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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

The Decline of Christianity

THE past century and a-half has witnessed the concurrent decline of Christianity, for, during this era, which roughly corresponds in secular history with the era from the French Revolution down to our own day, the once imposing structure of Christian theology has steadily disintegrated with "all the inevitability of gradualness," to employ the political phraseology of our own day. It is the purpose of this article to outline the successive fundamental stages of this steady "Decline and Fall" of the once omnipotent and seemingly unassailable system of Christian Theology. For, up to the latter part of the eighteenth century, Christian Theology represented a kind of mental "Great Wall of China," impervious and impregnable to all the adverse winds of scepticism; based as it was upon what all seemed agreed was "The Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture."

To trace the successive stages in this decline from the majestic edifices of mediæval and reformed theology down to the nebulous apologetics and wishy-washy cant of present-day theology is a long story, but its fundamental stages can be briefly traced: we mark, three such stages.

Firstly, it was the Bible, "the Impregnable Rock" itself which has disintegrated under the hammer blows of modern historical and literary criticism. From the closing years of the eighteenth century on, a continuous critical evaluation of the literary sources of the Christian tradition and of those of its Old Testament prototype, Judaism, have completely dissolved the old pre-critical estimate of the authorship, nature, and purpose of the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments, along with so much other "sacred scripture" of other non-Christian faiths. Whilst there is, certainly, still plenty of room for disagreement on technical points, certain fundamental assumptions can now be safely stated with the concurrence, in some cases, a reluctant concurrence, of virtually all scholarly opinion.

Few, if any, of the Biblical books are the actual work of their titular authors; most of them are of unknown date written in the majority of cases, long after the events which they profess to describe at first hand, most of them have been freely "edited" and not infrequently, entirely re-written in and for the advantage of later ecclesiastical vested interests. More destructive still of ancient orthodox tradition, none of the Old Testament writers had any prevision of the New Testament; whilst none of the authors of the New Testament had any suspicion that they were either "inspired" themselves, or were themselves composing the Sacred Scriptures of a new religion, that came later. If Paul and company were to return to-day, they would indubitably be most astonished to find that they are to-day regarded as the founders of a new religion; as astonished as would be Isaiah and his Old Testament colleagues at discovering that they had predicted the Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ.

Thus, "The Word of God inspired in all its parts" has been reduced to the modest status of an ancient literature, of interest to the historian as indicating what the early Christians and their Hebrew forerunners thought about themselves, but of little value, and then chiefly by way of critical inference rather than by direct narrative, as actual sources of information for the origins of Christianity. How are the mighty fallen!

If the decline in credibility of the once-deemed infallible sacred scriptures, of the logical foundation of the entire historic structure of the Christian belief, constituted the first step in the break-up of the Christian Theology, the rise, and, subsequent acceptance of the theories of evolution, as propounded by Darwin and his contemporaries, marked the second, equally decisive phase of its decline. For Christian Theology, both Catholic and Protestant equally, is founded, both in actual logic and in supposed history, upon the inseparably associated beliefs in pre-Darwinian days in the professedly historic creation, the subsequent Fall of Man, and the consequent need for a Redeemer to save the posterity of Adam from the rightful consequences of their eering ancestors' "original sin" in the Garden of Eden. We repeat, the whole structure of Christian Theology, in both its main branches, Catholic and Protestant, stems from the pseudo-history of Genesis, no Fall, no Redeemer!

Consequently, the scientific proof of evolution by Darwin and his contemporaries was a deadly blow to the very foundations of Christianity. Once deprived of the historic Fall and of the consequent and subsequent need for Redemption, Christianity, indeed, virtually ceases to be a religion with a unique message of Salvation for mankind, and becomes merely a system of ethics—and a secondhand one at that. Properly understood, the Evolutionary theory makes Christianity, and the clergy, superfluous. Though, rather than acknowledge this obvious fact, "modernist" Christianity gives a diverting exhibition of mental and verbal acrobatics that must increase one's respect for clerical ingenuity, if not for the motives which inspire it.

The above intellectual revolutions promulgated by the Darwinian School of Biology and by the "Higher Criticism" of the Bible, belonged to the nineteenth century. Our own twentieth century has witnessed the origins of another line of critical thought, the third according to our present computation, a critical formulation which is still, at present, in its early stages and the impact of which upon traditional Christian orthodoxy has not yet produced its full effect. Did Jesus and the early Christians intend to found (what later became) the "Christian Religion"?

Or, more precisely, is orthodox Christianity and traditional Christian theology ultimately derived from its

* We use the names "Jesus" and "Christ" of the actual Founder, or Founders of the Christian Religion, without prejudging the still unresolved question as to their precise identity.

alleged founders, Jesus and his apostles or, rather, from the contemporary pagan "mystery religions" and their admittedly pre-Christian Gnostic cults of the Divine Redeemer and an elaborate sacramental theology, non-Jewish and considerably older than the Christian Era? As Bishop Barnes has honestly admitted, the developed sacramental theology of the Eucharist, of "the Body and Blood partaken for the remission of sins" is almost verbally identical with the pagan "mystery religions" of Dionysus and Mithra, and it has little or no connection with the original "Last Supper" of the earliest Christians, which was a commemorative meal pure and simple, having no connection with the Body and Blood of Christ.

Was the entire Christian theology derived, via the Gnostic theologians who wrote (or edited) the "Pauline" Epistles, from such already existing pagan sources? It is, perhaps, too early to say definitely yet; there is, as yet, no rationalist analysis of the whole question on a level with, say, Cassell's "Supernatural Religion" with regard to the composition and date of the Gospels. But the already available evidence seems to point unmistakably in that direction. Should it finally prove to be so, Christianity will be, not only "down" but, definitely "out."

We repeat: the above paragraphs outline successive intellectual stages in the current decline of Christianity and in the disintegration of contemporary Christian Theology.

F. A. RIDLEY.

RELIGION IN THE REIGN OF HENRY VIII

WHEN dealing with the Religious Reformation in his volume on Henry VIII, Dr. M. Smith reminds us that in an earlier work: *Pre-Reformation England*, he marked the signs of the momentous changes of coming generations, Colet, More, Erasmus and other Humanists favoured reform, but not of the sweeping character conducted by the King.

For a time, Oxford scholars championed the New Learning; but later, when Wolsey founded Cardinal College, he was driven to Cambridge for his preceptors. Men destined to be Reformers met at the White Horse Tavern in Cambridge, where religious difficulties were freely discussed. Dr. Smith avers that: "It was just the place where the young aired their extreme views and proposed reforms which their reverend seniors were certain could not be carried out. . . . It was the nest from which those who were to change the Church took their flight. Two of the members, Heath and Parker became archbishops; seven of them became bishops . . . and eight of them became martyrs; Bilney, Tyndale, Clark, Frith, Lambert, Barnes, Ridley and Latimer."

Our author deems the greatest treasure from Henry's reign to be the English rendering of the Bible. It is true that there were versions in Flemish, French, Spanish and Italian, as well as the Lollard translations in England, but Wyclif's Bible was barred as heretical. In 1408 a Provincial Council had decreed that: "No man by his own authority may translate any text of the Scriptures," or read the same unless authorised by the Diocesan Council. Yet 180 MSS. of Lollard Scriptures have survived. As Dr. Smith states: "The Transcription of the whole Bible must have taken at least a year and, in addition to the wages of the scribes, must be added the cost of materials and the binding. We may conclude that in our currency such a book would have been cheap at £150. Foxe tells us how Nicholas Belward,

the Norfolk Lollard, bought in London a New Testament for four marks and forty pence, that is for nearly £50 of our money."

Erasmus' rendering of the New Testament directed disciples of the New Learning from classical to Biblical themes. Tyndale and other Cambridge scholars undertook their translations. As chaplain to Dr. Tunstall, Bishop of London, Tyndale proved wild and wayward. So in 1524, he crossed the Channel and never returned to England. At Hamburg he translated the Pentateuch into English. As Dr. Smith observes: "It would be hard to overpraise the work of Tyndale. His version indeed, needed correction, and has been several times revised, but the New Testament we read to-day is substantially the work that Tyndale gave to England 400 years ago."

At this time, all Protestant translations and polemical tracts—especially when they emanated from Wittenberg—were viewed with aversion in orthodox circles. Moreover: "In 1526, many people in England were terrified by Lutheranism. In the years 1524-25 there had been the Peasants' War. Atrocities had been committed on both sides, and the conscience of Europe had been shocked. The revolt was due to agrarian grievances and feudal despotism."

Ordinary people in England regarded Reformers as rude disturbers of the public peace. Although the Catholic, Charles V, had entered into friendly relations with the Lutheran princes of Germany while engaged in his Tunisian adventure, he was still determined that heresy should not infect his hereditary realms and, above all, that Flanders should not serve as an asylum for heretics from abroad. Thus, Tyndale stood in dire danger of arrest, imprisonment and a fiery death in the Netherlands. Betrayed by an informer named Phillips, Tyndale was incarcerated in the fortress of Vilvorde, which, lying beyond the jurisdiction of the Amsterdam authorities, gave them no opportunity to intervene.

Phillips sought to ingratiate himself with the English Government to secure a monetary reward for his treachery. But Tyndale had lost all interest with the home authorities, and Phillips's overtures were ignored. Again his own character was suspect so, alarmed for his personal safety, he sold his possessions at Louvain and fled to Paris. Our author notes that Tyndale's imprisonment "lasted nearly eighteen months, but there is no reason to believe that he was harshly treated. Netherlands prisons were not so vile as those of England; and though Tyndale had to pay, or his friends to pay, for his keep, he was not subject to the brutality and extortion he might have experienced from an English turnkey."

At his trial, the Louvain theologians disregarded Tyndale's services to Humanism. To them he was merely a pernicious heretic. So in 1536 he was degraded from the priesthood and consigned to the secular authorities for punishment. In October of the same year he was sent to the stake and then strangled so that only his lifeless body was consumed in the flames. While awaiting death, Tyndale's thoughts dwelt on his New Testament which had been banned by Henry VIII and he earnestly prayed for the King's conversion. It is surmised that he would have thought his prayers answered had he known that Coverdale's version of the Scriptures was already in use in England. "A year later," observes Dr. Smith, "the same Bible was issued with a new frontispiece, showing the King crowned on his throne," distributing Coverdale's Bible to the bishops for use throughout their sees. It contained a special Address to the Reader, while, notes Dr. Smith: "In the first issue of the Dedication to the King there

is mention of ' your dearest just wife, and most virtuous princess, Queen Anne ' ; but in a few months ' your dearest just wife, and most virtuous princess ' was Queen Jane. There exist copies where the change in the name has been made with a pen."

Dr. Smith confesses that were one to judge from Coverdale's Dedication alone, the Bible's chief function is the proclamation of the divine rights of kings. Coverdale was intensely loyal and approved Henry's divorce from his first wife. So in the Biblical passage dealing with the levirate (Deut. XXV, 5) Coverdale substituted *his kinsman for her husband's brother*. This impelled Chapuys to inform his sovereign, Charles V, that: " A Bible has been printed here in England in which the texts that favoured the Queen [Catherine] . . . have been translated in the opposite sense."

Among the many anomalies of the Roman Church, was the brazen manner in which pilgrimages to the tombs and relics of saints were conducted. Images and relics were credited with magical powers and the adoration of saints was indistinguishable from worship. " Finally," declares Dr. Smith, " the Pope discovered that the saints had done a superfluity of good works, and that these constituted a treasury of merit on which he could draw, assigning them to the credit of anyone who could pay for them cash down. Originally, indulgences had been a sensible expedient for freeing men from an intolerable or impossible penance in this world, but through the treasury of merit they had developed into a shameful traffic on the pretence that a Pope in need of money could overrule the justice of God in another world."

Our author opines that liberty of thought and expression in the Church of England is far more gain than loss. Certainly, a Church which excommunicates its heretics is strongly entrenched. But still stronger is the Anglican Church when it condones and even encourages freedom of thought and inquiry " confident that in the end Truth will prevail."

T. F. PALMER.

HISTORY IS BUNK

THE First Henry Ford once startled the world by declaring that history was bunk, and, if my memory is serviceably faithful, he indicated also that all events desirable for man to know were reported in the daily newspapers. Niebuhr, the historian of Ancient Rome, had long previously remarked that he who knew nothing of events which occurred before his birth was mentally a child. Niebuhr was, however, not the primary source of this observation, for Cicero had also made it, and as Cicero was a notable plagiarist, it had, for that reason alone, probably been made before him. In any case it was the sort of saying we should expect from the argumentative Greeks, and its formulation does not necessarily imply intellectual depth.

Henry was, of course, wrong in suggesting reliance on the daily journalistic draught, and, no doubt, would not, under protest, have maintained that opinion without qualification. He was old when he discharged his aphorism, but, let us hope, not so ossified as to have lost all flexibility. One can, however, never be sure of that with people afflicted with the lust to manufacture.

The first trouble of daily journalism is that some of its " news " is known by its editors to be untrustworthy. During that miserable episode when the Italians sought to carry 20th century civilization to the Ethiopians, our pseudo-evening papers often told of Ethiopian victories, but the journals of the next morning carried amended accounts of Ethiopian defeats. In this example the

correction followed so closely on the false news that not much harm was done, but the unreliability of the press often goes much deeper.

Some false reports are never contradicted; some again are deliberate and part of a campaign of proselytism. Can we, for example, suppose that the Italian press of the period when the attacks on Ethiopia, Albania and Greece were contemplated and made carried true accounts of the facts? Can it be asserted that the reports in our own press of events in Russia, Yugoslavia and other countries contiguous to these, have not been sometimes false, deliberately, or by sub-conscious bias? Where would Henry have us go to correct the errors, or decide which account to believe? No, dear Henry, we need to supplement reading of the daily press.

When we consider Henry's jibe at the normal histories, we feel a sneaking sympathy with his view, for much " history " is, indeed, balderdash. Did not Niebuhr himself " debunk " many stories of ancient Rome? Remus and Romulus indeed! Was not the tale of William Tell, Gessler and the apple found to be a myth, and after having been the object of great faith, even in the Swiss universities? Think, too, of Alfred and his cakes, and—forgive me Scots—of Bruce's spider. Of course, what we would reject is not history, but what wrongly passes for it.

Pseudo-history is very large. There is the Bible, which for the most part is history only in the sense that it incorporates information of the beliefs and customs of very, and not so very, ancient people. In that sense it is part of the science of anthropology, and this is part of the science of history. This idea of history as science indicates the difficulty which Ford sensed, and which led him to his rash remark. History is a science; therefore it is difficult, involving collection of information, research, sifting and weighing of evidence, and a continual questioning of accepted views. Especially the last is difficult, for accepted views are often much more than opinions of historians; they are part of the structure of the State, as, for example, Christianity, which is, in its turn, the prop of many things. In the U.K. it is the chief support of royalism, and conservatism in general. In this country it is easier to attack capitalism than royalism or religion. Many novelists are prone to display invective against big business; it helps their reputation, but, along with their journalist brethren and famous socialist politicians, they metaphorically doff the hat and bend the knee to Christ and the King. If Christianity is in question they hasten to assert that they do not object to true religion, but only to its corruptions. Valiant demagogues assure us that Christianity is the basis of our western civilisation, in spite of the fact that when the Christian story in the New Testament is examined it crumbles away, and as for the view of this religion being the basis of the worthwhile in our history it cannot be maintained except by ignoring the authentic story of its fraud, forgery, persecution of opponents, and general social effect.

The view that the Bible could be called history only in a special sense might be better expressed by saying it is material for history rather than history. It is part of the web of our knowledge, which as a great historian of medicine, Arturo Castiglioni, remarks, goes back to distant and diverse origins. No one could, said he, comprehend the present accurately and profoundly and look intelligently into the future who is not acquainted with the sources of knowledge or able to follow the roads along which knowledge of the truth has reached us.

The effect of Christianity as a civilising agency, so far as medicine is concerned, does not seem good. A high standard of medical knowledge had been reached before

the time of Christ. Castiglioni mentions the later time of Galen, A.D. 129 to 200, as marking the culminating point of Graeco-Roman medicine, the decisive force in which all the currents of scientific thought seemed to have been united. It signalled, he says, also the beginning of decadence. Views of the actual cause of the decay differ. Continual war, the influence of Oriental thought (and Christianity was oriental), and a series of great epidemics all played a part. In fact social causes are never isolated events but totalities of pre-existing conditions.

There were five great pestilences of early Christian days which are worth mention. The first followed the eruption of Vesuvius, A.D. 79, spread through the Campagna, and is said to have destroyed tens of thousands daily. Then there was the plague of Orosius, A.D. 125 and onwards. In Numidia more than 800,000 people are said to have died. The pestilence of Galen, A.D. 164 to 180 caused the death of thousands daily, and there was the pestilence of Cyprian, A.D. 251 to 261, an epidemic of smallpox. With deference to Ford, however, let us be doubtful, at least of the reported figures—the ancients weren't good at statistics.

It is precisely in periods like these that there is an anguished and fearful search for supernatural aid. Before Christianity became dominant general superstition concerning disease abounded, and Aesculapius Salvator was worshipped. His worship was, on the coming of Christian predominance, transferred to Christ, and early features of Christ in some statuary were modelled on Aesculapius. Scientific medicine decayed, and Christianity did not procure its revivification, but went along the path of fantasy; casting out devils, and laying on of hands.

Christianity was itself an effect of decadence, and in its turn a cause of it, or a potent factor in its cause. Medical decadence lasted long. Luther called doctors who were not believers in devil-possession, ignorant blockheads, and, much later, Samuel Johnson got Queen Anne to touch him for scrofula, and in the 19th century anaesthesia in childbirth was resisted because of Genesis.

Thus, although Henry Ford was wrong, much which is yet called history is unworthy of the name.

J. G. LUPTON.

ONE VOTE

SUNDAY evening scene in the Picture House vestibule was much as usual. People in twos and groups drifted in and out, silent or chatting and laughing softly, perhaps toned down by the carpet underfoot, the warmth and subdued lighting.

One variant this cold autumn night was a small table near the pay office. On it lay a pile of papers, pens and ink. By it stood a member of the Picture House staff. He never raised his voice, but talked quietly to entrants as they turned from taking tickets, also pointing to a poster which in heavy type exhorted them:—

“Patrons of Sunday shows: Speak, agitate and vote for your right to attend Cinema on Sundays, for efforts are being made to deprive you of that pleasure and privilege.”

Many people, some straightway, others after murmured discussion among themselves, signed the petition in favour of Sunday cinema.

Entered an oldish man, slightly bent, walking slowly yet firmly, with strength indicated in his square-shouldered frame. His clothes were shabby but good, well cared for as he was cleaned up from his dirty work of weekday.

After he paid for a cheap seat the young man said to him, “I'm sure you'll sign the petition.”

“What for?”

“They're trying to stop Sunday shows.”

“No!”

“They'll do so if you don't stir about it.”

“Dirty dogs! It's the only amusement I can get to.”

“Then you must sign.”

Said the older man hesitantly: “I'd like to, but my sight isn't good and my hand's shaky.”

“That doesn't matter a bit,” the young man breezily assured him. “Your name's as good as anybody's. Come on.”

Genially he took the old patron by the arm, led him to the table, and dipping a pen in ink placed it in the man's fingers.

Laboriously, a mixture of scrawl and heavy strokes he traced the signature “Tom Bradd.”

“Thanks,” said his mentor briskly. “Watch out for the next move. Don't be robbed of your rights.”

Slowly nodding his head and with some gleam of indignation in his eyes the old fellow walked in to take his seat.

All the week Tom Bradd was at work in a yard shovelling coal into bags and selling it to customers from back streets, more often in halves and quarters than hundredweights. This toil was laborious, the man going home tired as well as dirty. By the time he washed, and prepared and ate his supper in the tenement lodging he occupied, he felt no inclination to go out. Following one pipeful of tobacco and a lethargic sit in a chair he went early to bed, sleeping till next morning.

Saturdays he finished at mid-day. After eating he had a nap, then shaved, a painful and lengthy process with the amount of stubble which grew on his chin in a week. At evening he did his shopping, later going to the nearest public house. Here he drank three or four pints of beer and listened to the talk, having little to say.

Sunday morning he lay in bed till mid-day, dined, and in the afternoon smartened himself and changed his clothes. Sunday night was devoted to a cinema, in which he was intensely interested, enjoying every reel in the programme.

The Sunday following the one on which he signed the petition in favour of Sunday opening, Tom Bradd saw in the vestibule a poster. With difficulty he made out its message to be a notice of the Town's Meeting on the following Wednesday to discuss the matter and vote on it.

In his subdued voice, half communing with himself the man said, “I shall go and vote. It's nearly the only pleasure I get in the week.”

He remembered the time and place of the meeting. Satisfying scrutineers, by giving name and address for them to verify, that he was an elector, Tom Bradd entered the Town Hall, one of a large, keen audience.

Debate was vigorous and lively. Clergy and ministers were leaders against Sunday opening of cinema. Opposing them were councillors and a solicitor. The latter was in good form, drawing his listeners to enthusiasm. Tom Bradd applauded loudly, all he could do save put up his hand affirmatively when voting was taken at the end. This was in favour. Tom Bradd remarked, “So it ought to be. There's nothing else for people like me.”

Next Sunday he read a notice in the Picture House calling on patrons to vote at the poll demanded by opponents of Sunday films. He said aloud, “I shall.”

Going straight from work on Thursday evening, Tom Bradd entered the polling booth and took the prescribed

form on which to record his opinion. Slowly and carefully he made a thickly drawn cross in the space for marking an affirmative vote.

Having folded the paper and dropped it in the ballot box, he said to the presiding officer, "I want to see a big vote for Sunday pictures. I can't read much, so it's about the only pleasure I get after a week's hard work."

Nodding, he went out, full of hope for an affirmative majority, which to his satisfaction came at the night's counting.

A. R. WILLIAMS.

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND SCHOOLS

SOME readers may recall the Education Bill of 1908; it was the first of the new Liberal administration's legislative measures, which was thrown out by the House of Lords. Among its proposals was one that State aided schools should confine religious instruction to what its Nonconformist sponsors dubbed "Simple Bible Teaching." It was argued that all Christians believed in the Bible; ergo, its simple teaching was the groundwork of all Christian sects. The bungalow structure of Simple Bible Teaching would suit the Nonconformist conscience, and the Church of England could add a story to cover their organisational church theories, while the Catholics could put on an attic to house their centralist Vatican control.

The "simple" fact of the matter was, of course, that this so-called Simple Bible Teaching was non-conformity and its "simplicity" was merely giving their interpretation of the Christian superstition. From the point of view of Canterbury or Rome, the heresy would already have been inoculated, and an intolerable situation created. In short, the argument was spurious, a dodge to snaffle the Church schools for Nonconformity.

Now a somewhat similar situation is arising in a move being made by the Catholics. Even that wealthy concern is feeling that £60,000,000, as they allege, for the upkeep of their schools, is a bit over the mark. So they are putting forward a plan which is the obverse side of the Nonconformist medal of 1908. The Catholics propose to hand over their schools to the State—but on conditions.

They make much of the fact that Catholics, "who are for the most part dependent on a weekly wage" are compelled, in addition to paying their full quota of rates for non-Catholic State schools, to support their own. Well, we all have to pay rates and taxes for things we don't want, and their proposal merely amounts to you and I, who also pay our full quota to support State schools, paying towards the upkeep of schools teaching Catholic doctrine as well.

What then are the conditions on which Catholics insist? I will quote from their Hierarchy's own statement: "The (State) authorities would be given the sole power of regulating the secular curriculum and the Church would surrender the right of the Catholic managers to appoint teachers. Teachers, however, would be subject to approval as regards religious belief, character and fitness by representatives of the Church, and the religious education provided in the school would continue unchanged."

Thus the conditions are two in number: (i) religious education to remain Catholic, and (ii) teachers, though appointed by the secular authority, to be subject to approval by the Church. The demand that ratepayers shall be called upon to finance schools wherein religious teaching, and that exclusively Catholic, shall be an

integral part of their curriculum, may at first sight seem the most unreasonable. But, in my submission, it is the first-mentioned condition which is the more insidious and dangerous.

Religious teaching is plain for what it is. The child when it grows up and develops a rational way of thinking may discard this metaphysical school blazer. But he may not so easily become aware that what was taught him as history, economics, physics, etc., was coloured with the same religious outlook. The position of the observer is a material factor in the thing observed, science tells us. Precisely, and the thing observed by the Catholic-minded teacher, whatever its nature, will be materially affected by the Catholic standpoint; and this is more particularly so with the totalitarian creed of the Roman sect than with that of any other. There is the fly in the ointment—the secularly-appointed teacher must meet with the approval of the Catholic managers as to faith, morals and general suitability. In other words, if the choice of applicant is between a physics master of first rate quality but an atheist, and one of third rate quality but a Catholic, well, the children will just have to do with third rate physics; they must have first-rate Catholic approaches.

This, I say, is the more insidious danger in the Catholic Hierarchy's proposal. There are millions in the world to-day with a wrong attitude to their fellows by reason of a false conception of history, and quite unaware that that conception is due to the religious prejudices of their teacher; and others who are held back from valid material concepts by some unconscious inhibition, deriving from their early religious teaching, though they think they have long shed such childish superstitions.

It is to be hoped, therefore, that rationalists will also have questions to put to parliamentary candidate as to why the State should use our money to further the aims of the Catholic Church.

P. C. KING.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF ATHEISM

Religionists never tire of claiming that Atheism is "purely negative." To help refute this falsehood, chalk up the following for Atheism:—

It banishes fear of the supernatural. Fear of hell, of the devil, of God, and of evil spirits has brought and still brings untold mental suffering—and thus, mental slavery—to the human race. Atheism replaces this stifling superstition with intellectual emancipation.

Based upon the philosophy of naturalism, Atheism encourages science, whereas religion, born of ignorance and feeding upon a decreasing belief in supernaturalism, fears science.

Atheism reveals the true basis of ethics—the desire of man to be happy here and now. It shows that man should be moral, not because it is the will of a God, but because good conduct pays better than bad conduct.

It reduces disagreements. With so many conflicting religions, there can never be universal peace and real fellowship. Atheism, by ridding the world of imaginary beings, lays a foundation for harmony.

Atheism enhances courage. To embrace a religion and spout nonsense requires only a rubber-like spine. But to face the world and espouse Atheism openly necessitates courage.

Atheism saves time, energy, and money, which religionists waste by worshipping gods.

DEWEY COLLETT
(The Atheist, U.S.A.)

LIFT UP YOUR HEADS, An Anthology for Freethinkers.

By William Kent. Price, cloth 5s., paper 3s. 6d.; postage 3d.

PSYCHO-ANALYSIS—A MODERN DELUSION. By

Frank Kenyon. Price 5s.; postage 3d.

THE BIBLE: WHAT IS IT WORTH? By Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 2d.; postage 1d.

ACID DROPS

The "trial by ordeal" was almost postponed at Ealing Police Court when the Bible was found to be missing from the witness box; a previous witness had pocketed it. Proceedings were held up until a sergeant went in search of a similar fetish book. Would not a copy of "Alice in Wonderland" have been as efficacious? Or did the magistrate really believe that people can tell the truth only after being threatened with a "so help me Gawd?" However, all judges are not so naive as this for it is narrated of Mr. Justice Maule who, when a witness said "I have been wedded to the truth since infancy," replied, "Maybe, but how long have you been a widower."

We are not foolish enough to think that His Majesty's Government wait on the publication of *The Freethinker* every Thursday before their deliberations, but we have on more than one occasion suggested that before Churches are repaired or rebuilt, housing should be first on the list. In New Cross, at least, this seems to be the procedure, for the Rev. Mr. Broadbent has got quite nasty because "practically all the houses have been repaired, and even pubs and cinemas have their neon lights going, but the Parish Church still has its leaky roof," etc. He added that it is the people themselves who are to blame (as if they were complaining) and they are more concerned with "material comfort than with spiritual welfare." To which profound remark we can only add, "Hear, hear."

Partial Excommunication is the latest penalty imposed by the Pope on newsagents who "knowingly and freely" sell communist newspapers. If the Vatican proposes to ban the sale of all other newspapers critical of Catholicism, newsagents will be in for a lean time.

The Israeli Government is really getting into its stride and is performing the function of a government: that is, to govern. Not only is it so concerned with the welfare of its citizens that it bans any marriage outside the "faith," but the second commandment is being enforced, no sculpture of any kind is allowed. It is true that some Talmudic theologians maintain that the injunction by Jehovah to Moses that "Thou shalt not make any graven image" meant only that no one shall worship any graven image, but then Talmudists are quite as adept in tautology as any of their fellow witch doctors. We often wonder if it strikes Israel that even Hitler only objected to *some* marriages and *some* forms of sculpture.

It is well known that no matter how often and how long a Christian lie is exposed and scotched, it makes no difference, the lie is still assiduously spread about, particularly if it is about a heretic. The deathbed recantation of Thomas Paine, as repeated by Mary Roscoe, is the subject of an article in the *Aldershot News* recently. This has been time and time again proved to be a lie, even Mary Roscoe has denied the story. But does this make any difference to the slanders? Not a bit.

The terrible threat of "eternal consequences" on all those men who would not come into the Church uttered by the *Church Times* to which we referred the other week appears to have been a veritable damp squib. The Rev. H. Dobson, writing to the journal in reply, said the people to whom he gave the awful warning just laughed

at him. "They say they do not expect any eternal consequences either bad or good, and even if there may be, they are prepared to take the risk," he complains. Mr. Dobson is to be congratulated on having the courage to state the truth—and the *Church Times* for publishing it. For it must be a sad blow to ecclesiastical pride to find people laughing at threats which are just so much twaddle.

All ranks, from generals to privates, are being roped in to the latest Christian drive in the army. We particularly like the idea of the courses in "Christian information and practical application of Christian principles" which are being given at the chaplains' headquarters. Atomic bombs are, of course, a part of this "Christian application."

The Pope, perhaps seeing that nothing else will do the trick, is now asking for a "prayer crusade" to get the Holy Places in Jerusalem back from the Israelis. We have an idea that so long as this is done, the Israelis won't be unduly disturbed. Why does not the Vatican send a detachment of its Papal soldiers and have it properly fought out in true military fashion? Surely a good Papal soldier will not mind giving up his life for such a holy cause?

Awful discovery. A writer on the *Universe* seems to have made an analysis of the Christmas card market of 1949, and he claims that cards "with the faintest reference to the Incarnation have totally disappeared." This is quite true. Christmas is a pagan festival, designed for fun and games, and has no more to do with the Incarnation than the moon. But—oh boy, he should see our "Christmas" card . . . !

Lourdes has managed to unearth two modern defenders at last. The first is the Rev. Leslie D. Weatherhead who said in the *British Weekly* that "it is not a ramp . . . Lourdes is a tremendous success"; and then, perhaps thinking of his Nonconformist readers, added, "but as a place of healing it is negligible." The second defender is an M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P., etc., "Specialist." He said in the *Journal of Physio-therapy*, "The almost magical effect . . . at Lourdes, which we in the mid-twentieth century of scientific achievement must still acknowledge as the unknown magical quality of spa-therapy." That blessed word "magical"—it can explain anything!

One fact stands out in the revival of the Oberammergau Passion Play. The gentleman who has been chosen to represent Jesus is a thorough light-haired "Aryan"—all accounts make him an ex-Nazi—and of course not a scrap like the Arab-Semitic type Jesus must have had he really lived. Herr Preisinger has not even a Jewish nose. Still the play will help to foster the anti-Semitism which some people foolishly imagine no longer exists among the ex-Nazis. It had marvellous success in this before the war and no doubt will be equally successful now.

THINGS WE WOULD LIKE TO KNOW—

Cannot the Spiritualists give us the date of the next Election; and, more important, who will win?

Are Dr. Weizmann and General Smuts gratified with the results of their life's work in what Lord Samuel's termed "a free South Africa and a Jewish State?"

"THE FREETHINKER"

Telephone No.: Holborn 2601.

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

TO CORRESPONDENTS

T. OWEN.—Many thanks—but you will have noticed that we dealt with the point you raise.

THOMAS BENTON.—Thanks for cuttings.

A. SYKES (U.S.A.).—Celibacy was enjoined on the higher clergy in 305 A.D. by the Synod of Elvira and on all clergy by the Council of Trent in 1545 A.D. In spite of opposition, it was re-enforced by the Council of Trent in 1545 A.D.

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).

Lecture Notices should reach the Office by Friday morning. 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.

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.

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.

SUGAR PLUMS

The Brains Trust in the Town Hall, Broadway, Stratford, London, E.15, on Thursday, December 8th, arranged by the Executive of the N.S.S. is attracting considerable interest, and Freethinkers from different parts of London intend to be present. The Rev. D. S. Wallace Hadrill, M.A., B.D., Vicar of Holy Cross, Hornchurch, the Rev. F. R. Wright, M.A., Vicar of Romford, Mr. R. H. Rosetti and Mr. L. Ebury will each speak for 15 minutes on "Is There a God?" and then questions on that subject will be invited from the audience. Alderman E. Cannon, of West Ham, will be the Question Master. As on the previous occasion, questions are expected to come fast and pointed. The proceedings begin at 7-30 p.m., and admission is free.

Applications for tickets for the N.S.S. Annual Dinner on Saturday evening, January 7, are coming through quickly and at the moment it looks as though there will be some disappointments as last year. The disappointments will naturally come to the late applicants, so those who wish to be present should send without delay for tickets, enclosing 15s. per ticket, noting any vegetarians, to the General Secretary, N.S.S., 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1. Besides the dinner there will be speeches, a musical programme, a reception with general introductions among the party. Perhaps the best testimony is the number who make the Annual Dinner a fixed engagement for each year.

One of the nicest touches from a very good audience at the Birmingham Branch N.S.S. meeting last Sunday in Satis Cafe was their hearty endorsement that a message of sympathy with Mr. Chapman Cohen in his recent accident be sent to him, coupled with grateful appreciation of all he has done and meant to the Freethought movement in this country. We are pleased to inform readers that Mr. Cohen is making satisfactory progress. Mr. R. H. Rosetti was the speaker and the best testimony to his address on "An Evening with the Gods" was the number who gave him their personal thanks after the meeting was over.

At a meeting held by the Merseyside Branch N.S.S. on November 6, it was decided to appeal to Birkenhead Freethinkers to join their Liverpool friends in furthering freethought propaganda on both sides of the Mersey. Will all Birkenhead freethinkers get in touch with Mr. A. E. Jones, 48, Grasville Road, Higher Tramere, who has agreed to act as local representative.

"The Rationalist Annual for 1950," edited by Frederick Watts (Watts & Co., 2s. 6d.) keeps up its fine tradition and reputation with many excellent and varied articles on matters of the greatest interest to Freethinkers. Sir Arthur Keith, Prof. Gilbert Murray, Dr. Maurice Burton, and Prof. J. B. S. Haldane, are among the contributors, and there is something for all tastes in all their scholarly contributions. We must single out, however, the article by Dr. Burton which, for all who are interested in Biology and Evolution, will tell them a great deal they should know. "The more we progress along the path of biological knowledge," he writes, "the more we find that fundamental truths elude us." This should form the best possible working text for those optimists who imagine that all we need now to do is to sit back with the feeling that we almost know it all.

In a lighter vein is Mr. Royston Pike's account of Voltaire at Ferney—the period of Voltaire's life when he was attacking the "infamous" with all the terrible power of words at his command. It is well and entertainingly written. Prof. Firth writes on "An Anthropological View of Mysticism"—an important analysis, and Mr. Gowans Whyte deals with the vital question of "The Teacher, the Child, and the Church." Prof. Heath writes of Darwin and that *enfant terrible* of Darwinism, Samuel Butler—but all the articles should be read, merely mentioning titles is fair neither to them nor to their writers.

How the unfortunate boys who are training for the Navy are badgered into religion is delightfully admitted in a naval chaplain's article in a recent number of the *Church Times*. There, he shows quite clearly how as soon as a boy steps foot on deck "the practice of religion holds a prominent and natural place in the life of the establishment." The day begins with the Holy Sacrifice, hymns are sung and prayers reverently delivered at Morning Divisions, and there are more prayers in the evening in the chapel. We are also told that the boys get religion as well in "the multifarious activities of their daily life."

The boys appear never to get rid of the chaplain for he is always with them "instructing the boys in the faith of the Church." After training, a boy is "personally commended" to the chaplain of the ship to which he is drafted. And no doubt the unfortunate young chap will have similar administrations from his new Navy chaplain. The truth is that the boys in the Navy are forced to have religion—woe betide any who refuses it. And it is one of the worst exploitations in modern life. In the name of "discipline," these poor boys are made to swallow a mass of Christian drivel given up long ago by most Bishops. Can anyone in Parliament speak up for them?

The propaganda department of the Church Assembly has slipped badly by allowing it to be known that 300 redundant churches have been offered to the Ministry of Works. How can they appeal with any justice for further financial help to build new churches?

REASON IN THE CHURCH

I

IT is often asked, how do reasoning Catholics remain in the Church with so much illogicality? One might set out to catalogue "reasons" only to find as many as there are Catholics. To assume ulterior "motives" is to fall for theology, for these are animistic and theological. Though it concerns everyone, the "science" of logic is an integral basis of the "Queen of the Sciences." But the illogicality is paradoxical, for the question is how and not why.

J. M. Robertson once started an essay with the old woman's question, what do we want a definition of an elephant for when everyone knows what an elephant is? He said it was a question of which elephant, but the real question is whether we know the difference between real elephants, white elephants and pink elephants. And as Chapman Cohen said, an elephant is no more wonderful than a flea, only bigger. If reason begins with childhood's questions, adults are perplexed, the child puzzled. But the child may show philosophic insight in learning and a philosopher, childish absurdity in teaching. Questions involved are the same for all, but involve a difference in method, of explanation and observation, which become confused in argumentation.

If eminent modern logicians are as much at sea as the ancients, it is little wonder if the ordinary Catholic is bemused. Hegelians give us dialectic antagonism as reason, and Bertrand Russell "the philosopher who has reinstated logic" accepts St. Thomas Aquinas' idea that analogy is the basis of logic. Logic, like mathematics, is abstract and general; accuracy is only possible in mathematics and logic; knowledge is uncertain; and so, Thomism is justified, although the theologian can still use the Socratic method of putting the question and Aristotle's systematic method of inquisitorial interrogation.

Poor old J. W. Poynter told us that "a course of Thomas Aquinas would not do anybody any harm," a peculiar remark that suggests an absence of benefit. Miss Dorothy Emmet, also accepting analogy as the basis of logic, said that we should pay more attention to the subtleties of St. Thomas' argument. But the matter is not one of subtlety but of intellectual confusion. If the word reason is ambiguous, so also is logic, for here the term logic is used in two entirely different ways. If Aristotle's system is scientific, Aquinas' system is the reverse. If Aristotle's method is one of testing argument, that of Aquinas is one of avoiding logical inconsistency, and it does so by evading the tests of Aristotle's system.

In Aquinas' *Analogy of Being*, the title gives the word and the argument runs, that *something* exists, but we cannot know what, for we can only think by analogy. If, for instance, we speak of God as Father, we do not mean our actual parent; we must consider the sense in which an analogy is used. Accepting Aristotle's six kinds or modes of existence, being, essence, reality, etc. Aquinas argues five ways of considering it. As degrees of perfection; there is no perfect analogy and God only is Perfect. Animistically, of things acting or acted upon, God is Pure Act. As degrees of purity, of truth and error; God is Pure Being or Truth. As complexes of good and evil; God is Good. Finally, existence as a whole, can be thought of on the analogy of the Church as a hierarchy of being; as the Pope is head of the Church, so is God of the Universe. The system is elaborate and voluminous.

But this white elephant has its use. In Aristotle's system a primary maxim concerns definition, but here we are given indefinable terms, as being, essence, reality, and even the possibility of definition is denied in imperfect analogy. In place of definition we are given particular instances to illustrate, so we are arguing from the particular, but in Aristotle's method, at least one proposition in a syllogism must contain a generalisation, so that we reason from the general. Aristotle's idea is to avoid contradiction but here it is openly asserted. Aristotle's method concerns arguments as abstract propositions but here we are concerned with "necessary being." So, with this method we achieve logical consistency by evading logical criticism, which is applied to our opponents demanding definition and clarity. By such methods one can carry any idea to its "logical conclusions" to reach the point of absurdity and still consider oneself logical.

This enormous intellectual edifice is built on a foundation in which the allogical primitive analogy is confused with logic. But it is clear that our reasoning Catholic does not wade through all this. Charles Singer said that "as a sustained intellectual effort" Aquinas is the "most remarkable and fatiguing" ever. This method achieves intellectual exhaustion and to our modern psychologists or alienists mental fatigue is the very essence of hypnotism. Our reasoning Catholic then, thinks his position logically sound; is accepting beliefs in a mystical solemnness which is the result of the primitive method of analogy. So we see, there is an element of mysticism in logic and an element of logic in mysticism. We are not only concerned with white elephants but also with pink elephants.

We need go no further for evidence than Bertrand Russell, who has argued that logic and mysticism are two co-existent "impulses," and that mysticism is illogical; but fails to see that his logic is mystical. Being a teacher, he seems incapable of learning from experience. Being a metaphysician, he is more concerned with "abstract consideration of the possible" than with the actual. Separating the inseparable, he does not relate experience in observation but lives in mystical abstraction, where he finds the perfect analogy in the logic of mathematical symbolism. And so, being a mystic, he is aware of contrary impulses. As with Aquinas, his acceptance of analogy as the basis of logic leads him into inconsistency as in the denial of knowledge of the physical world and the uncertainty of knowledge. His white elephant is built upon the same foundation and so he also is involved in the same mystical self-denial.

Speaking for myself, I know nothing of any such impulses, but I can give logical consideration to the statements of logicians and mystics concerning their methods, but further consideration calls for another article.

H. H. PREECE.

The Anglo-Catholic journal, the *Church Times*, admits that "both English and German Roman Catholics prayed for victory of their respective forces" with the formula of "Thy Will be done," and God seems to have let the German Catholics down badly. But though Roman Catholics don't mind praying to the same God, they positively refuse to pray with other believers who are not Catholics. The *Church Times* is very grieved, but there is one simple way out of the difficulty. Give in entirely to Roman Catholicism—and all will be well in the Vatican and in Heaven.

REBUKE TO THE CENSOR

An Imaginary Preface to an Unwritten Play

AFTER seeing this play performed, most people will ask themselves a pertinent question. It had better therefore be answered beforehand. How comes it that the censor should permit the public performance of a horrible, degrading and immoral play, dealing openly with abortion, gonorrhoea, pox and venereal disease in general? It is, of course, not an immoral play at all, the only offence being the use of words not usually uttered in polite society. These words are shocking but it is a surprising fact that they only shock on first hearing. After repetition, one accepts them as medical terms. The word "abortion" does not necessarily imply human interference; some of nature's processes are thus referred to by doctors.

However, if you, the audience, care to pretend you are all members of a club and buy your tickets beforehand, we can put on the stage any play we like—within certain very wide limits—without let or hindrance from the Lord Chamberlain's Office. Having, so to speak, cocked the snook at the censor, let us examine him and his office. Pay your money the day before the performance, keep up the pretence of giving a purely private performance to club members and you can fill a large theatre with thousands of the general public and put on an uncensored play. But that is not to say that you may put a frankly immoral play before your audience. Not a bit of it. There is still the policeman to be considered and in the United States at any rate, he has the power to interfere, ring down the curtain and throw every member of the company into gaol—as has happened in that liberty-loving country.

The censor of plays may, if he thinks fit, withhold a license for any play with immoral tendencies though he is unlikely to interfere unless the fault is gross. But if you think, dear reader, that his sole or indeed main job is to consider a play's moral or immoral tendencies, you have a surprise coming. Such is not the case. You may try to get a risky play passed for production and will probably succeed. The censor will consider the matter and render his verdict; but if you attempt to ridicule a politician, introduce a comic cabinet minister or put any living member of the Royal Family on the stage, the censor will not consider the matter at all. He will flatly forbid you to do it. Did not Laurence Hausman have to wait 20 years before being allowed to show us Queen Victoria and then permission was only granted reluctantly on the intervention of the King? Now why should this be? Are we not to laugh at our politicians on the stage? By no means. But we may laugh to our heart's content at the spectacle of a creature shuffling about half blind, suffering from hereditary venereal disease. We may even put a brothel on the stage. There was a brothel staged at a large well-known London theatre some time ago. Of course, it was referred to as a café, but the attendant harlots meeting their men, stuffing their payment into that silken bank which such girls know so well, the figure of one girl with her partner retreating to some more private apartment upstairs, left one with no alternative idea. Of course, this couple may have been going to see the time, but we are irresistibly reminded of Mr. Squeers and his boys. The pair had been considering the word LOVE and then retired to give it practical expression.

Further, a play may be refused a license on immoral grounds one year and granted a full license the next. That has happened over and over again. "La Dame Aux Camelias" is too shocking a play to be permitted, but a

few years later precisely the same play, without alteration of a single word becomes a suitable spectacle for any young girl to take her parents to see.

Now about this gonorrhoea and abortion. Are these suitable subjects for a play? If you consider dramatic performances as being merely something to amuse the well-known mythical "tired business man," then most certainly not. But if we consent to widen the scope of our play-acting, and look on it as being possibly edifying, something which will send us on our way with a new idea or a thought which requires working out, then the answer is undoubtedly yes, indeed. Since this present play was written specially for a Mothers' Meeting (tea afterwards) the author obviously answers in the affirmative. After all, what subject more suitable for an assembly of the nation's motherhood could there be than that of gonorrhoea, the possibility of catching the disease quite innocently from one's husband and more particularly the subject of abortion and the proper spacing of children?

The plain fact is that the office of censorship was originally instituted to protect people in high places from ridicule and that tradition has endured for many, many years and is still in operation. Why, then, may we not laugh at a political caricature in the theatre while precisely the same idea may be enjoyed in a newspaper? The answer is that we have got used to the freedom of the press and resent any change. We have likewise got used to censorship of the drama and resent any change. So we drive a coach and horses through the law and give Sunday performances of uncensored plays.

It may not be generally realised how many of these Sunday performances there are. A Sunday newspaper report stated once, "Owing to there being such a large number of Sunday shows this week, the next Stage Society Production has been postponed." There is another reason for this prevalence of performances on the Sabbath. The actors usually give their services, including rehearsals, for nothing. But the same actor who acts gratis for some play-producing society or other will carefully explain to you that he objects to the opening of the ordinary theatre on Sundays as well as weekdays, because he says he will have to throw in the extra performance for nothing. He does not as a rule object on religious grounds.

The curious state of censorship in the film world may be of interest. The film renters actually appointed and paid the salary of a censor of their own, and told him what to do. He had not one iota of power to ban anything, however indecent, since his employers were the very people who were to show the film. The most he could do was to make recommendations and suggest alterations. Then what useful purpose did he serve? The very useful one of hoaxing the public into thinking their entertainment was under strict control and more especially the appearance on the screen of a nice censorship certificate—but it meant nothing. The office has now been granted some power but it remains in the hands of, and is controlled by, the film interests and not by an independent authority.

Your professional dramatist very naturally rebels and expresses himself vigorously against this interference with him earning his living. On the other hand the acting profession welcomes it with fervour. They will say quite bluntly to you, "Do you expect us to be pleased at the possibility of a policeman coming on the stage, stopping our show and throwing us into prison?" While recognising the fact that an official license makes this possible interference remote, it is still possible. A play may be written so as to appear almost harmless but on presentation before the public, a bit of "business"

introduced may change the character of the words and present a most indelicate double meaning.

What then must we do? Is there no alternative to the censor or the policeman? Indeed and there is. The general public is after all the final arbiter and we can safely leave the verdict with them.

STANLEY ROBERTS.

RELIGION AND REVOLUTION

IT would be difficult to compute how many books, in the last hundred and fifty years, have been written about the French Revolution. Even the Russian Revolution has not, I think, produced anything like as much in the way of controversial writing. Of course, most of the issues involved have now become less burning questions, and many of the arguments in our day have been largely academic discussions. But at the same time (as in so many matters of acute controversy) there have been misconceptions generally held—often, indeed, fostered—by religious bigots, and particularly by Roman Catholic partisans. Mr. Archibald Robertson's *The French Revolution* (Watts, 3s. 6d.) has been written deliberately to show up the ideological background of France in the late eighteenth century and to dispel the ideas of the Roman Catholics, which have been so injected into the general literature of the subject that few but historical specialists have been able to distinguish fact from fiction.

The ordinary man in this country tends to think of the French Revolution largely in terms derived from *The Scarlet Pimpernel* and other similar works of fiction. In other words, this is thought to be a matter of blood-curdling assassins, destroying for no apparent reason delightful aristocrats. Mr. Robertson shows that this is a picture which is hopelessly out of focus, and proves that the people of France, who revolted against the helpless bondage in which they were kept, were abundantly justified in most of the things they did. That there were excesses he does not attempt to deny; but there can be no doubt that the more a people are held down the more violent will be their revolt when it comes. And—this is perhaps the most valuable part of Mr. Robertson's book—he shows that the Vatican, as always, supported the reactionaries and did its best to keep the people in the subjection which had been their unhappy lot for centuries.

Only on one point is one disposed to be critical about this book. Mr. Robertson does his best to put into their correct perspective the parts played by propagandists and revolutionaries of various schools of thought. On the whole he is quite successful. But he occasionally tends (probably unconsciously) to play down the part played by Protestants in the Revolution. Admittedly, he points out that there were bloody clashes between Protestants and Catholics; he admits that, at any rate in the early stages, there were few Atheists in anything approaching important positions in the State. But I do not think (this, I would stress, is a purely personal opinion) that he gives to the Protestant people of France the credit that some writers would give them.

Naturally a writer who is a Freethinker tends to stress as strongly as he can what Freethinkers did in a world-shaking movement such as the French Revolution; and few people who have read deeply in the literature of the period will have any doubt that much of the inspiration was derived from freethinking writers and philosophers. But the Freethinker is rarely an active politician, and in consequence the influence of Freethought (whether of the kind represented by this journal or of the rather milder kind represented by the Society of Friends, the

Unitarians, or the Deists) tends to be more in the nature of theoretical policy-forming than in the taking of places on the barricades.

Mr. Robertson, however, deserves the highest praise for showing that the French Revolution was part of that eternal war against the tyranny of the Vatican which is still being fought out in our day. Just as the Pope to-day can arraign Russian Communism as the enemy of the Papacy so the Pope of that day could arraign Girondism or Jacobinism or whatever was the convenient term of the eighteenth century. And, in fact, there is some basis for supposing that the work of the French revolutionaries was fundamentally more anti-religious and less rival-religious (to coin a word) than that of the Russian revolutionaries of 150 years later.

Controversy will probably continue on these issues for many years to come. We shall no doubt still get Roman Catholic tracts from writers like Mr. Belloc, just as we shall still get Tory broadsides from writers like Mr. Arthur Bryant. But the truth can never be hidden underneath the tissue of propaganda that is put out by the opponents of freedom. The fact that the French Revolution was one of the greatest movements towards freedom in the history of man is something which is now firmly established in the minds of all who have taken the trouble to ascertain the facts. And the existence of Mr. Robertson's book makes it clear what the facts really are.

JOHN ROWLAND.

PREMATURE

"Hitler is dead, the world is rid for ever
Of vicious cruelty without alloy":
Thus thought the morning stars, that sang together
When all the Sons of God shouted for joy.

They sang too soon; for cruelty survives,
And viciousness we see on every hand;
Our own dear country has been clapt in gyves,
While fear is waxing in each Allied land.

Look, shouting Sons of God, look, singing stars,
Upon this picture of our "peaceful" world!
Behold the peoples pent by iron bars,
By wartime regulations unrepealed.

* * *

See, crumbling cities and the falling towers;
Scared, and rebellious, people lacking food;
Dictators strutting; quarrels of the Powers;
Pretentious prelates, formal but not good;
Science frequenting obscurantist bowers,
Dogmatic on facts little understood;
This is our daily fare, for truth is scant,
And over all a layer thick of Cant.

The mob with mascots, amulets and charms,
Is bent on money, fornication, sport;
Heedless in general, quick to take alarms
At new ideas, at "alien strains of thought";
In shop and office, factories and farms,
The worker's livelihood is dearly bought
With arduous toil, and little scope for skill,
Minding machine, or till, sans zest or will.

* * *

And always in the background there awaits
The BOMB that foolish men are sure will cure
The world's malaise by killing men and states:
God's sons and singing stars are premature.

BAYARD SIMMONS.

CORRESPONDENCE

THE REPUBLICAN MOVEMENT

Sir,—Can any of the readers of "The Freethinker" give me any data concerning the Radical Republican Movement of the 1870's and 80's of which Charles Bradlaugh was the principal force?

Newspapers and pamphlets of this time would be particularly valuable, also any anecdotes which may have been handed down.

Any literature forwarded to me for examination will be copied and returned to the sender as soon as possible.—Yours, etc.,
ERIC MAPLE.

COMMUNISM

Sir,—Mr. J. Plimmer appears to think that this correspondence does not rightly come within the province of "The Freethinker." I feel sure that the Editor would have excluded the letters had he agreed with this view. "The Freethinker" has always been in the forefront when the freedom of opinion has been challenged in any sphere. The essential objection to Communism is its absence of freedom and actual destruction of liberty.

My original assertions as to Communistic tyranny and persecution stand. Mr. Plimmer has not been able to deny any one of them. They were not isolated or "cooked" examples, but true statements of deliberate Soviet terrorist policy. We had a B.B.C. radio discussion on the 17th November when in "Getting to Know the Russians," eight representative speakers who had lived in Russia gave their experiences of the repressive life of the people.

Mr. Plimmer mentions the efforts Russia is making to improve their standards of living. These standards are much lower than in England, and one of the reasons why the Soviet will not allow their people to mix freely with ours is that the great disparity in standards would be revealed. Hence the "iron curtain."

Russia doesn't recognise intellectual integrity. For example, at Yalta certain principles were established for the introduction of democratic systems in the countries liberated by the war. It was laid down that Governments should be established in those countries "representative of all democratic elements in the population and pledged to the earliest possible establishment, through free elections, of Governments responsive to the will of the people." That declaration was applauded as a new charter of liberty. In those countries subjected to Russian influence those provisions are being flagrantly disregarded.

Freethinkers stand for equal freedom of thought, speech and publication. Do Communists? If Mr. Plimmer is a Freethinker I hope that he will bring his freethought ideal into action, and endeavour to prevent Russian totalitarian dictatorship, with its accompanying horrors, from being introduced into our country.—Yours, etc.,

ALFRED D. CORRICK.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Report of Executive Meeting held 24th November, 1949

The Acting President, Mr. R. H. Rosetti, in the Chair. Also present, Messrs. Scibert, A. C. Rosetti, Morris, Griffiths, Ebury, Hornibrook, Page, Woodley, Barker, Johnson, and Mrs. Quinton.

The meeting expressed its sympathy with Mr. Chapman Cohen in his accident and wished him a speedy and complete recovery.

Mr. R. Johnson came to the Executive on the nomination of the North London Branch in place of Mr. J. G. Lupton who retired owing to ill health. A resolution was passed thanking Mr. Lupton for his long, useful, and loyal work for the Society and the movement.

Minutes of previous meeting read and accepted. Financial statement presented.

New members were admitted to Glasgow Branch, and to the Parent Society. Help in the way of speakers for Newcastle and Glasgow Branches was agreed upon.

Mr. J. T. Brighton reported that the Sunderland Borough Labour Party had cancelled his hiring of a hall for two dates. The Executive is awaiting further details it has asked for.

Further advertising of the N.S.S. in the press was under discussion and enquiries as to the most suitable mediums are to be made.

Avro Manhattan's meeting in the Conway Hall was reported, final arrangements for the Brains Trust in the Stratford Town Hall, on Thursday, December 8, and for the Annual Dinner,

on Saturday, January 7, in the Holborn Restaurant announced.

Correspondence between Mr. G. H. Taylor and the office was read, and the meeting agreed that Mr. Taylor was excluded from the Executive on a conference vote, and the Executive would abide by that decision.

The next meeting of the Executive was fixed for December 15 and the proceedings closed.

R. H. ROSETTI, General Secretary.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m.: "Church History and Doctrine," A Mormon Speaker.

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Tuesday, December 6, 7 p.m.: "The Rebirth of Israel," Mr. CHARLES SOLOMON.

Lewisham Branch N.S.S. (Hope Hotel, 73, Loampit Vale).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: "The Jesuits," Mr. F. A. RIDLEY.

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "Fundamentalism, Modernism and Secularism," Mr. T. M. MOSLEY.

Glasgow Secular Society (McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Debate, "Is the Christian or Secularist Best Equipped to Face Life?" The Rev. THOMAS CROMBIE, B.D., versus Mrs. M. I. WHITEFIELD.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (The International Club, 64, George Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: A Lecture.

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Coopers Hall, Shaw Street, Liverpool, 6).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Twenty Years of Freethought," Mr. J. V. SHORT.

National Secular Society (Stratford Town Hall, Stratford, E. 15).—Thursday, December 8, 7-30 p.m.: Brains Trust. See advertisement.

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: A Lecture by a Labour Party Speaker.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "The Social Psychology of English Speech," Professor T. H. PEAR, M.A., B.Sc.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W. 1).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: "On Making Oneself Understood," Mr. VICTOR P. MORRIS.

OUTDOOR

Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. J. BARKER.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Platt Fields).—Sunday, 3 p.m.: Messrs. E. BILLING, G. WOODCOCK, C. McCALL and KAY.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Bombed site, St. Mary's Gate).—Lectures every lunch hour, 1 p.m.: Messrs. E. BILLING, C. McCALL and G. WOODCOCK.

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

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

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