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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

The Bones of St. Peter

THE world has recently become very excited over the alleged discovery in Rome of the bones of St. Peter, "the First Pope." According to the ecclesiastical tradition accepted as authoritative by the Roman Catholic Church, St. Peter was put to death by the Roman Emperor, Nero, A.D. 64, during that early persecution of the Christians recorded by Tacitus. Since which distant date, if we are to believe the claim now put forward by the Papal archeologists who have just dug up what are alleged to be St. Peter's bones, no trace has been left of the mortal remains of the "Prince of the Apostles," the first Christian Bishop of Rome.

How much historical truth is there in all this? Whilst the whole affair may seem to Rationalists to be an obvious case of priestly imposture or, at best, a highly disputable case of historical identification, to the Church of Rome it is, obviously, a matter of primary concern. For, if it can be demonstrated that the bones buried beneath St. Peter's Cathedral are, actually, or even in all probability, the bones of the early Christian apostle, the claim of the Popes to be St. Peter's authentic successors would, obviously, be substantially strengthened; and this hitherto dubious claim is the very foundation of the world-wide claims of the Church of Rome.

It was, of course, a common enough phenomenon in the medieval "Ages of Faith" to find the bones of holy men buried in consecrated ground; such finds were, in fact, like the discovery of pieces of the "True Cross," almost a regular feature of medieval existence, and it is, in fact, rather surprising that the bones of St. Peter (historically a very minor figure, but, from the Catholic theological standpoint, the most important of all the saints except the "Mother of God") have not come to light before. However, there may be reasons for this in other spheres, perhaps, besides that of Theology.

We will return shortly to this aspect of the problem. Meanwhile, however, our readers may find it relevant to turn their attention for a moment to the historical problem connected with St. Peter and his own alleged connection with the foundation of the Papacy.

The official tradition accepted at the Vatican runs thus: St. Peter was appointed by Christ himself as his chief lieutenant and eventual successor, c.p. the famous text in Matthew, Ch. xvi, 18-19. After the Ascension of Christ, Peter became, automatically, head of the Church and, as such, took the place of Christ. Eventually, he went to Rome, the then capital of the secular Roman Empire, founded the Church of Rome and became its first Bishop or Pope. Presumably he could have gone somewhere else, for Christ's commission constituting him as his "Vicar" on earth, did not specify any place, but once domiciled as Bishop of Rome, his supreme role as "Vicar of Christ upon Earth" became merged with the office of Bishop of Rome, or Pope, and was passed on to his successors.

Peter was traditionally martyred, as stated above, A.D. 64, and was succeeded by Linus in the registry of the Bishops of Rome. As far as I know, no one knows exactly how the early Popes were nominated.

Such is the orthodox Roman Catholic doctrine of the Foundation of the Papacy. It will be obvious from what has been already stated, that the historicity of Peter's personal connection with Rome is, for Catholics, not a merely historical one: it is actually a matter of fundamental dogma, an "article of Faith" by which the Papacy stands or falls. For it is solely because Peter was the first Pope that his present-day successor, Pius XII, is "infallible" and is the ruler of the "Universal (Catholic) Church."

Such is the official version. Now let us have a look at it from the objective standpoint of historical scholarship without any theological presuppositions; in point of fact, quite a number of Christian non-Roman (Greek Orthodox and Protestant) scholars would agree with us in calling into question the above tradition of St. Peter's sojourn in, and Bishopric of, Rome.

In the first place, we may note that the whole tradition of St. Peter's connection with Rome is a purely ecclesiastical one. We have, in fact, absolutely no evidence for his existence at all outside the New Testament and, with one very doubtful exception, presently to be noted, there is no evidence in the New Testament for his visit to Rome. Neither the Pagan historians nor the Talmud refer to Peter by name. Tacitus, if the passage in question is genuine, refers to the Neronic persecution in which Peter is supposed to have perished, but does not give us the names of any of Nero's individual victims. Suetonius, a second-century Roman historian, gives a brief reference to what *may* be the Christian Church in Rome, if so, our oldest reference is A.D. 50, in the reign of Claudius, but, while he *may* refer to Christ ("Chrestos"), there is no mention of Peter.

As far as the New Testament itself is concerned, it tells us quite a lot about Peter. How far what it tells us is historical is, of course, another question, and we cannot go into that here. But it says nothing about Peter at Rome nor the foundation of the Papacy. In the New Testament there is, indeed, an "Epistle to the Romans," and a very important one, too, which Albert Kalthoff has aptly enough termed, "that monumental tome of Catholic theology," but it bears the name of Paul and not of Peter, and its actual ascription to Paul is highly questionable. It was probably a second-century work of Gnostic theology. Elsewhere, in his "Epistle to the Galatians," Paul, or an impersonator, refers to Peter, but in hostile terms which seem to indicate that Paul, at least, had never heard that Christ had designated Peter as his successor.

The New Testament, however, contains two epistles written in the name of Peter. Both, however, are universally admitted to be second-century works, the "Second Epistle" has even been put as late as the

third, and, even supposing that they are genuine, neither mentions Rome. It is true, and this is the sole "evidence" that the New Testament offers in regard to Peter's connection with Rome, the First Epistle is written from "Babylon" and "Babylon" was sometimes used in early Christian literature as a term or abuse for Rome, e.g. it is so used by the anti-Roman author of the Apocalypse. But, as a French historian has aptly remarked: "It need hardly be pointed out that this satirical designation, comprehensible enough in an invective (this reference is to the Apocalypse—F. A. R.) would be absurd in the heading of a letter." (Salomon Reinach—*Orpheus*—1929 edition, p. 259.)

M. Reinach goes on to state that "Babylon" in St. Peter's Epistle, was, actually, a place in Egypt, and had no connection with Rome.

If this be so, we have searched the New Testament from cover to cover and have drawn a blank as far as the alleged Foundation of the Papacy is concerned.

Accordingly, we are left with the ecclesiastical tradition as our sole authority. This can be certainly dated back to about A.D. 200 when a Roman ecclesiastic named Hippolytus declared that Peter and Paul were the founders of the Church of Rome and that their "trophies" were preserved at the Vatican; presumably a reference to some early relics which have since disappeared. The tradition is thus an old one. Howell-Smith is correct in finding a reference in Justin Martyr (c. A.D. 150) to Christ's commission to Peter, it is even older. But Justin Martyr's text may have been tampered with in the interests of the legend. The texts of ancient writers were not exempt from such treatment, as we know from Josephus and even from the New Testament itself. The Church of Rome, from the Third Century on, had an obvious interest in getting, perhaps in manufacturing, as much evidence as possible for its alleged foundation by Peter.

Well, there is the case for the authenticity of the bones of St. Peter. It is not, historically, a very impressive one, and it is not likely that anyone who did not already accept the Catholic tradition would accept it. They may be the genuine bones, but, much more probably, they may not be so.

There remains, however, one further point to be considered. Why has it been left for Pius XII to start the hunt for relics of his remote predecessor? The answer seems simple, and it has no apparent connection with Theology. For the Church of Rome is, to-day, fighting for its life against contemporary enemies more deadly even than Nero. The Vatican needs all the weapons in its vast arsenal, not the least potent of which is superstition. Already the Virgin Mary has appeared in atheistic France and Mexico and the Masonic Portugal of Fatima. In modern Rome, rampant with Atheism and Communism, St. Peter's relics may appeal to the dying embers of superstition. Perhaps they will build a shrine to them where now stands the memorial to a far nobler martyr, the atheistic Giordano Bruno? Or, as so often in Papal history, political opportunism dictates theological cults. When, for instance, Ireland falls away from the Faith, then we may expect St. Patrick to appear in person!

We may appropriately conclude our brief survey of the problem of St. Peter's bones by recalling James Anthony Froude's pious summary of the evidence relating to another even more dubiously authentic saint: "Such is all, and, perhaps, rather more than all, that is known to men about this blessed saint, but not more than is known to the angels in Heaven."

F. A. RIDLEY.

AN ARTIST'S TRAGIC STORY

THE career of the now celebrated French painter, Paul Gauguin was a sad one. With an inborn craving for artistic expression, he deserted and estranged his commonplace wife and her family connections. Soured by the world's treatment of his impressionist art, he acted in a most eccentric and forbidding manner towards many of his friends and admirers. It is deplorable that a man of such striking individuality and uncertain temper ever married at all, and became the father of several discontented children.

In Somerset Maugham's famous story, *The Moon and Sixpence*, Gauguin appears in the character of Charles Strickland who is pictured as: "A man without any conception of gratitude. He had no compassion. The emotions common to most of us did not exist in him, and it was as absurd to blame him for not feeling them as for blaming a tiger because he is fierce and cruel."

Maugham's estimate is partly confirmed in *Paul Gauguin's Letters to His Wife and Friends* (Saturn Press, 1949; 16s.). This attractively bound and handsomely illustrated volume is interestingly prefaced by Maurice Maugham, while its translation from the French was placed in the competent hands of H. J. Stenning. It is claimed that these epistles, "for the first time, restore him to us to-day, stripped of legend, a veritable God of painting, taking his rightful place among the immortals."

After serving as a sailor, Gauguin became a stock-broker in Paris and, in 1873, married a Danish girl and the wedded pair and their offspring enjoyed a prosperous and contented bourgeois existence for a decade. Then, Gauguin became impatient with the Bourse and, in 1883, without a word of explanation, threw up his employment to pursue his passion for painting. Living expenses were reduced and his wife induced him to settle in Copenhagen where her relatives resided. Gauguin, however, soon antagonised his Danish friends and he returned to Paris with his boy, Clovis, where they lived in abject poverty. So pitiful was their plight that the painter became a billsticker in order to buy bread.

As these epistles prove, Gauguin was ever in penury. His paintings and pottery had very few purchasers during his lifetime, and those that he himself sold realised a few hundred francs only, as most of the critics scorned his pictures as unsightly daubs. Yet, after his unhappy life and painful death in Tahiti, Gauguin's works have been deemed the products of a genius and prices undreamed of by their creator have been paid for his pictures.

The volume under review contains 181 letters, most of which are addressed to his absent wife. These are followed by a comprehensive appendix and chronology of the artist's career. After visits to Panama and Martinique in 1887, Gauguin returned to Paris penniless and was assisted by his sympathetic friend, Schuffenecker, and resumed acquaintance with the artist, Emile Bernard.

In that fateful year, Vincent Van Gogh wounded Gauguin with a razor during a fit of insanity. In the following years his artistic activities were continued, but he was practically dependent on his friends for food and shelter. In 1891, he went to Tahiti where his best work was afterwards done. But in 1893 he was again in France and inherited a small legacy from his uncle's estate. In Paris he lived with a Javanese female named Amah, but soon set forth on his travels. On his return

to the gay city he discovered that his mistress had stolen most of the treasures that adorned his studio and decamped. Sales of his work realised little and, after attempting suicide in a frenzy of despair, he decided to return to Tahiti. But finding the cost of living too great, Gauguin migrated to the Marquesas Islands in 1901. Here he fell foul of the French authorities for his audacity in daring to champion the cause of the natives. He was prosecuted by the police for charging them with smuggling. He was sentenced to six months' imprisonment and fined 1,000 francs in 1903. But the end was near. Worry, privation, syphilis, heart trouble, and severe eczema had shattered the painter's once-powerful frame. He appealed against the sentence and it is surmised that "he would certainly have won his case, but could not raise money to go to Tahiti." On 8th May, about 11 o'clock in the morning, Paul Gauguin dies. Fastened to his easel is an unfinished canvas: "Breton Village Under the Snow."

Gauguin's letters reveal his experiences as a commercial agent in which capacity he lamentably failed. As usual, he was short of money, and in disgust and on bad terms with his wife and her relations, he left Copenhagen and returned to Paris in 1885. "You ask me," he writes to his spouse, "what I am doing this winter. . . I have no money, no house, no furniture—only a promise of work from Bouillot if he has any." Throughout their correspondence appears the lack of peace which vexes public men.

After his one period of prosperity on the Bourse, Gauguin lived almost invariably on the verge of poverty when not immersed in poverty itself. Indeed, few of his letters to his friends omit references to his penury, or suggest monetary aid. Still, it is noteworthy that when the artist sent canvases to his wife for disposal in Denmark she usually pocketed the money, while leaving her husband stranded, although she was gaining a fair living for herself and children by teaching languages and translating books. Details of a sordid character certainly appear in the letters. Yet they are all intensely interesting and throw a flood of light on Gauguin's and his wife's psychology. In fact, all the correspondence is highly instructive.

In reply to his wife's reproachful letter dated 1886, Gauguin tells her that she and her children were far better circumstanced than he. They lived in a well-furnished house and enjoyed "the amenities of marriage without being bothered by a husband. Whereas I have been turned out of my house and am living in one room with a bed, a table, no firing and seeing nobody." He and his son, Clovis, have nothing save a slice of bread and a relish for their repast, so what are his wife's deprivations to theirs?

From Brittany he writes to say that he has scraped together sufficient money for the journey there, but is now living on credit. Still, if he breaks down "it will be no evil and there need be no regrets." The painter then migrated to Panama with the usual results. Then from St. Pierre we find: "Goodbye for the present, dear Wife, I kiss you and love you (I ought to hate you when I look back and see the vile tempers which parted us). Since that day everything has gone from bad to worse." Later, he writes from Martinique to Schuffenecker, who had frequently assisted him, thanking him for his communication "which has only one defect, it did not contain the money for my return."

With his reappearance in Paris, Gauguin informs his wife that the ceramics he intends making will ultimately furnish sufficient money for her needs but for the

moment he was only able to live because his friend "Schuff" feeds him. So he requests her to send him a Manet of his, which he wishes to sell. Later, he complains of continued illness but is too poor to pay a physician. Again he avers to his spouse: "I determined despite all the certitude which my conscience gave me, to consult others (men who also count) to ascertain if I was doing my duty. All are of my opinion that art is my business, my capital, the future of my children, the honour of the name I have given them—all things which will be useful to them some day. When they have to make their way in the world, a famous father may prove a valuable asset."

Ordinary mundane affairs—those things that compose the major experiences of life—influenced Gauguin little, if at all. In fact, his entire personality was centred in his impressionist art, and he was fervently convinced that he was specially inspired with a revelation to the æsthetic world. Yet, save for a select circle of choice spirits, Gauguin's masterpieces were scorned as coarse, crude, grotesque and unnatural. But to-day, now that the painter is beyond good and evil, every product of his hand or brush is acclaimed as a priceless work of art. Whether the exceedingly high estimate in which his pictures are now held will prove permanent, only coming generations can decide.

T. F. PALMER.

OYEZ, OYEZ, OYEZ!

What do you want to hear?

Is it the story of a woman's love?

Or tale of honour that you most will move?

Or is your mind fixed on the saints above?

And what is it you fear?

That woman's love is brief, inconstant is;

And honour not now honoured, but a hiss;

That saints their earthly life will never miss.

Do you fear that to hear?

Then go right now and seek a hempen rope;

If you fear that you have no ground for hope;

But courage shown, you can with evil cope;

Deliverance is near.

BAYARD SIMMONS.

THE OPIUM OF THE PEOPLE

You keep the people in ignorance and superstition because you fear them if they are enlightened; you drug them with opium so that they shall not realise the way you oppress them. . . . After having made man extremely unhappy in this world, religion gives him the vision of a God who will make him even more unhappy in the next. Would it not have been more in keeping with His goodness, with reason and with equity to have created only plants and stones, rather than to form men whose conduct can bring on them infinite pain? A God treacherous and evil enough to create a single man and then expose him to the danger of self-damnation cannot be considered as perfect; he can only be considered as a monster.

Who are the only real disturbers of society?—The priests. Who are they who debauch daily our women and children?—The priests. Who are the most dangerous enemies of any government?—The priests. Who are the abettors and instigators of civil wars?—The priests. Who poison us perpetually with lies and impostures?—The priests. Who rob us, down to our last breath?—The priests. Who abuse our good faith and our credulity regarding the world?—The priests. Who work the most constantly for the total extinction of the human species?—The priests. Who defile themselves the most with crimes and infamies?—The priests. Who, among all human creatures, are the most dangerous, the most vindictive and the most cruel?—The priests. And yet we hesitate to wipe out utterly this pestilential vermin from off the face of the earth! . . . Verily, we deserve our misfortunes.

D. A. F. DE SADE.

ACID DROPS

Anglo Catholics appear to be very angry with *The Church Times* for daring to suggest that there was no historical evidence for the Assumption of Mary. As it is a "pious belief," argues one of them, and as it is "so consistent with our Lord's Incarnation and Ascension," it really must be true. Moreover, if she had died in the ordinary way, she would have left some "relics." As there are none, she must have been carried straight up to Heaven.

This ignorant twaddle is just the kind of thing Anglo-Catholics love. It never occurs to them that the reason there are no "relics" of Mary is that she is a *myth*—a re-hash of Isis and other female deities. But one never suggests that Isis was ever carried up to Heaven—even though there remains none of her "relics"!

There has been a 25 per cent. increase in new cases in New York and other places in the U.S.A. of infantile paralysis. So far treatment has not been successful, so Catholics are now asked to implore God Almighty to put an end to the epidemic. We wonder whether many parents will prefer prayer to secular medical treatment—or if both are prescribed, they will feel it's the prayer and not the secular treatment which will provide the cure? For infantile paralysis, is there a single doctor in the world who believes in prayer?

Reverent Rationalists, and those Freethinkers who admire Buddhism, should explain the Buddhist gentleman whose portrait adorned the newspapers recently. For 16 years, he proudly informed the world, he had never slept in a bed. A chair was all that was necessary for him. Exactly what his object was, we fail to understand. Was he trying to placate the Buddhist non-existing Diety, or what?

A Mr. G. H. Stevenson, who is a Fellow of University College, Oxford, recently declared that Sir W. Moberly in *The Crisis in the University* "took a very gloomy view of the present situation." Sir Walter considered "the universities implicitly if unintentionally hostile to the Christian faith and even to a liberal humanism." Mr. Stevenson does not like such plain speaking and he does not agree that "the anti-religious materialism of writers like Haldane and Bernal is quite as influential as Sir W. Moberly imagines." Perhaps not, as both these professors write entirely from a Russian Communism standpoint. There is, however, Freethought which repudiates not only all dictatorships, but Christianity as well; and it is this Freethought which is permeating the intelligent students' outlook.

Pasquin of the *Universe* makes great play of a recent press photograph of Dr. Kirk, Bishop of Oxford. Referring to the Anglican doctor's festal vestments, particularly the lace on his alb (that is the garment that looks like a nightshirt) Pasquin suggests that Dr. Kirk, the Anglican looks more Roman (Catholic) than any Roman Cardinal. We are not quite sure what is the point of this reference, except, perhaps, that Anglicans look as silly as Romans when dressed in their finery, with which we could agree, especially after seeing a photo of Cardinal Spellman in the American publication *Look*, in full war paint of fur cape lace surplice and red cassock. Anything looking less like a man would be difficult to imagine which of course, is just the point.

The Editor of the *Ormskirk Advertiser* complains that at a meeting of townfolk to discuss the question of Sunday cinemas, "the religious element crept into the discussion." This seems to be a classic instance of understatement. What else *but* the religious element is responsible for these undignified wrangles? Surely the Editor of the *Ormskirk Advertiser* knows this. Trade Unions are satisfied that cinema employees shall not be overworked and shall be paid accordingly. Safety and Health Regulations are observed, the majority of the townspeople want their cinema open on Sunday, and the police are in favour because young people are kept off the streets. The only section of the community who are against the cinema is the religious section.

That cynical adage, "Trust in the Lord but keep your powder dry" must have been taken to heart by the South London parson whose church was burned down last week, for the church was insured! The gulf between precept and practice is very wide, and the average parson's trust in the Lord to look after his own is very, very faint. A "bob" with the Pru' or even a lightning conductor is hardly evidence of faith in the Lord, but it is certainly safer, and does show results, for God is careless these days, if one can judge by the many calamities that have overtaken so many of his houses lately. We shall no doubt be charged with purveying cheap sneers, but nevertheless, the all-seeing God really did miss that one.

According to the *Sunday Express*, both the Rev. R. Hoekstra and "Little David," the only boy of nine God has ever allowed in Heaven alive, put aside for once the easy but perhaps strenuous task of converting England and healing the sick, for a few delightful outings in Hyde Park—"when it was dark"—with Miss Joan Mann. We cannot, in honesty, blame them, especially as the gracious reward was a few stolen kisses.

Moreover, unlike a mere orthodox Christian, Little David (age 15) actually told innocent Joan "risque" stories, perhaps to show what a thorough man of the world he was. Anyhow, Little David, even if he has failed to produce a single cure from the sick, appears to have cured Miss Mann!

Mr. L. P. Edwards contributes to the *Church Times* an illuminating account of what is happening in the new State of Israel. He says, "Generally speaking, the regime is far more tolerant to opposing creeds than the past history of Jewry might suggest." In other words, he is quite surprised that the people who have accepted Judaism as their religion and who are now trying to create a State with many conflicting ideologies therein, should prove far more tolerant than any State where Christianity is all powerful. He has to admit that the rabbis "are at present broadminded and tolerant men from whom the other creeds, especially Christianity, may expect to receive fair, even preferential, treatment." And he even agrees that Israel is not going "red." Perhaps one reason why tolerance is the watchword in the new State is that the leaven of Freethought must have penetrated most of those in authority; and many of these have known what Christian intolerance has always been.

THINGS WE WOULD LIKE TO KNOW—

What would the conversation be like about God Almighty and Jesus Christ held by the Red Dean and Stalin?

When Professor Bernal calls Stalin the "Protector of Science, does he not mean the "Pope" of Science?

"THE FREETHINKER"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

Would "Taffy" of Room B6, Keogh Barracks, Mytchett, nr. Abershot, Hants, get in touch with A. Hancock, Grange Hostel, Hawley Lane, Farnborough, Hants.
For "The Freethinker."—J. Paterson, 7s.; J. Johnston, 2s.; B. Adams, 10s.
J. HUMPHREY.—Thanks for cuttings.
A. M. McLELLAND.—Thanks for cuttings.
A. J. MARTIN.—Thanks. See below.
E. W. JAMES.—Thanks for your very interesting correspondence with the British Bible Union. You did not expect to convert the whole Organisation, did you?

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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).

SUGAR PLUMS

Mr. E. W. Shaw informs us that arrangements have been made for forming a Branch of the National Secular Society in Lewisham. A hall has been procured and arrangements for a series of indoor meetings are well in hand. Full details will appear in these columns at a later date. Mr. Shaw would like to hear from Freethinkers in the Lewisham district who are interested. His address is 128, Farnstead Road, Bellingham, S.E.6.

The following (sent us by Mr. A. J. Martin) from the Stockton-on-Tees Evening Gazette, should spur readers on to make similar efforts to get "The Freethinker" into their Public Libraries:—

"Whether a magazine called "The Freethinker" should be made available in the reading room at the Public Library provoked discussion. The Library Committee recommended that it should. Ald. J. E. Johnson disapproved strongly because the magazine advocated materialism, but Ald. C. W. Allison said it boiled down to whether ratepayers should have access to the periodical.

On the casting vote of the Mayor (Ald. M. M. Kelly) the recommendation of the Library Committee was upheld."

The interesting thing to note here is that the intolerant alderman is a strict Baptist, while the Mayor is a Catholic! Obviously the Baptist was more afraid that his religion would suffer than the Catholic.

Books still appear in defence of the Bible—the latest *The Truth of the Bible* by M. B. Newbold. We reckon it is the 197,463rd book published during the past 50 years on the same subject, yet there are still people who have the impudence to say the Holy Book is not true. Like us.

THE FUTURE OF FREETHOUGHT

THERE are occasions when even the doughtiest of Freethinkers may feel despondent. When we look at the cash which is at the disposal of our opponents—above all, when we look at the way in which the Churches are able to take advantage of every swing of the political pendulum—it seems that we have a really severe disability which it is impossible for us to overcome.

Some readers may think that such a statement about the political position of the Churches is too extreme to be justifiable. But consider one point alone. Think of the relationship of the democratic powers to Russia. Before the last war the Churches condemned the Soviet Union. Nothing was too bad to be said about that country. Then, when Mr. Churchill expressed the opinion that any country which fought against Hitler was a friend of Great Britain's, the Russians changed overnight from the hideous oppressors of the poor peasants to our glorious allies. That was understandable. It was repeated in many non-religious quarters, of course.

But then, with the coming of peace (if that is the correct word for the state of armed truce in which we now live) the political contradictions between the Stalinist regime and the Wall Street-Vatican set-up which has control of this country became so obvious that it was increasingly difficult for the governments of the Western Powers to accept Russia as a friend. So at once (quite spontaneously, of course!) the Churches found out that Stalinist Communism was the enemy of civilisation. It will, I imagine, not be long before all the pre-war atrocity stories about the Soviet Union are repeated.

Now, those who have done me the honour of reading my contributions to this journal will realise that I am not a Marxist. I am not even a Dialectical Materialist (so far as I understand that somewhat ambiguous philosophy). But I do feel that Freethought is more consistent than any possible line which the Churches have been able to take.

Naturally, to maintain something like consistency in a world like that in which we are now living is not easy. Conditions are constantly changing. And it is only when the philosophical outlook of the Freethinker is consciously thought out and based on a foundation of solid fact that it can be related to whatever changing conditions we may face.

But anyone who allows himself to be distracted from the basic philosophy of Freethought by any temporary changes in conditions will be doubly foolish. That Christianity, as we see it to-day, whether in the form of Vatican imperialism or in the form of Church of England sentimentalism, is bound to be purely arbitrary.

Now, this is not for a moment to suggest that there is any necessary merit in a philosophy that does not change. Naturally, if Freethought is to have any future at all, it is bound to evolve. New scientific discoveries will have a relationship to the philosophical beliefs we hold. If, for instance, the end of the controversy regarding genetics which has recently centred around the name of the Russian scientist Lysenko should end (as is possible, though improbable) in Lysenko's claims being firmly established there would be many ideas which we should have to jettison. But at the same time the fundamental ideas of the Freethinker would in no way alter. It would still be true enough that the mind of man would be the yardstick by which we have to judge everything.

It would still be true enough that we could not call into the argument any supernatural power.

Or, to take another line: if the Society for Psychical Research should prove (as it well may, one of these days) that some form of thought-transference can take place, that would not have any necessary effect on the basic ideas of Freethought. Even though communication from one brain to another could be proved to take place, that would not necessarily involve any kind of abrupt alteration in our attitude as Freethinkers. It would merely mean that there would prove to be some new kind of wave-motion, perhaps comparable to that which carries the signals of the radio and the television set.

What, then, of the future of Freethought? Well, as I view it, Freethought is likely to remain the point of view of an intelligent minority. Most people appear to dislike the energy required for the development of an independent line of thought. It is always tempting to let oneself go, and to follow the herd. And when the newspapers and the B.B.C. take a line consistently, never allowing there to be more than an occasional reluctant suggestion that the opposite point of view is reasonable enough, few people will have the energy or the desire to question that attitude.

Yet the reader will, I hope, note that I used the phrase "an intelligent minority." That is the point. I hope that it does not sound priggish or consciously superior. But anyone who has met a group of Freethinkers will agree that they are on the whole intelligent people. It is only an intelligent person who will remain sceptical about the basis of what is taught in the schools, in the newspapers, and "on the air." And because Freethinkers are intelligent their point of view will remain.

We are living in an age when the mass production of opinion has been brought to a fine art. Advertisement and propaganda increasingly influence the ordinary lives of millions of people. But Freethought, Anarchism, and such libertarian ideas still hold sway over many. And if we are numbered in hundreds of thousands only, whereas our authoritarian opponents can count their millions of passive and docile supporters, that is no reason why we should despair. We stand for a firm belief in man's reason, we face the future without the blinkers of manufactured opinion. And for that reason, I hold, we cannot be finally suppressed, though many people of many schools of thought would like to see it happen.

JOHN ROWLAND

"GOD AND BEAUTY"

THE other day I was travelling to work and behind me a couple were sitting. You know the type of people they were, for you and I meet them everywhere and always. The woman was loud mouthed and could be heard by all, especially by myself, and the man was quieter, but served to prompt and encourage the woman. However, the conversation was of little moment and I was able to close my mind to it for most of the journey, but for the last few minutes of the trip, I had put away my magazine and couldn't help overhearing the tailpiece of their conversation.

The woman was telling the man of an illness that she had been experiencing and the amount of suffering. He was prompting her and saying how much help faith could be, to which she agreed, but enlarged to the point of

saying that although she prayed every night, she did feel that the Christian Scientists took faith healing too far. Incidentally she also believed that psychologists could be of great help to sufferers.

I pondered over her words and her ideas for quite a while, and also constructed a picture of the woman from her ideas, thoughts and, most important, her voice. I saw a middle-aged spinster, wearing glasses on a hooked beak-like nose, and a face to match. As I left the bus I saw the original, which in reality differed but little from my conception, except that she had a slight moustache.

I do not condemn a person for their lack of beauty, nor do I completely believe that a lovely person must be that much nicer to know. However, I do believe, and believe it very firmly, that a person does very often (in fact nearly always) show their character in their face. And from the face I saw on this woman, she was one of the most unlovely philistines I could never wish to see.

All this started me off thinking about God, beauty, folk and all manner of thing related (perhaps) to these things. The first idea I had was that there is a God, but not in the way the Godmen think, I see God in the same way I see honesty, scruples, cruelty, conscience and other such abstractions, that although they have no concrete form, shape or substance, are nevertheless very real. This God, the one of the philistines, is just like their conscience, cruelty, kindness, scruples and other attributes . . . they apply them in the manner that the situation demands, and if they feel that they are able to "get away" with anything they try it.

Now this attitude and relationship towards and with God, by these "unbeautiful" people could well be investigated, for I feel sure that there is some connection between the two. In an advancing age, an enlightening age, one finds that the people that hang on to God are those who are hypocritically respectable and cling to that extra bit of respectability they associate with Church and Churchgoing. Many of them don't believe the stuff they say, but feel that it is "right and proper"; others do believe what they say and think that if they are pretty smart they will be able to fiddle some extra favour from an all too human God; a God that is susceptible to flattery. There is, however, another group, the group I call the "unbeautiful," and it is this group that constitutes, I think, a very large part of many congregations.

What is an "unbeautiful"? I should hesitate before venturing any definition, and even now, I don't think that I would venture a hard and binding one. I would say that frustrated loves are the greatest preponderance of this group. The people who have not had love from their families, not had love from their fellow men, in fact, those who have suffered either by their own fault, or because they have not been lucky enough to experience real love. These people are quite naturally thwarted, and they then turn towards something that will accept all they have to offer without biting back . . . paying into a collection plate is a pleasure to such people, as is organising the bazaar or jumble sale. It is a different story when a beggar asks for a little Christian charity from them, for should they give alms to him, it would go unseen and consequently unpraised (they forget that their God is all-seeing), so they drive him away with words of advice. "Look for work you lazy good-for-nothing" . . . Christians!

The reaction of this group towards the Church is that of intense love, that of frustrated sex (they are usually women) which finds some measure of satisfaction in lavishing affection on God, and, of course, the Church. The love of these poor souls, for really they are to be

pitied, manifests itself in various ways, but usually there are quite strict lines along which their ideas flow. Perhaps the wealthier ones plan someday to place a stained glass window to their everlasting memory, within "their" Church, for, you know, these people are so strong in their affection for the Church that they as individuals, consider it their private domain.

Others try by less impressive methods to work into the affection of the Church and its hierarchy. In the Roman Church there are gifts, which provide a means towards endearment: a ring, the stones of which may be used to embellish some heathen symbol of their ritual, in the other churches there are other ways, such as running messages for the clergy, passing out pamphlets, whipping the slackers back into line, organising parties, sales, outings and the various other functions connected with this serpent.

All this warped and frustrated love that has been poured into the Church by unhappy wives, frustrated virgin spinsters and other similar creatures has resulted in an atmosphere being created around the Churches that is enough to repel any person that is healthy and curious about "the faith."

Of course, this idea and feeling that I have, may be all in my mind and of no one else, but you think about it and ask yourself next Sunday, if and when you see a rapidly emptying Church, whether or not I am right after all, and perhaps there is something in that fellow's idea about the frustrated love of those poor slaves to respectability.

• PETER CROSS.

CORRESPONDENCE

JAMES JOYCE

Sir,—It would have been far more to the point if Mr. Keon in his recent letter on James Joyce had given us, say, a dozen citations from his books, thus proving incontestably that Joyce really was "an out-and-out atheist." That he gave up Hell proves nothing—even Jehovah's Witnesses repudiate the Christian Hell, and they insist that they are Christians. In his autobiography, just published, *Elected Silence*, Thomas Morton describes his progress to Catholicism—and he says he was "impelled in a Catholic direction" by the writings of James Joyce. I am not surprised. To say that *Finnegans Wake* is no longer the "literary boggy" it once was is just sheer nonsense. It is just as much hopeless balderdash as ever.—Yours, etc.,
H. CUTNER.

FREETHOUGHT AND TOTALITARIANISM

Sir,—It is not that F. A. Ridley gives any evidence of being approposited by a word. It is rather that W. Gallacher has got his mind thoroughly muddled over the two meanings of the word "communism."

The ancient and true meaning of communism describes a state of society wherein the individuals have voluntarily surrendered their property and some of their human rights to the group. This is practised in many places by small groups. The modern and false meaning of the word arises when it is applied to a system of government best described as nothingism for the people and everythingism for the ruling few. These words are used in their absolute sense, for there is nothing relative about them in modern practice.

The people—the nothingites—have absolutely nothing of their own right. All life, liberty, spouse, child and cash can be taken away from them at a moment's notice, never to be heard of again. The ruling few—the everythingites—don't explain or give a reason. Why should they? Their time is much better occupied in telling the 180 million nothingites how happy they are in the classless communist state and how miserably miserable are all foreigners owing to the wicked landlords and the unspeakable capitalists.

The essence of true communism is that it shall be a voluntary association. The essence of modern communism is that there shall be nothing voluntary about it. The question: "Either, . . . has to be answered at once; thereafter the slightest deviation from the Party line is fraught with dire peril.

This perversion of the meaning of a very beautiful word has been perceived to an increasing extent during the last 30

years; most people saw through it between 15 and 25 years ago. Mr. Attlee only saw through it last year, after 28 years' adulation of that system of government. Mr. Gallacher hasn't yet seen through it and it is only charitable to assume that his mind is too hopelessly muddled to enable him to do so. Hence his letter.—Yours, etc.,

W. C. SLATER.

PROBABILITY AND POSSIBILITY

Sir.—I have just read in the current issue of the *Freethinker* Mr. Wood's article, "Drawing Stumps." My failure to be interested in this controversy is not disrespectful to the protagonists, but merely because I find that my present life is as much as I can manage, and to my taste enough. My motto has ever been that of Ralph Waldo Emerson: "One world at a time"; I think that mankind has quite enough on hand to make our present life more profitable and happy without concerning ourselves with *A Beyond*.

As a poet, I have had no small appreciation of Mr. Wood's verse contributions to the *Freethinker*, but I do not think his argument, as displayed in his article referred to, is sufficiently astringent and tightly-knit. Speaking of Mr. Cutner, he says that "evidently Mr. Cutner is the sort of man who walking along some jungle path and suddenly confronted by a man-eating tiger, would exclaim, 'I don't believe it!'" I do not believe that Mr. Cutner would say this on a jungle path, for the jungle is the habitat of the tiger and it might be expected to be there. But if the man-eater were encountered in the Strand, I think Mr. Cutner's exclamation might be in order. Of course, the tiger might have escaped from Regent's Park or the Docks, but as Eliza Doolittle would say, it is "not bloody likely."

In this life, of which, when all is said and done, we know so little, we must be allowed to be guided by *probability*, which is, to my thinking, far more important than *possibility*. For my part, though a future life for each of us is a possibility, the probability of this is so remote as to be not worth the time necessary to investigate, and, therefore, best ignored by those of us who have not Methuselah's expectation of life.—Yours, etc.,

BAYARD SIMMONS.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

OUTDOOR

- Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Car Park, Broadway).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: Mr. H. DAY.
Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.
Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. J. BARKER.
Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Platt Fields).—Sunday, 3 p.m.: Messrs. KAY, SMITH and BILLING. (Alexandra Park Gates).—Wednesday, 7 p.m.: Messrs. KAY, SMITH and BILLING.
Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Ranelagh Street, bombed site, Liverpool).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. W. PARRY.
North London Branch (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Sunday, 12 noon: Mr. L. EMBURY. (Highbury Corner).—7 p.m.: Mr. L. EMBURY.
Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barkers Pool).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. A. SAMMS.
South London Branch N.S.S. (Brockwell Park, Herne Hill).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: Mr. F. A. RIDLEY.
West London Branch N.S.S. (Marble Arch, Hyde Park).—Sunday, 6 p.m.: Messrs. E. BRYANT, C. E. WOOD and E. PAGE.

OUTDOOR

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

INDOOR

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

Schoolmaster, Retired, wants pupils, all English subjects, also French and Geometry. Live with family; small remuneration. Write: Wm. A. Vaughan, "Longwood," Flat 3, Castle Road, Camberley, Surrey.

SECOND-HAND BOOKS. Wants List Welcomed. Michael Boyle, 30, Parliament Hill, N.W.3.

FATHER DIVINE IS GOD

THE popular belief that a new God cannot get away with anything without a Virgin Mother has now been exploded. Father M. J. Divine (Reverent Rationalists please note) was not born of a Virgin, or even of anything else. He merely, to use his own admirable expression, "Combusted." This combustion process took place at a street-corner somewhere in the U.S.A. (cp., *These Have Found a Faith*, M.Bach.).

There is a shocking rumour afloat that he was born Charles Baker, and that his parents were ex-slaves, but this is only a Wicked Lie issuing from those "Adamic" minds which are still sunk in "Carnality" and "Mortality."

The Lord God Father Divine ("tangibilated" in the form of a large Negro who looks—one hates to say it—"not quite a Gentleman") in spite of His Deity, has aged considerably with all the fuss and bother of looking after the World during the troublous times of the last ten years. Whereas twelve years ago he looked a young forty, he now looks quite old, nearly bald, and could easily, by the irreverent or "Carnal-Minded," be described as fat.

He came into prominence gradually, beginning somewhere in the 1930s. At first he was noted for feeding the hungry and helping down-and-outs recently released from jail. It is clear that he has done a great deal of good—to such an extent, I understand, that the American police force have given him the honorary title of Major—hence M.J., for obviously God has no need of a Christian name.

The teachings of Father Divine, *The Lord God and Dean of the Universe*, grew out of Christian Science and is now embellished with curious additions of his own.

Briefly, the position is that He is God and has come to usher in a New Dispensation. Anyone who does not accept His "Divinity" is visited by "Swift Retribution." He actually claims to be the cause of all the recent air disasters. There is to be no more death for the "Good" but the "Wicked" (the unbelievers) are to perish, preferably in agony.

Marriage is strictly forbidden. Since the Righteous are to live forever, there will be no need for babies. Incidentally, marriage is "legalised adultery," and anyhow, the Union of the Sexes had never been approved by the Lord God in the Garden of Eden—actually it was the Serpent who messed everything up.

Returning for the moment to the "Carnal Mind"; there is a good reason for this. Father Divine insists on fraternisation between all races, and particularly between "white" and "black." It can readily be seen that the U.S. Government would frown on Him and His Dispensation if He were to encourage marriage among his thirty million followers, for such marriages would inevitably be "mixed." The fact that He Himself has been married twice is very neatly explained. "I married," He frequently proclaims, "to propagate Virtue, in order that you might live freed from Adultery."

His first (known) marriage, so the story goes, was to a middle-aged lady who chanced to be much grieved because she was not, at that juncture, a Virgin. A few years later she died, beseeching God (Father Divine) to give her a Virgin Body and bring her back to Earth. This, always ready to oblige a lady, God kindly did. The present Mrs. Divine, a beautiful young Canadian girl, is—it was proved, but no one knows how—the same lady reincarnated. This second marriage to the same lady only quite different (if the reader can follow!) took place three years ago, and is referred to as the Marriage of the Lamb.

The Divine Phobia against Sex is so fierce that even little children are not allowed to play together. I have attended two of the Divine Banquets (every meal is called a Banquet, to suggest God's affluence)—it must be admitted that I was very kindly treated—and at one of them the Divine Rule was observed and the two sexes were made to sit "back-to-back."

Like Mrs. Eddy Baker, Father Divine teaches that the Body is Pure Spirit. Therefore—and this is rather hard to follow—no privacy is allowed. You must never have a moment of solitude, because you are Pure Spirit and Spirit cannot be separated from Spirit. I am told that the same applies to the bath and even the soap-suds must be shared! No one may have a single bed—all beds must be double and shared with another of the same sex but of the opposite tint of skin. This is called "Enacting the Bill of Rights."

I should here note that God is very fond of being surrounded by Virgins—he likes them by the thousand. One wonders how he manages to get all these Virgins? They must be young and are called God's Rose-Buds. They wear a special uniform and sing astonishing hymns in praise of Father Divine, and about Swift Retribution, etc. To meet the problem of the ex-Rose-Bud, the Lily-Buds have lately been formed. No details have as yet come to light, but I gather they are like "Rose-Buds" but larger.

The Divine Racket (sorry—I mean the Divine Dispensation) can be recognised under the blameless title, *The Peace Mission Movement*. Even in this country His followers are active. Believing as they do that all human love is sinful because now God is on Earth all love must be centred on Him, they encourage the breaking of all human ties, and advise all "followers" to break up even the happiest marriages.

It is a curious fact that the Father Divine Dope appeals to "educated people"—doctors, lawyers, and people with a University education.

It is seldom that a convert embraces Father Divine immediately. Generally there is a long process of deliberately acquiring a false conscience, or, as the Divine phraseology hath it, "raising the Adamic Man from 'Carnality' and 'Mortality' up to the 'Christ-Consciousness,' *Invisibilated* and *Tangibilated* in the Fatherhood degree—in the Lord God, Father Divine."

The ultimate end of a convert is, usually, to go over to the U.S.A. and become officially one of His Family. They are seldom heard of again, not so much because letter-writing and worldly contacts are forbidden, as that the hypnotic force of some thirty millions of people—which could even reach across the sea—is so terrific in personal contact that they remain permanently and exotically hypnotised. I only encountered one who, to use her own charming expression, "came out of the chloroform." In fact, much of my information about the Peace Mission Movement has been gathered from her eye-witness accounts, together with a careful perusal of their weekly paper "The New Day," which Father Divine has very kindly sent me gratis for the last five months!

Clearly the thing is dangerous, for, in spite of the fantastic nature of its tenets, it has a curious and inexplicable way of "getting" even the most unlikely people in the end.

Swift and terrible retribution is promised to all who write or speak critically of "Father"—so this is where I must await my doom!

S.K.