worst kind, and a relic of ignorant, superstitious, and primitive barbarism.

Mr. Lewis points out that among the early Hebrews the fear of blood was paramount, and circumcision "was a blood sacrifice on behalf of the boy to cleanse himself of the contamination of having come in contact with the mother's 'uncleanliness.'" He says that there is "no other reason." The idea that health and cleanliness have anything to do with the rite is "merely an excuse for its continued practise to-day because the primitive Hebrew knew nothing about health and hygiene in the modern sense of the word." This is true, but it does appear rather more as a debating point than as a real argument. Mr. Lewis says the word "hygiene" does not occur in the Bible—which is not surprising; but surely there is quite a lot about health and cleanliness in a primitive sort of way?

All the prohibitions about blood in the early part of the Bible are evidence of the terrifying effects of taboos, and few other books show so clearly how these taboos persist and are perpetuated. The Bible is God's Word and must not be departed from—yet it is packed with the silliest legends and myths, and worse still, "divine" prohibitions which are nothing but taboos so utterly insensate that even our Christian bishops have to expound them afresh with lame apologies for bad translations or misunderstood implications.

In dealing in great detail with what the Bible has to say about "blood," Mr. Lewis has performed a great service; for in general, these passages are glossed over; they are rarely read, and those believers who do know all about them prefer to concentrate on the "good" laws in the Bible, or the activities of Jesus Christ going about "doing good." But so long as the Bible remains the great fetish book of a considerable portion of the human race, so long such detailed analysis of its stupidities as that given by Mr. Lewis are necessary. Certainly the question of what is meant by "uncleanliness" in the

Bible is of paramount importance. It has nothing whatever to do with what *we* mean by cleanliness; it is, in fact, a primitive taboo of the worst kind.

On woman many of these taboos have fallen with a ferocity and a cruelty hard to forgive these days, and anthropologists have done humanity as a whole the utmost service in exposing them. It may take centuries yet before they are eradicated, for customs inherited from far away periods are hard to eliminate. Think of the number of people—well educated too—who dare hardly wish for something favourable without adding "touch wood" and they actually touch wood as they speak. There are dozens even sillier taboos all believed in and acted upon in our civilised society. Jews and Christians alike are actually afraid of paring their nails on the Sabbath day! It is incredible.

The ceremonies associated with circumcision all over the world make terrible reading yet they are persisted in for no other cause than custom or religion—which really means fear, the fear of the Gods or of Magic. With Jews, the rite is the most fanatical of all, the helpless baby being the victim and no one daring to utter a word of protest. It is a fact that even those Jews who are convinced that Judaism is nothing but childish superstition will champion circumcision to the utmost, pretending it is entirely for hygienic reasons, but really because, whatever else they may have shed, the fear caused by the taboo is still strong and cannot be shaken off.

All this is exposed by Mr. Lewis with great detail and no one can read his righteous indignation without coming almost to the same conclusion as he does—that the rite is "magical" and performed to ward off the forces of evil "in the same way as magic wands and amulets." Judaism, that is, the real and true religion, is packed with similar and most idiotic magical ceremonies; so silly indeed are they that modern Jewish rabbis either ignore them or explain them away as relics of the ghetto believed in by ignoramuses. The Talmud, all the same, is packed with the most grovelling superstitions of the kind. These are rarely put forward by Jews these days as evidence of God's love and mercy and justice.

In any case, Mr. Lewis makes mincemeat of the theory that circumcision was ordained for health and hygienic reasons. A deliberate mutilation performed with the risk of death following seems rather a heavy price to pay when precisely the same result will follow a little soap and water.

But is circumcision a medical problem? In his standard work on the subject, Dr. P. C. Remondino goes very fully into this aspect and supports his belief that it is a good thing for most men—if not for all—by copious references to diseases helped by the operation. I cannot deal here with his arguments but he does make one or two significant admissions. He admits that "little inconvenience" may result if the operation has never been performed, though in general he agrees with it. The point is that in pathological cases all kinds of operations are necessary and circumcision may be one of them; but that it should be performed as a routine procedure is another matter. Mr. Lewis brings a large number of medical references condemning the "barbarous custom" in the most unequivocal terms; and he insists that, as far the rabbi who performs it is concerned, it is done "as a religious rite" not concerned in the least degree with its medical aspect.

But there is also the point of view of the poor little baby—who cannot give it, and whose helplessness is one of the factors which makes circumcision possible. Have statistics been compiled which give the mortality cases? Do we know how much dreadful pain we cause the wee

mite? Are inquests held where the operation has been so badly bungled that the infant has died?

It does seem to me that if death occurs as the result of the operation the closest judicial inquiry should take place; yet that it does not, or very rarely, is due entirely to the fact that the operation is surrounded by religion. If the British government were able to prevent "suttee"—the religious custom of forcing a poor Hindu widow to be burnt alive—surely the law can also step in and prevent what is after all an absolutely unnecessary mutilation on a helpless child?

Mr. Lewis also discusses the "psychological" effects—the shock on the nervous system of a cruel and painful operation; and he follows this up with a detailed account of the actual performance. Details of any operation are painful to read and so one must not make too much of this objection; but it certainly makes sad reading—particularly when one realises how altogether unnecessary is the operation.

For Freethinkers the one thing to remember is that bodily mutilation seems to have been always one of the signs of intense religiosity. The Roman Catholic Church is full of accounts of saints who were ready to submit to any mutilation for Christ's sake, and other Christian sects, like the Russian Skopts, seemed to have no bounds to their horrible mutilations.

It is due to our anthropologists that light has been thrown on these disgusting practices—most of which, it cannot be too often repeated, are religious; and I can only hope that books like *In the Name of Humanity* will do their vitally necessary work.

It would prove most interesting if a medical defender of the rite can now be found who will take up the challenge thrown down by Joseph Lewis in what is certainly a most important work.

H. CUTNER.

THE JESUS STORY VERSUS HISTORY

WITHIN the span of our "Christian" civilisation historical events are fixed as "B.C." or "A.D." Scientists who ought to be sceptical do not seem to have cared very much about the fixing of what we may call zero point in history. According to the Scriptures, Herod the "King" schemed to kill the Holy Babe, and Mary and Joseph had to flee to Egypt for safety. Apparently, this was quite an unnecessary journey since the power of Herod did not extend as far as Egypt, and to confuse the issue still more he was stupid enough to die in the year 4 B.C.: that is to say, Herod was already decaying in his grave when the Holy Family fled before his wrath.

Perhaps Christ was born four years before Christ: but what about that zero point? Can it be corrected, or have we rather to revise our opinion about the historical reality of Jesus?

According to Luke II, Mary had to be delivered in the days when "there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed (and this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was Governor of Syria)." As a matter of fact, the taxation took place in A.D. 6-7 (when Jesus would have been seven years of age), and the name of the then Governor was not Cyrenius, but Sulpicius Quirinus. Therefore, unless the Blessed Virgin was in labour for seven years there is certainly something "fishy" about the Gospel story.

When St. John preached, Herod was Tetrarch of Galilee. Note, he was not "king" but at best "quarter king," together with three others, one of whom, according to Luke, was Lysanias, "Tetrarch of Abilene." Unfortunately, for the Gospel story, there never existed

a Tetrarchy of Abilene, and Lysanias died at least 36 years before the "birth" of Jesus. It is, therefore, not so strange that no contemporary of the miracle man Jesus mentions him.

In A.D. 6—or to use a more scientific method—in + 6 Quirinius was appointed Governor of Syria, his provincial Prefect in Judea was Coponius. The successors of Quirinius in the Syrian governorship were Silanus and Vitellius: those of the Judean sub-prefect Coponius were:

Marcus Ambivius	+9
Annius Rufus	+11
Valerius Gratus	+14-25
Pontius Pilate	+26-36

None of the above were allowed to pass a death sentence unless it was handed down to the Judean sub-prefect from the Syrian Governor. In +36 Marcellus replaced Pilate who was cashiered for malpractices and died on his way to Rome.

Herod was what we may call a "stooge" of Rome, and Augustus had no reason to interfere in Jewish affairs as long as Herod was in office in Judea. Conditions changed only after the Tetrarch had died. It is elementary knowledge how plebiscites can be engineered. The Jews sent a delegation to Augustus, the "Saviour," and humbly expressed their desire to become Roman citizens: and the Saviour-Imperator, in his august consideration for the benefit of mankind in general, and his Jews in particular, graciously agreed to this "Anschluss." Consequently, it was not before +6 that Rome could have made a census for the purpose of taxation.

This, as we have said above, happened in +7, and again in +14, according to the inscription on the monument of Ancyre (the so-called *Res Gestae divi Augusti*), a narrative of the Emperor's life and work.

The difficulty of altering the inscribed monument no doubt prevented the monks from interfering with the record as they did with the written works of Tacitus. Josephus and others, who lived about zero point, and who should have had some knowledge of a Jesus.

Therefore, to fit in with the historical facts, Jesus should have been born seven years after the zero point of our era, but Quirinius was not then in Syria: and the name of the contemporary Roman Governor was, as can be corroborated by the coins of that period, Quintilius Varus, the same who was later defeated by Arminius.

Jesus, it is said, suffered in the reign of Tiberius (+4-37). Irenaeus, the Ecclesiastical Father, asserts (Haer. ii, 24, 4-6) that Jesus was about 40-50 when he was crucified. If this were to coincide with the time of Pilate, his birth must have occurred long before our zero point. "Thou art not yet fifty years old," say the Jews unto him (John viii, 57), whilst according to Luke (iii, 23) "Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age."

Since the Gospel-writers are by no means agreed on the various dates, can we accept the idea of an historical Christ, or even the zero point of our era?

PERCY G. ROY.

A CHRISTIAN CEM

Kill Germans, to kill them, not for the sake of killing, but to save the world, to kill the good as well as the bad, to kill the young men as well as the old, to kill those who have shown kindness to our wounded as well as those fiends who crucified the Canadian sergeant. . . . As I have said a thousand times, I look upon it as a war of purity, as I look upon everyone who dies in it as a martyr."—A. F. WINNINGTON-INGRAM, Bishop of London, St. Paul's Cathedral, 1915.

PAPAL ROME

IT is not everybody's pleasure to be able to visit the City of Rome.

I have spent several days in this Pagan city during three separate visits.

This is a wonderful city and being the headquarters of Catholicism, makes the whole place very important as a centre of religion founded on paganism, and that is the reason for the designation, Pagan City of Rome.

The visitor, when searching for places and objects of interest, will be directed by individual tastes.

My predilection was to inspect objects of antiquity and note to what modern purposes these are used, particularly in matters of religion where the Popes have appropriated ancient temples of the Roman gods, utilising these and "pagan" rites so as to make up something new out of the ruins formerly consecrated to Jupiter, Bacchus, Venus, Mars and the whole galaxy of star-gods originally occupying those wonderful buildings which are now called basilicas. These basilicas were more like judicial courts when the ancient Romans occupied them; and in them, State affairs were discussed with constitutional festivals. Now, were an Egyptian priest, dead 5,000 years, to visit St. Peter's, Rome, in this century, and observe the present Romish ritual of popery, he would see that much of that performance to be similar to that of the Egyptian ritual of Isis, with this exception, that what is presented to-day, is but a tawdry arrangement, compared with the elaborate philosophical ceremonial of Sun worship in ancient Egypt.

The occupants of Rome imitated to such an extent, both in manner and in time, that the Emperor Commodus shaved his head and carried the god Anubis for religious processional show.

This shaving of the scalp represents the sun's disc, and is an outward sign of recognition among the priestly craft, as is circumcision with the Jewish caste.

The Romish use of holy water, which is none other than tap-water, with a pinch of salt, is sprinkled upon many peculiar objects, such as people's faces, asses, coffins and upon owners of cocks to make these birds more prolific.

All this is a money-catch, and there is scarcely any article which a priest will not wet and bless for the usual fee. One of these wettings is for mules; it is a benediction founded on a miracle about racing in the Circensian sports under the patronage of St. Hilarion.

Be mindful of this fact also, that a critic of popery is a damned heretic to a devout Catholic.

Another side-show is the enormous number of wax models of fingers, babies, noses, legs, all ill-shaped, which hang upon boards, as votives, for supposed benefits received.

After a short period, these waxen images are melted, and reappear as candles, to be sold again to the faithful, so that the light from a penny dip to St. Anthony might be coming from a wax-baby as a former votive to St. Agnes.

These bric-a-brac are made all the more ridiculous because of the nonsensical tomfoolery which is faithfully said about them, and if not believed, well, one must laugh.

But, what the saintly images, i.e., the priests, like best are votive offerings of gold rings, jewel bracelets, etc., to support these impostures and frauds of faith on senseless idolatry.

What sort of minds have these people who practise this deluding charlatanism, saying that wooden or plaster images are sensible to the affairs of those who give and take?

The paying worshippers are deluded sillies, and the taking priests are bold humbugs.

All these wonder-working blocks are not made by hand. Some have been dug out of the hills, others fell from heaven; and one, the painting of St. Dominic, was done during the angel's spare time, in heaven.

I have seen these lying objects, standing before me, as their keepers related the story, more ridiculous than any medicine-man savage could credit, how the images came to be what they are, particularly, the tale about "the Bambino," whose picture I bought and have, as evidence of the truth that the woodwork was done, J.C.-cum-Joseph, as skilful carpenters, all in a single night.

Psychologically, this popery is a bane and ruination to all Catholics, bar the priests. These trumpety dolls have usurped the niches wherein the ancient heroes formerly stood, and if a choice were made, a founder of an empire is preferable to one who built a nummery, and a benefactor as Antonine is better than the "johnnie" Antony who preached to sprats.

The Catholic saints are a hell-fire lot, for among them is that Gunpowder Plot villain and Romish priestly jesuit, Father Garnet, who assisted Guy Fawkes and blessed his barrels of explosives at Westminster.

I ventured to do as Rome does while I was there, consequently, for my own convenience, I acted the R.C. and gained entrance to places and secured information which could not be obtained by a heretic Protestant, or a damnable Atheist.

This is not profanity, nor blasphemous, neither is it wicked; for one religious pack is always against another different sect, and the Catholics take not only the wafer, but a bagful of biscuits as champion revilers and "bloody" persecutors of everybody not in with the Catholics, whose diatribes "agin" the Jews and Turks are too awful to relate.

The official Catholics in Rome are past-masters in the art of presenting whatever is fabulous with a pretence of making it appear real.

This make-believe business is most extensive with their rag and bone relics, and with silly stories to support their statements that J.C., Paul and Peter were living in Rome, April the First, A.D. In one instance, I was shown a plaster slab, with impressions of somebody's feet, outsize, made when the mortar was soft.

These "footsoles" are Jesus Christ's and the slab upon the floor is covered with an iron grating. Price, *una lira* to vien in the church of *delle piante*, or marks of the feet which wandered a great deal; for, others were shown to me, at Bruges, and elsewhere.

What a contrast there is between these fictitious paltry "relics," such as a bit of wood, as large as a 3d. piece, a toenail, or piece of rag, when compared with the sights of places connecting high thoughts that bring to mind the lives of revered ancient famous men as Cicero, Bruno, Galileo and the Caesars.

The amount taken as show-fees, during one week of a visitor's season, is enormous, and all the attendants strive to get as much money as possible into their boxes, for they draw a commission on the takings from inquisitive visitors.

Here is a degrading system by which thousands of lusty idlers are kept comfortably, by the credulity of believers and by payments from sight-seers.

The credulous ones are always giving, and if these be rich, or a prince, then a shrine-offering from them will often be valued at £1,000.

A visit to the Pantheon is something worth remembering. The gigantic pillars of huge circumference, at the

entrance, will never be forgotten, for they impressed me with grandeur.

This wondrous building is old, and its foundation age is not known.

Agrippa dedicated it to Jove and all the gods, and then Boniface 4th claimed the Pantheon and consecrated it to the Blessed Virgin and all the Saints.

Its immense dome is a masterpiece of architecture, and although there are no windows the inside is fairly light. The statues of the Roman gods are away, and images of Catholic saints stand in the niches.

This specious claiming of "heathen temples" by the Popes and using them for Catholic worship, under a new name, is to be seen all over Rome; as the Temple of Saturn is now the Church of St. Adrian.

I have noticed a dozen or more women, in the Church of Theodorus, each with a child in her lap, in front of this Saint's image, imploring good health for their sickly infants, and expecting miraculous healing from the wooden idol.

This Church was originally a temple upon the spot where Romulus, the founder of Rome, was suckled by a wolf, as the story goes, and when Romulus was deified, he was considered the protector of infants, and so the pagan idea became a popish ruse.

Other transformations occur when Apollo becomes S. Apollinaris and the Temple of Mars is now Martin's Church.

It was easy, therefore, when Christianity became Italy's religion, to make quick headway, which was said to be by God's help; but, all the material was at hand, which saved time, labour and expense to romish priests, who always flourish admirably with other people's goods.

During the Jubilee, the Santa Porta, in St. Peters, was opened, and I walked through this entrance, which can only be permitted once in 50 years.

In St. Peter's is the handkerchief with which J.C. wiped his nose; and, consequently, left an impression upon the linen, which was given to a devout lady, when J.C. was hanged, crosswise.

N.B.—No disrespect is intended with "J.C.," which letters are used solely for brevity; as the Americans called their saviour "Henry," when reading I.N.R.I.

WM. AUGUSTUS VAUGHAN.

MONEY - MAKERS

Two more "Lives" of Jesus have recently appeared, and so long as they bring in money, more and more similar works will be produced. The late Dr. C. J. Cadoux has written one from what may be called the Protestant point of view—that is, one is never sure as to how much he believes or rejects. Of course, Dr. Cadoux believes that there was a Jesus, but whether he was the Son of God or God Almighty himself is not at all made clear. The other book is, *The Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ Our Lord* by Jules Lebricon, written from the Roman Catholic point of view and therefore should be swallowed whole.

Our object in noticing these books is, however, to point out that so long as there is a ready sale for "Lives" of Jesus, and for books bolstering Christianity, it is idle to ask Freethinkers to give up attacking religion. Free thought has had a hard fight in the past and the fight is not by any means over. Needless to say, we use and advise intellectual weapons; no doubt it would be easier to use ruthless political power and wage war with murder, imprisonment, and concentration camps. But then that would not be Freethought.

AN APOLOGIA

Just think of the all the goodness
That Nature does bestow,
The Summer's golden sunshine,
The Winter's crystal snow.
The bursting buds at Springtime,
To watch a lamb at play,
The fragrance of the blossom,
The scent of new-mown hay.
The music of the song-bird,
The breaking of the dawn,
The setting sun at even,
A field of yellow corn.
Then think of all the evils
Inflicted on mankind,
The wars and death that follows,
The crippled and the blind.
The racial persecution,
Intolerance and hate,
The rivers of suspicion
Surrounding every State.
The labour exploitation,
The profit of a few,
The slums of our big cities,
The jerry-builders, too.
We truly thank thee, Nature,
But whom are we to blame
For all the dreadful evils?
Ourselves! 'Tis to our shame.

W. ASHTON.

OBITUARIES

CHARLES POTTER

By the death of Charles Potter on April 18, in his 80th year, the West Ham Branch N.S.S. has lost one of its most loyal and enthusiastic members. He gave a long term of service to the Trade Union Movement, including over 32 years as a collecting steward, and suffered dismissal from his employment for having the courage to uphold his principles. He saw the light of Freethought, and he and his wife joined the West Ham Branch of the N.S.S. In spite of his age, he was one of the most enthusiastic and youthful of its members and was never so happy as when giving some service to the Movement. Our sympathy is with his widow and surviving members of his family. The cremation took place at the City of London Crematorium, Manor Park, London, on April 22, where before an assembly of relatives and friends, including members of the West Ham Branch N.S.S., the General Secretary, N.S.S., read a Secular Service.

R. H. R.

GEORGE SEMMENS

The North London Branch, N.S.S., has lost one of its oldest members by the death of George Semmens, aged 75, which took place in the New End Hospital, Hampstead, on April 16. He joined the North London branch in 1936, and remained loyal to the branch and to his Freethought principles until the time of his death. One cannot speak too highly of the faithful support given by such member, and what it means to the welfare of our Movement. The last scene took place in the Hendon Park Cemetery, Mill Hill, N.W.7, on April 23. Many relatives and friends, including members of the North London Branch, N.S.S., gathered round the grave when a Secular Service was read by the General Secretary, N.S.S.

R. H. R.

MARIE LOUISE BERNERI

It is with regret that we record the death, at an early age, of Marie Louise Berneri, daughter of Camillo Berneri, a prominent anti-Fascist who was killed in the Spanish Civil War. She was well known for her work in the Anarchist Movement in this country, particularly in connection with the "Freedom Press" which published many of her works on Anarchist philosophy. She was also co-defendant in the London trial of four Anarchists in April, 1945. There was no religious service, and her ashes were scattered at that beautiful spot, Ken Wood, before a small gathering of friends and relatives. We extend our sincerest sympathies to her husband.

J. S.

CORRESPONDENCE

ROYAL ROAD FROM CHURCH

Sir,—I was pleased to read Mr. Blakeston's article as about three years ago I rescued Queen Victoria's most mortal work from the penny box of a Croydon junk shop. I never, however, had the resolution to read it. A few months before Charles Dickens died, the Queen, at Buckingham Palace, presented him with a copy. It was only after some futile endeavours that a meeting had been arranged.

It is remarkable with what secrecy the book was set up. The publishers—Smith, Elder and Co.—had the work done in a printing office in Little Green Arbour Court, Old Bailey. The manager set up the type with a single assistant in a room which was kept under lock and key, and never left vacant while the work was proceeding. After forty copies had been prepared for her private use an edition for the public was prepared.

The book enabled the wily Benjamin Disraeli to say, "We authors your Majesty." Disraeli is not much read now, but is his Queen read at all?—Yours, etc.,

W. KENT.

IS IT ?

As most people know, Northern Ireland is predominantly Protestant, and it is alleged that Roman Catholics are unfairly treated. Recently Paul Robeson, the celebrated Negro singer and patriot, fulfilled an engagement in Belfast. As is his custom, he went for an early morning walk in the city. There were few people about, and as he turned a corner, Paul saw an elderly priest.

"Good morning, Father," he said politely, smiling, and raising his hat.

The old man was pleased.

"Good morning, my son," he replied, "and is it that you are a Catholic?"

A great smile lit up the giant Negro's face as he said:—

"Aw, shucks, Father, have a heart. Ain't it bad enough to be a nigger?"

J. E.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon: Mr. L. EBURY.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Marble Arch, Hyde Park).—Sunday, 6 p.m. Messrs. E. BRYANT, F. WOOD and E. PAGE.

LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "The Conquest of Fear," Mr. S. K. RATCLIFFE.

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Car Park, Broadway).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m. Mr. H. DAY.

Hapton.—Monday, May 2, 7-15 p.m. Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: Messrs. WINTER, WHITAKER and BARKER.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. T. M. MOSLEY.

Padiham.—Sunday, 3 p.m. and 7 p.m. Mr. J. CLAYTON.

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

Worsthorne.—Friday, April 29, 7-15 p.m. Mr. J. CLAYTON.

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