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Price Threepence

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

The Decline of Christianity

It has been for some time a matter of common knowledge amongst Freethinkers and students of religion in general, that religious belief in this country, that is, belief in Christianity, has been steadily declining since, at least, the 1914-18 war. This fact has at long last received a semi-official confirmation in one of the well-known Gallup Polls; a test of public opinion in various directions, and which is now a regular feature of our national life.

We quote a brief summary of this revealing document given in a recent issue of the *News Chronicle*.

Under the general heading of "What do people know about the Bible," our contemporary describes, at first glance, the rather startling results of this Gallup Poll:—

The Bible is still the best-seller. But how many people know what is in it?

The Gallup Poll has been making a test asking adults in all parts of the country.

Can you give me the name of any of the four Gospels, that is to say, any of the first four books of the New Testament?

Three in five could name all four Gospels, another one in seven could name some but not all, one in four could name none.

Of the over 65's, only 21 per cent. of the men and women could not name any of the four Gospels. The proportion increases steadily among the younger people and rises to 80 per cent. amongst those of 29 years of age and younger.

More women than men could name all four Gospels: and more well-to-do people than poor.

Here is the difference between various religious groups:

	Four correct	1-3 correct	none
Church of England ...	62	13	25
Nonconformist ...	75	13	12
Roman Catholic ...	51	13	36
Church of Scotland...	75	6	19
No religion ...	39	19	42

When a similar question was asked by Gallup Poll in Sweden (an almost entirely Protestant country), the results showed a lower degree of acquaintance with the names of the Gospels than here.

News Chronicle.—British Institute of Public Opinion.

The above figures are very revealing. For they indicate unmistakably the almost complete loss of religion amongst the younger people, also that Britain is no longer a "Christian land," and, indeed, that Christianity is dying fast.

The *News Chronicle* subsequently published the reactions of a number of prominent Churchmen of a variety of denominations to these figures. Perhaps the two most interesting replies were those of the Anglican Dean Matthews, of St. Paul's, and of Monsignor Ronald Knox, the well-known Roman Catholic publicist and translator of the Bible.

Dean Matthews tried to score off his "Fundamentalist" colleagues by accusing the Church of having tried to suppress the results of the "higher criticism" of the Bible, thereby causing the churches to lose ground with thinking people.

Whilst Mgr. Knox frankly admitted the current decline of religion, from the Catholic point of view this

decline in a Protestant country is, indeed, only to be expected. For ever since Bishop Bossuet wrote his famous *Variations* in the seventeenth century, it has been a commonplace of Catholic apologetics that Protestantism ultimately paves the way for total unbelief in the Supernatural.

What sociological conclusions are we to draw from the Poll? The figures indicate a steady decline in religious belief, since it could not reasonably be presumed that anyone with the slightest attachment to any kind of Christianity, even the most nominal, would be totally ignorant of the Four Gospels; to all believing Christians the most intimate and sacred of the canonical scriptures. This numerical decline is a most serious matter for the Christian Churches, but what is far more serious for them is its age distribution.

It is a truism that any cause which loses the attachment of the young is headed for extinction, and if the rate of ignorance continues amongst the next three generations, Christianity, by the end of that time, will have become an insignificant sect with not the remotest pretensions to be regarded as a national religion. The quoted example of Lutheran Sweden indicates also that this state of things is not confined to Britain.

Christ is following his Pagan predecessors into oblivion, but the "Galilean," at least, can be said to have had a long run for his money!

It is self-evident from this important social document that we have travelled a long way since the spacious Victorian days, when Fundamentalism and family prayers were the order of the day in virtually all "respectable" houses: when even juvenile fiction usually ended with a religious moral, when the Blasphemy Laws were still in active use, and when the most popular theatrical performance of the day played to an empty house on the night that its author was convicted of an offence against the moral code of Christianity.

"Other times, other manners."

To what must we ascribe the catastrophic decay of religious belief so forcibly indicated by the above figures? Undoubtedly, it would be an absurd excess of false modesty if the Secular and Rationalist movements were to disclaim their responsibility for at least a large share in the spectacular collapse of religious belief. A century of steady all-round-the-year propaganda cannot fail to have left its mark on the national mentality, as must also the vast output of excellent popular literature upon religious, scientific and philosophical themes, issued as books, newspapers and pamphlets by successive secularist organisations. These things must have had their effect. To paraphrase the most sensible of the Biblical books (*Ecclesiastes*), the Freethinkers of past generations have "cast their bread upon the waters and it has returned to them after many days."

However, this is not the whole story, for one must agree with a recent correspondent in *The Freethinker* that other factors besides the propaganda of Freethought are responsible for the decay of religious knowledge and

belief. The incidence of an industrial age itself; the diffusion of a semi-scientific popular education, the countless current rival attractions to both church-going and to Bible reading, must all be borne in mind.

From which last consideration there emerges a sociological conclusion of primary importance to the Freethought movement. Whilst religion is on the way out, it would be premature, unfortunately, to assert that the fast growing religious indifference indicates any widespread popular acceptance of a scientific world-outlook based upon conscious reason and thought-out knowledge, and until this last is actually in being, there is still plenty of room for a militant Freethought movement and still plenty of useful work to do.

F. A. RIDLEY.

HITTING BACK

IT is always distasteful to answer an angry correspondent like Mr. Wood, or a weak one like Mr. Austen. To deal with the latter first, surely he is aware that *The Freethinker* is not just an anti-Spiritualist paper? It is the only weekly journal in the world devoted to Freethought and its columns are open to all who have a case against it. Mr. Wood was given every opportunity to put his case for Spiritualism but there was no reason why Mr. Austen's answer to my comments published as an article in the *Psychic News* should have been republished in these columns. He was, however, given the opportunity of doing so and, if he wished, to add anything else; instead, he wasted space by complaining that his *Psychic News* article was not published, together with a few remarks which were purely irrelevant.

Now, what really was relevant to the issue was whether the "verbatim" report of the seance which forms the subject of the whole of this discussion was really compared with the Report of the Commission which investigated the cause of the R. 101 disaster, and found to be "absolutely correct." This was the claim put by Mr. Wood in his first reference to the seance and, as he gave no authority whatever for the statement, I stepped into the discussion and asked him to substantiate it. I really wanted to know where, when, and how, he got hold of the verbatim report; when, where, and how, he got the Official Report; and I wanted him to put the passages which were "absolutely correct" side by side. Had he done this there could have been no questioning on my part.

But from the day he wrote his article, to this day, Mr. Wood has produced not one scrap of evidence that he ever saw the "verbatim" report at all, and I have my doubts that he ever saw the Official Report. And certainly he has, as the reader knows, never given us the relevant passages from the two reports to show that they were "absolutely correct." I call this sheer, unmitigated bluff of the worst kind. Mr. Wood was not writing for credulous sheep who believe anything, but for hardened Freethinkers. He went out of his way to charge us with jeering and scoffing and with being afraid to investigate Spiritualist claims. And I took him up on this—without jeering or scoffing. I had no idea when I went into the problem what proofs Mr. Wood had by him but, as he had for some years contributed to these columns, I thought that at least he could produce something which might make us furiously to think.

But not only did we find that Mr. Wood had never seen the "verbatim" report of the seance, but it soon began to be obvious that there had never been a verbatim report at all; that the 3-year-old account given in the *Sunday Dispatch* was, as Mr. Paul Tabori declared, made up for

newspaper readers, and Harry Price had little to do with it. Mr. Tabori was not invited to say this, he volunteered the information himself; and I refuse to believe he did not mean exactly what he said. In any case, he could have written again to *The Freethinker* to point out that when he said Harry Price had little to do with the article, he meant something quite different, and what it really was that he meant.

Then I asked what were the qualifications of Miss Beenham for taking down a highly technical seance delivered at a terrific speed, and it now turns out that she simply had no qualifications for such a task. And it is here that Mrs. Goldney comes in with her letter published last week.

Mrs. Goldney was, it may be remembered, the lady who took down the notes given her by Mr. Charlton after he had read an account of the seance in *Nash's Magazine*, and it was from these notes that all accounts of the seance were subsequently based. According to her letter—and Mrs. Goldney is a member of the Council of the Society for Psychical Research, so she can be relied upon—Miss Beenham was unable to get down all the seance completely. Mrs. Goldney later took down Mr. Charlton's "annotations" and Mr. Price "made use of Mr. Charlton's comments in his report." This is the report which has gone all over the world, the one Spiritualists look upon as an "absolutely correct" and a verbatim report of the seance.

I am sorry to have to disagree "absolutely" with Mrs. Goldney as to what constitutes a fraud. I can think of nothing more utterly fraudulent as passing off for a genuine report of a seance something which was, in the first place, not properly taken down, and secondly, was actually added to in the way she so conveniently discloses for us. I never, of course, suggested that Miss Beenham's "transcript" was tampered with. I never knew, nor apparently does Mrs. Goldney, what was taken down in shorthand, how Miss Beenham managed to decipher it, and whether Harry Price did or did not add anything. To find this out has not been my job at all. I was concerned with mainly "investigating" the story put forward by Mr. Wood as being "absolutely" true, and it is not my fault that the investigation has disclosed as pretty an example of sheer fraud as I have ever come across.

If any reader now believes that it was the spirit of poor Irwin who spoke at terrific speed at the seance, and whose utterances were properly taken down by Miss Beenham and delivered to an astonished world as "absolutely" authentic, he is at liberty to do so. But Harry Price himself did not believe it, and for me the whole reeks with imposture.

For some reason which I cannot understand, Mr. Wood appears to think that if only I had met Mr. Costa (*sic*) and any others who were present at the seance, that would prove the report as sent to me by him was "absolutely" true, and that I should forthwith either become a Spiritualist or, like Mr. Wood, come to believe that "there was something in it." It is not unfair (I hope) to say that not a thousand Mr. Costers could prove as true a report that was obviously a mass of incoherence, speculation, and annotation. But if he really imagines that I am afraid of meeting anybody, he'd better try and learn something about me.

Mr. Wood's accusations of my "deliberate falsehoods" only amuse me. Apart from showing that to say the verbatim report and the Official Report agreed was on the part of Mr. Wood sheer bluff, I have never used the language this urbane controversialist uses against me. I

have not jeered or scoffed. I have not even discussed the general theory of Spiritualism. All I was concerned with was to show that in dealing with spirits in particular, or the supernatural in general, it was necessary to analyse every statement put forward as proof. And I think that I have succeeded.

H. CUTNER.

[It is to be hoped that this article will close the discussion. We cannot, of course, exclude really new, vital, or factual information, but we would prefer the matter to end.—*Editor.*]

A CHALLENGE AND A REFUSAL

The following correspondence speaks for itself:—

October 10, 1949.

Dr. Julian P. Boyd,

Editor, the Papers of Thomas Jefferson,
Princeton University, Princeton, N.J.

DEAR DR. BOYD,

I am challenging five historians to meet me on a public platform to debate the authorship of the Declaration of Independence. Since you publicly expressed disbelief in my premise that Thomas Paine wrote the Declaration of Independence, I am inviting you to join the five historians on the platform.

I am sending you this letter far enough in advance so that you may be properly prepared to defend your position against my open and avowed conviction that Thomas Paine was author of the Declaration of Independence.

This meeting will take place at a dinner at the Town Hall Club, New York, on January 29, 1950, the 247th anniversary of the birth of Thomas Paine.

I am sure you are fully in accord with this method of acquainting the public with the facts about this important subject.

Anticipating your acceptance, I beg to remain,

JOSEPH LEWIS.

DEAR MR. LEWIS,

I must decline your invitation to debate publicly the question of the authorship of the Declaration of Independence. Since I am quite sure that you will publicly or otherwise give the impression that my refusal arises from other motives than those which lie behind my decision, I will state them categorically as follows, though the number of reasons that I could adduce is far too lengthy for this communication:—

1. No reputable historian will agree to the proposition that you advance. The question of Jefferson's authorship of the Declaration of Independence has been universally established, has never successfully been challenged, and is no longer open to debate. I cannot therefore dignify your thesis with an acceptance which would imply that this is not a closed issue—and I am much too occupied with *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* and other serious historical matters to engage in a debate on a closed issue or to attempt to refute a question which I regard as frivolous, irresponsible, and bizarre.

2. Serious matters involving historical facts, about which there is room for honest difference of opinion, cannot be resolved by debate! Such problems, insofar as they can be resolved at all, should be approached through the usual channels of historical investigation and discussion—that is, by means of articles, books, and periodical publication addressed to those most competent to decide such matters, not partially or in a partisan spirit or in a dramatic effort to capture public sympathy by challenge to debate. These avenues of serious scholarly

discussion are open to you. You have set forth your thesis at length in your book. That book, so far as I am aware, did not receive a single approving voice in any reputable review or journal. The reason for this was obvious: You brought forth no single shred of documentary support for your thesis, which was supported solely by the most tenuous sort of conjecture, hypothesis, innuendo, and unscholarly treatment of the sources, to say no more.

3. Since I do not consider your question and thesis as falling within the category of historical questions open to serious discussion, I do not see that anything can be gained by a public discussion. If you have discovered evidence tending to overthrow the universally accepted belief in Jefferson's authorship of the Declaration of Independence—evidence which you did not present in your book—the historical journals are still open to serious discussion and on a matter of such vital importance I feel confident that any editor would welcome a serious, responsible, and scholarly presentation of that evidence. My own belief is that anyone possessing such information lies under a moral obligation to present it through such channels in order that it might be permanently preserved and subjected to careful analysis by historians, not set forth in a radio broadcast where those who are most qualified to judge are deprived, by the very nature of the presentation, of the opportunity to subject the evidence to scholarly scrutiny.

4. And, finally, your thesis as presented in your book rested in large part on what I regarded as a gross misuse of an hypothesis advanced in my *The Declaration of Independence*. In that book I advanced the supposition that the document which Jefferson himself regarded as his rough draft of the Declaration was, in the beginning, a fair copy of an earlier text, not then known to be extant. I meant to convey, and everyone else except you seems to have understood, that I referred to an earlier composition draft that is, a true rough draft—by *Jefferson himself*. You, without supporting evidence, construed this to mean that the earlier text from which Jefferson copied the "Rough Draught" was a text written by Thomas Paine. The flimsy nature of this supposition made by you, was completely demonstrated within a short time after your book was published by the fact that I discovered in the Jefferson papers in the Library of Congress an indisputable, authentic fragment of the earlier composition draft from which Jefferson drew off the so-called "Rough Draft."

If you should discover evidence tending to prove that Jefferson did not write the Declaration of Independence, I should welcome that evidence. We are now preparing for publication Volume I of *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*. That volume embraces various texts of the Declaration of Independence, including the fragment of Jefferson's original composition draft. If you have new evidence tending to overthrow Jefferson's well-established claim to authorship, I now invite you to present that evidence for inclusion in the pages of a serious, scholarly editing of the documents of Thomas Jefferson: If it is valid evidence and accepted as valid by scholars whose judgment we esteem, it will be included—otherwise not. Naturally I do not include in this invitation the so-called evidence that you presented in your book, for I regard that book as being unworthy of serious attention and certainly unworthy of mention in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*.

JULIAN P. BOYD.

November 10, 1949.

DEAR DR. BOYD,

When I read your undated letter which I received some-time ago, I had no intention of answering it as it only too

plainly revealed your biased and bigoted attitude towards my book on Thomas Paine, but after considerable deliberation I decided to send you this reply.

I believe that, as far as the evidence I have produced to prove that Thomas Paine and not Thomas Jefferson was the author of the Declaration of Independence, you are like the man, who "convinced against his will is of the same opinion still."

Despite your long letter and your reference to the finding of a "fragment" of the Declaration of Independence in Jefferson's handwriting as conclusive proof of his authorship, I again cannot help feel that in your stressing this point concerning its importance "you doth protest too much." A "fragment" is poor evidence in view of Jefferson's previous copyist mistakes, as well as in view of the numerous copies he made. I believe he made at least five copies of the Declaration. Is it not more likely that this "fragment" you speak of is a discarded piece from one of the many copies Jefferson made of the Declaration?

And as further proof of your all too pontifical attitude towards my book, is your statement that not a single reputable magazine reviewed my book favourably.

I take this opportunity to call to your attention a review which appeared in the Indiana Magazine of History, June, 1947, of which Professor of History John D. Barnhardt is editor. In this magazine there appeared a four-page review by Professor Albert L. Kohlmeier, Head of the History Department. This reviewer concludes with this statement:—

"Mr. Lewis has produced a remarkable book. . . . He has made a strong case in his main contention. . . . Men have been hung before now when the prosecution had a much weaker case."

I also wish to take this opportunity to call your attention to the statement made by the late Professor W. C. Ruediger, of George Washington University. He wrote:—

"Mr. Joseph Lewis has satisfied me that Thomas Paine wrote the original draft of the Declaration of Independence. No doubt both Jefferson and Adams knew this. . . ."

Professor Arnold Emch of the University of Illinois wrote:—

"I have read your book with the greatest enjoyment. It is of the utmost importance to have such a book of *profound and enlightening historic research*. . . . Your book is destined to be a 'Classic' and should be required reading for all classes in American History."

A Professor at the University of Virginia, who does not want his name mentioned because he writes, "I am in Jefferson's country, and in Jefferson's school; I have no desire to be crucified or shot at sunrise," makes this statement regarding my book:—

"This is a very searching piece of investigation, and must cause all serious historians of American political documents to pause and take notice. Mr. Lewis has done a fine job with data; he is after the facts and facts do not prove conclusively that Thomas Jefferson was the sole and complete author of the Declaration. Much, perhaps most, of Mr. Lewis's theory is based on presumptive and circumstantial evidence; but such evidence can be very convincing, and the author makes out a very good case for Thomas Paine."

Dr. Harold Rugg, Professor of Education at Columbia

University has put my book on his required reading list for his students.

But why continue—your attitude is beneath that of a schoolboy. If the whole world ignored my book and I revealed the truth it would be your duty to acknowledge it.

If you do not make any reference to my book, even though it be a footnote, in Volume I of *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, then I can only say that Volume I of *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* will be incomplete.

I sincerely regret that you declined my invitation to participate in the debate; however, I cordially invite you to attend.

JOSEPH LEWIS.

New York, U.S.A.

(Editor, *Common Sense*).

(No response was received to the above letter.)

WHITHER WEATHERHEAD?

II

Here is a passage from the Rev. Leslie Weatherhead's sermon:—

Last Sunday night we lifted up, in our silent intercession, a young girl of twenty-two who came to this city to take her university degree, and who now has given up all thought of her desired career because that damnable thing, surely born in hell, that we call infantile paralysis, has shattered her body and will continue to do so for years ahead. Some years ago we lifted up in prayer one of our number who took the highest qualification it is possible to take in surgery, and who, a few weeks later, was stricken with blindness in both eyes through an accident which the good God allowed, making it quite impossible for any more surgery to be done as long as life lasts.

Even trained and experienced doctors can sometimes scarcely bear the spectacle of suffering which a good God allows. One writes as follows:

I was called in by a poor woman to see her daughter. As I entered the humble sitting-room there was a small cot on one side, and by the gesture of the mother I understood that the sufferer was there. I picked up a candle and walking over, I stooped over the little bed expecting to see a child. What I really saw was a pair of brown sullen eyes, full of loathing and pain, which looked up in resentment to mine. I could not tell how old the creature was. Long thin limbs were twisted and coiled in the tiny couch. The face was sane but malignant. "What is it?" I asked in dismay, when we were out of hearing. "It's a girl," sobbed the mother. "She's nineteen. Oh! If God would only take her!"

If suffering were proportionate to merit or desert, it would be easier to bear it and to bear the thought of it. But let any sensitive man walk down the children's ward of a hospital and ask himself why tiny tots are condemned to agony, and he may come to the conclusion that in many cases it looks as if a malignant fiend has set a trap for a little child in the dark. The suffering is due to nothing which individual human foresight could have prevented, and often nothing that human ingenuity can devise can take the suffering away.

I know that when I was asked to broadcast an appeal for Cancer Relief, they sent me a lot of literature to help me make my appeal. But I did not dare to quote some of the cases cited. They would have harrowed and distressed the minds of my hearers beyond bearing, for many of them were cases of little children smitten with cancer. I can understand the cynic who said, "Jesus should have said, 'If ye, then, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much less will your Father in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?'"

In a sermon, this is what Dick Swiveller would have called a staggerer. Printed in *The Freethinker* anonymously, it might have been ascribed to Ingersoll or Bradlaugh. Another part of the sermon ridicules a hymn "which is so exasperating to thoughtful people":—

Yes, God is good: in earth and sky,

From ocean-depths and spreading wood,

Ten thousand voices seem to cry,

"God made us all, and God is good."

But what evidence is there in earth, or sky or ocean, or wood to prove goodness? Power—yes, and purpose and beauty, but where is the evidence of goodness? Disease curses the earth, even in the animal creation. Lightning flashes from the sky upon the just and the unjust. The ocean-depths have claimed many a gallant soul. What with sharks and octopuses and shipwrecks through storm, who can think of the ocean as a proof that God is good? And even in the "spreading wood," we find "nature red in tooth and claw."

I have heard that hymn sung scores of times—it is in the Fellowship Hymn Book, used in brotherhoods and adult schools—by people who would justly be amazed at a parson's ridicule of it. They might well ask if he had any right to retain his pulpit when he had reached those conclusions. Further, in another amazing passage, the reverend gentleman said "Nobody ever pretends that life on earth offers evidence of God's goodness." At the recent Brains Trust at Stratford I quoted this to the Vicar of Romford, who, not surprisingly, dissented from the views of the one-time Methodist. It is certainly "a new one" to hear from a parson that the Lord looked upon his creation—and saw that it was bad!

The Rev. Leslie Weatherhead was a Methodist minister before he went to the City Temple. I hope he does not regard it as a *call*. Like the laity, parsons move to improve themselves, and none need more to apply the Johnsonian injunction to clear the mind of cant. When Frederick Temple, Bishop of Exeter, was promoted to the see of London and preached a farewell sermon in Exeter Cathedral, he referred to the Lord's call to the metropolis. "If the Lord had called him to Itton"—a neighbouring village—"he would not have heard him," was the audible comment of a candid critic! In the Methodist hymn book there is a section entitled "Creation and Providence." Hymn after hymn proclaims the goodness of the Lord as revealed on this planet. I could fill a page of this paper with quotations. Here is one:—

"Mercy o'er thy works presides;
Thy providence displayed
Still preserves and still provides
For all Thy hands have made;
Keeps with most distinguished care
The man who on thy love depends;
Watches every numbered hair,
And all his steps attends."

What about this, Mr. Weatherhead? Do you want to scrap this section of the hymn book? Do you wish to forbid children to sing the old favourite "All things bright and beautiful"? Of course, the sermon did not conclude with the indictment of the natural order. The solution, as might be expected, was that Jesus whispered all was well! A good application of the injunction, "Whatever you are totally ignorant of assert to be the explanation of everything else." Call in a possibly mythical Jesus to justify an absentee god. Yet, in the penultimate paragraph of the sermon, the preacher revealed himself as approaching agnosticism:—

"Frankly, I don't know what God is doing, except in the vaguest terms. I am often as troubled and bewildered and stunned by the apparent injustice and cruelty and callousness of life as you are."

We atheists, who have not to carry the burden of a god, have no problem of pain. It exists only for the theist.

In the same issue of *The City Temple Tidings* appeared the following extraordinary letter:—

Spooks Club,
Fiery Terrace,
Hell.
12.10.'49.

"Phone HADES 0715.

Dear Sir,
I object to the use of my hymn in your sermon of Sunday evening, 9th October. I wish to inform you that in future my permission must be obtained via a reliable medium, your local spiritualist club, or 'phone.

However, we feel you are one of us and you will always receive a 'warm' welcome here.

Yours in torment,

JOHN HAMPDEN GURNEY."

I hazard a guess that the writer was the minister. What is the moral? Is it that Mr. Weatherhead's god has punished the hymn-writer for taking a more favourable view of the universe than he can do?

As an historian of London I have some regard to the most famous, and now the only nonconformist, church associated with the City. I have heard all its ministers except the present one. I feel he is letting it down. A few weeks before this *Comic Cuts* contribution had appeared there was an appeal for assistance to purchase an academic gown for the pastor, who had been degree if not pot hunting. A good idea! Some of us lecturers, seeing that our clothes wear out on the platform as elsewhere, might ask for a new suit. Would Dr. Parker or Dr. Norwood have done these things? I think not. I suppose all the deacons are "Yes" men. When these pulpit potentates are about they usually are. It is a pity one of them cannot persuade the minister to rest and reflect for a while. With the collaboration of the late Treasurer, Albert Clare, I included an article on the City Temple in my *Encyclopaedia of London*. I hope, when I revise that volume for a new edition, I shall not feel inclined to say that "Ichabod" should be painted over its doors.

WILLIAM KENT.

PAINTED MONUMENTS

The following is taken from the *Funeral Workers' Journal* for December 1949, and sent us by one of our older readers, Mr. L. H. Sparks.

SIR,—The caption under your photograph of a recoloured monument in Gloucester Cathedral reminds me of the story of the artist who, having undertaken the work of restoring the mural decorations in a church, and sent in his bill for £38 15s. 6d., was requested by the church council to render a more detailed account, which he did as follows:—

	£	s.	d.
1. Corrected the Ten Commandments	5	10	0
2. Embellished Pontius Pilate and put new ribbon in his bonnet	1	0	0
3. Put new tail on rooster of St. Peter and mended his comb	1	5	0
4. Replumed, and regilded the way of the Guardian Angel	7	15	0
5. Washed the Servant of the High Priest, and put carmine on his cheeks	0	10	0
6. Renewed Heaven, adjusted the stars, and thoroughly cleaned the moon	3	5	0
7. Re-animated the flames of Purgatory, and restored souls	1	7	6
8. Revived flames of Hell, put new tail on the Devil, mended his left hoof, and did several odd jobs for the damned	4	16	6
9. Put new spotted dashes on son of Tobias and dressing on his sack	5	6	0
10. Cleaned the ears of Balaam's ass, and shod him	0	14	0
11. Put earrings in the ears of Sarah	1	6	0
12. Put new stone into David's sling. Enlarged the head of Goliath, and extended his legs	2	5	0
13. Decorated Noah's Ark	3	0	0
14. Mended the shirt of the Prodigal son, and cleaned his nose	0	15	6
Total	£38	15	6

PAUL GRIFFITH.

It has, we think, been quoted often, but is always worth recording again. At least, the artist believed in the "material" more than the "spiritual."

Some folks hereabouts call sign-posts parsons, because they point the way, but don't go it.

—J. J. Hissey.

ACID DROPS

The health of the 73 year-old Pope Pius is causing some anxiety to his associates, for his "Holy Year" duties are expected to be heavy. He is, however, leaving very little to chance, or even to God; his physician is in constant attendance. Pius seems to have little faith in the Biblical injunction of the laying on of hands, but for the "propagation of the Faith," one would think that the Almighty's representative would dispense with a mere physician. Piety and pills sound contradictory.

The "News Chronicle" invites its readers to submit six golden rules for bringing up children, and of the many examples so far published, all agree on the essentials: example, security, patience and kindness; yet none referred to Christianity which is supposed to be so important in "character-building." In fact, the Rev. D. Parry-Jones complains that the rules submitted would merely "serve for the training of a pup," and is shocked at the omission of Religion and Patriotism. Evidently the Rev. gent takes a long-term view and is dismayed at the prospect of a generation of irreligious and unpatriotic children.

A "witch" and two "warlocks" have been arrested in Lisbon whilst delivering charms and spells to women. They must be congratulating themselves that the Catholic Church has been forced by the modern world to become a little more tolerant and no longer has the power to put heretics and witches "to the question" nor to deliver them over to the secular arm for burning (so as not to shed blood!). The witches were merely fined £1,000, but how the Hierarchy must sigh for the good old days!

Some London publicans display a sign that they have arranged with the Banks to cash no cheques on condition that bankers will sell no beer. A notice on the same lines ought to be displayed in St. Pauls, where Sir Stafford Cripps, "the first layman" to do so, preached on a recent Sunday. True, dollars and deity have always mixed well, but in 1950 we would prefer Sir Stafford to concentrate on the material and not the spiritual.

Roman Catholic bishops and Lutherans have been allowed to visit some of the Soviet labour camps and have reported that conditions were relatively humane. The workers were not subject to "unhealthy compulsion." The Lutheran Bishop Dibelius, however, added that behind the hundreds they were allowed to see were thousands they were not allowed to look at; while Bishop Tkotsch (R.C.) added, that he could see no justification why young people of 15 or 16 should be kept in prison for four or five years. Well, slave labour costs nothing but the slave's keep, and thus reduces unemployment. There can be no strikes for better pay, and all in the garden is lovely.

The question of "unity" raised in the columns of *The Times* last year has produced a volume of correspondence mostly, of course, from Roman Catholics. They recognise that they are in a strong position, but as the Archbishop of York recently pointed out, there was a dual track on the "spiritual" highway. One track led to Rome, it was true, but the other track led to the Church of England; and he added, "Year by year a large number of Roman Catholics joined the Church of England"—mostly ordinary people. We might add that quite a number of Roman Catholics also join the Freethought Party. From the way, however,

the Roman Church manages to advertise, one would think that conversions were its sole prerogative, and it is a pity that the complete numbers leaving the Church of Rome can never be obtained.

It is well known that in spite of the boast that Roman Catholicism is the same the world over, there is a great difference between the brand put forward as "the Faith" here in England, and what the Irish people or the French-Canadians get in their countries. A case recently disclosed from Canada shows how people are terrified of priests and their power. In a mixed marriage, the poor R.C. girl was badgered to such an extent that she committed suicide, and this was too much even for the R.C. judge, who awarded the husband heavy damages against both the priest and the poor girl's mother. The case proves what the Church of Rome can do in a country where it still has some power.

"Individual" Holy Year pilgrims to Rome must now apply for a "Bishop's Wallet," and must get permission from a Bishop before applying. You can't be a *bona fide* pilgrim without the wallet which, incidentally, contains among other things a pilgrim's prayer book. There is, however, one other formality very necessary before the magic wallet is yours. You must send 15s. to cover the cost. So that if 100,000 pilgrims apply, the National Committee for the Holy Year will receive £75,000. And it's all for Christ's sake.

It appears also that too many concerns are "muscling-in" on the Holy Year racket, and the Pope has had to warn the Italian Government that he won't stand for it, at least that is what his speech meant after being trimmed of its verbiage. Not only are Holy Water, Holy Biscuits, and the inevitable pieces of the "True Cross" on sale, but pilgrims will also find special Holy Year cigarettes. If they are as bad as some of the special brands manufactured in Britain during the war, it will not be improbable that instead of ordering a penance of *Paternosters* and *Aves*, pilgrims will be awarded packets of fags.

At Northumberland Sessions, Judge Richardson told the court that "if more people depended on the Lord, this country would be in a better position." Whether the Judge was amongst the group of people in the recent Gallup Poll who do not know their Bible, we cannot say, but if he will take the trouble of reading it, he will find that the Lord is so undependable that he would never again be guilty of such an observation. Trust in the Lord by all means, but keeping one's powder dry is much more important.

Rome is busy cleaning up for Holy Year, says the *Sunday Pictorial*, and Pope Pius has almost brought about the abolition of prostitution. The number of ladies of easy virtue is reckoned to be about 4,000. According to Infessura (cf. McCabe—*Testament*) when Innocent VIII was Pope in 1490, the number of prostitutes, holy and otherwise, amounted to 6,800: a reduction of 2,800 in 460 years. At the same rate it will need quite a few more "Holy Years" to clean up the Eternal City.

THINGS WE WOULD LIKE TO KNOW—

Will Sir Stafford Cripps tax the collection taken at St. Paul's on the occasion of his sermon?

Were the "shocking" stories told by the Rev. P. M. Caporn to his congregation of Eastwood Church, Notts. from the Bible?

"THE FREETHINKER"

Telephone No.: Holborn 2601.

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

TO CORRESPONDENTS

Would Miss Bryan of Holland Park be good enough to send her address to this office.

BENEVOLENT FUND N.S.S.—The General Secretary gratefully acknowledges the following donations: H. A. Lupton, £1 ls.; Mr. and Mrs. S. Miller, £5 5s.

G. DOUGLAS: (1) Mormon "prophecies" can only be discussed if known. Could you give us a dozen? The writer of the Book of Mormon could make up any "prophecy." (2) There are no "original" documents of the Bible anywhere. (3) You can find the reference to "Christ" in Josephus by consulting the index. It is a gross forgery. (4) The History of Susanna is in the O.T. Apocrypha.

The following periodicals are being received regularly, and can be consulted at "The Freethinker" office: **THE TRUTH SEEKER** (U.S.A.), **COMMON SENSE** (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), **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

Professor J. C. Flugel, B.A., D.Sc., will lecture for the National Secular Society in the Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, on Thursday evening, 2nd February, on "Population Policies and International Tensions." Admission is free, and the lecture begins at 7-30. The Executive of the N.S.S. is responsible for the arrangements. London saints can best help by making the lecture known as widely as possible, and by bringing friends along on the evening.

The new Lewisham Branch N.S.S. has arranged an attractive syllabus for this session. This evening, Mr. W. Kent lectures on "Can an Antiquarian be a Christian?" Mr. Kent is well known as an antiquarian with a number of books to his name, and his lecture should provide an interesting evening. Lectures are held in Hope Hotel, 73, Loampit Vale, London, S.E., and begin at 7-15 p.m.

Here is something good for Bradford readers. The Rev. Dudley Richards, M.A., will speak for the Bradford Branch N.S.S. in The Mechanics' Institute (Science Room), Town Hall Square, at 6-45 this evening, 22nd January. We have not been informed of the subject, but a clergyman who has the courage to speak from a Freethought platform deserves all the courteous welcome which we know will be given him.

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem has never been a creditable monument of the Christian faith, comments the *Manchester Guardian*, which is perfectly true, but it does serve as a 'horrid example of what happens when six Christian sects (who all worship the same God) can disagree on the form of worship. This is apparent on certain feast days, when armed sentries were needed to keep reminding followers of Jesus that "brotherly love" is one of the main tenets of their creed, or is it?

Sam Russel, of the *Daily Worker*, is reporting on conditions in church schools, and on his visit to the Hamlet Church of England School found that the classrooms "almost always need artificial light, and the furniture in use was condemned twenty years ago." The classrooms were dingy, dismal, gloomy, airless and overcrowded, a heritage of the age when the Church provided education for the "lower orders" as a charity. Yet there is a howl of rage when it is suggested that the State should take over. If Church Schools cannot reach the standard demanded by the Education Act, abolish them and let the State take over. Religious squabbles should have no place in child education. Nor is it democratic to expect sectarian interests to be supported by the majority.

INTERNATIONAL FREETHOUGHT CONGRESS AT ROME, 1949

Report of the Proceedings

II.

THE second subject of discussion was Humanism and Freethought, and occupied Sunday and part of Monday. M. Jean Cotereau was the official speaker. He defined freethought as 'thinking freely, i.e., reasoning freely, though he agreed that the expression could be interpreted in more than one way. Saint Thomas d'Aquinas was a rationalist according to the Catholics; but the freethought or rationalism which Freethinkers practise is neither that of the middle ages nor of the Renaissance. This is a rationalism without dogmas; it is a-religious and anti-religious, but is not necessarily materialist nor atheist. It may lead a sincere rationalist to other conclusions, e.g., Voltaire, Victor Hugo, and Combes, were neither atheists nor materialists.

If it is difficult to give a precise definition of freethinking, it is more difficult to arrive at one of humanism. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the humanists were those who admired, above all, pagan antiquity, but they commonly called themselves Christians, even one such as Pomponazzi, who, inspired by Aristotle, demonstrated the mortality of the soul and declared that man, having no supernatural aim, should take instead the welfare of mankind. In the seventeenth century Socrates became a Christian in the hand of G. Balzac, and the Church had established a Christian humanism as the sole conceivable and efficacious doctrine for the perfection of man on earth.

But of recent years, other humanisms have appeared, in particular that calling itself Economic Humanism or Synarchism which is the inspiration of a Society more severely secret than ever was Freemasonry. The National Revolution attempted by the Vichy Government was according to the programme outlined by the Synarchy who had proposed as far back as 1934 the overthrow of the Third French Republic. In France, therefore, the term humanism implies the defeat of 1940 and the supremacy of Petain; it has been used by the socialist, Leon Blum, signifying the elimination from socialist ideology of materialism and its replacement by spiritualist humanism.

Yet another declaration is that of J. P. Sartre, that existentialism is a humanism.

True humanism, according to Cotereau, can be met with only in freethought, for it is an appeal to all individual men to join in action for the betterment of mankind as a whole. We can be followers of Epictetus, Erasmus, Voltaire, Goethe or Marx; we can profess the religion of humanity of Auguste Comte, or the doctrines of Professor Schiller.

The Christian also claims that his religion is for the betterment of mankind; but it is not so from the point of view of man on earth, it is according to the commandments of deity. The history of Christianity shows that in operation it has brought not happiness but division and sorrow to great masses of humanity.

Each religion has made a claim to the monopoly of salvation and not one can, after many centuries of failure, honestly offer itself as the sole hope for all mankind. A parasitical clergy preaching an outworn creed cannot justly pretend to improvement of their fellow men. Côtureau, on the other hand, did not claim that humanism must be atheist and materialist; the genuine humanist was unwilling to lose time in attempting to solve the unsolvable, his every effort was to increase the total of earthly human happiness. Nor did the speaker consider true humanism compatible with unrestrained Capitalism.

Humanism contains one dogma, that man is capable of improvement, and he could think of no better foundation for humanist activity than scientific investigation and rationalist proof. In order to clear the field and allow these two factors full play, the humanist must be anti-religious and anti-clerical. In fact he will be compelled to be these by the clergy themselves.

Although humanism is a more ancient term than freethought it has not been the target for denigration and misrepresentation that the term freethought has been; and part of its appeal lies in this very thing, and many who are afraid of social prejudices fear to adopt the appellation of freethought. Côtureau was quite ready to meet these hesitating novices in rationalism and was prepared to use any docket which might strengthen the general movement. If a society could be formed with the title "Humanist" or any other title, but not with the name of "Freethinker," he was ready to support it, if it was essentially freethought; and he had acted in this sense on many occasions. Of recent years France has not been the only country to see a great increase in clerical power and a political repulse for rationalism; and it is a lamentable fact that in many countries the forces which had worked politically for rational humanism were now divided and even at enmity. It seemed to him that one factor in the use of the label Humanism as opposed to the label Freethought was a political factor. On the one hand the Communist Parties were withdrawing from freethought organisations as too liberal; on the other the liberal and radical elements pretended that freethought had become too Communist. Freethought was of no one political party; it is a method which can be applied with varying results according to the individual, but it has always been the method of the thinking minority and it would be deplorable if this minority which, in two great wars and in the disturbing period following them, has lost so much political ground were to be divided and torn by internal quarrels.

It was not only from revived clerical power that scientific humanism was suffering; from the Soviet universities mendelian geneticists were excluded and the American universities have been purified of Communists; both actions seem equally to be condemned and it should be the endeavour of all freethinkers, humanists, rationalists, or what you will, to re-assert the freedom of scientific thought.

(To be continued.)

EMINENCE AND SUPERSTITION

EACH philosophy has its problems, and there are no philosophies of universal belief. Moreover, everyone fairly versed in the history of opinions is aware that absurd beliefs have been held by eminent men. It seems, therefore, that only naive people can wonder that men of intellectual acumen hold, or have held, philosophies which modern critics stigmatise as superstitious. If such simple ones do raise the question, an answer can be given in discussion according to the temperament of the questioned, the time at disposal, and an assessment of the value of the question and intellect and education of the questioner.

The question is a favourite one with the unreflective kind of religionist. He often carries around an image of Gladstone or Sir Stafford Cripps clasping to heart the dear Bible, within which is the grand tale of the meek and lowly Jesus, who so continuously inspired, or inspires, those great men, and without whom neither would have done those charitable deeds, the fame of which shines as a diamond in his reputation. If it is one of these particular images that evokes the question we could dispose of the wonder at once, for the ability of these men is not the eminence imagined. What would be thought of him who advanced Jane Russell's ability as evidence for the proposition that millions now living will never die? She, too, is eminent. The average religionist would see the absurdity here.

Political eminence is, in fact, not much of a pointer to philosophical ability, and it is only philosophical quality that is important in questions of philosophy. The politician, especially in these days, is far too busy a man to produce pregnant opinions in matters of philosophy. If such a general observation does not satisfy a questioner, we could, perhaps, analyse the specific characters of these two men, and trace out their environment and habits. We might also point out that it is very difficult for a politician of unorthodox views on religion to come, except up the back stairs of respectful silence, to the inner sanctum of leadership. In Gladstone's day it would have been impossible.

There are, however, better examples that can be brought to worry the Atheist when his opinions clash with those of the pious man's: examples of men of fine integrity, learning and intellect. Such a one was Cardinal Newman, and there was the great Augustine, called great here to distinguish him from the Augustine who came to convert the English. Of the former, little will be said here, but, like Sir Stafford and Gladstone, but unlike his brother, he seemed never to have had the fundamental doubt that God might not exist.

The great Augustine is an interesting figure. He has been described as the greatest theologian of the Roman Empire. His birth was at Tagaste, North Africa, in A.D. 354. Thus he was born in the early years of Christian dominance, but while pagan religions survived. His mother was a devout Christian, his father a pagan whose ambition induced him to give his son the best education that Proconsular Africa could provide. Given intellectual ability, and wide range of interest, there would inevitably come to Augustine the feeling that a choice had to be made at least between Paganism and Christianity, perhaps between religion and atheism.

Did he pay any lively attention to the more fundamental choice? He does remark that after being a Manichean for nine years there arose a conceit in him that those philosophers called Academics should be wiser than the rest, for that they held men ought to make a doubt upon everything, and decreed that no truth can be comprehended by man. This period, however, does

THE MOTHER OF GOD. By G. W. Foote. Price 3d.; postage 1d.

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

not last long. In 374, Augustine was an initiate in the sect of the Manichees, so that it is in 383 that he is a doubter, and perhaps not a serious one. In 384 he comes upon Ambrose, who is teaching a Neoplatonic Christianity, and through him he becomes, in 386, himself a Christian.

How was Augustine affected by science? Medicine was already in its dark age. It seems, however, that anatomy was not quite extinct, for Augustine says:—

"For although with a cruel zeal for science, some medical men who are called anatomists have dissected the bodies of the dead, and sometimes even of sick persons who have died under their knives, and have inhumanly pried into the secrets of the human body in order to learn the nature of the disease and its exact seat, and how it might be cured; yet those relations of which I speak, and which form the concord, or as the Greeks call it, the harmony, of the body, outside and in, as of some instrument, no one has been able to discover, because no one has been audacious enough to seek for them."

Mr. E. M. Pickman in "The Mind of Christendom," Oxford University Press, 1937, discusses the question of Augustine's views on science. He points out that Augustine held that his conversion was possible only because of his preliminary enlightenment received through the false faiths of paganism, and insisted that pagan error was an indispensable preliminary to a later acceptance of truth. The question arises why then he was unwilling to tolerate pagan dissections of the corpse in order that the Christian harmony of the living body be some day revealed. Mr. Pickman answers that it was partly because Augustine was not greatly interested in the living body, but partly also, perhaps, because doubt was to him rather a pain than a pleasure.

The fact that Augustine was not very interested in the human body may be viewed in two aspects. If it was, as it may have been at some time, merely that his absorption in philosophical speculation had left him no time or intellectual energy to spare for meditation on medicine or anatomy, then his indifference was a mere accident, and it would not justify the criticism implied by the phrase "cruel zeal for science." If, however, his indifference was due to his religion, in that, because of it he held the body as naught, just as he regarded all non-religious knowledge as vanity, then his criticism of anatomy was *prima-facie* reasonable. This did become his position, even if it was not his at first. Here, then, is an example of the fundamental conflict, science against religion. It is knowledge that is the light of the world, and Augustine emerges in history as a sinner against the light. He sins deeply, for Lecky must say that Augustine more than any other theologian is responsible for systematic persecution.

Why did Augustine become a Christian? For answer one must see him in his environment. He was born in an age of intellectual decadence. The Dark Ages had begun. Moreover, he seems the kind of man to become a devotee of magic. At 20 he is a member of a religious sect, the Manichees. What is he seeking there? Is it the unvarnished truth? In these days he might have joined the Christian Science movement. Would one become a member of that body in order to find the truth about it? The facts seem to point to an early contamination with a low culture, the culture of those who see mysteries and await magic fulfilment of wishes.

When he embraces Christianity, his emotions are satisfied. He thinks his new religion stands the test of reason, but this is his misfortune. The fact is that he was born under the darkening sky of oriental mysticism, the storm burst, and he was one of its casualties.

J. G. LUPTON.

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH TO-DAY

THERE have been attempts made in many quarters to line the world up on either side of a theological and political fence—on one side the cohorts of Wall Street and the Vatican, and on the other side the Marxist supporters of the Soviet Union. Freethinkers, Anarchists, Liberal Christians of the Unitarian school and of the Society of Friends, as well as the more freedom-loving Socialists and their sympathisers, have said that it is necessary to build up a "third force" which will stand free from the entanglements of both sides.

Yet the efforts of the more totalitarian thinkers persist, and one of the most interesting of these was shown in the recent correspondence in *The Times* which was started by an article from an anonymous correspondent (by internal evidence, probably a Roman Catholic correspondent) on 31st October last. This correspondence, which went on for quite a month, has now been reprinted in a pamphlet which deserves study by all who wish to understand the trends of the times.

Catholicism Today is published by *The Times* at sixpence, and it contains the majority of these letters which appeared up to the end of November. The contributors, while there seems to be a considerable majority on the Roman Catholic side—e.g., Michael de la Bedoyere, editor of *The Catholic Herald*, Mr. A. C. F. Beales, chairman of the "Sword of the Spirit" movement, and Sir Henry Slessor—also include thinkers of all schools of thought. There are, for instance, Prof. Emile Cammerts, a Belgian who is now a member of the Church of England, Mr. Wilson Harris, M.P., Mr. E. G. Lee, an eminent Unitarian, and Mr. Kenneth Cadbury, who is a representative of the Society of Friends.

Admittedly, Freethought and Rationalism, as generally understood, did not appear to be represented; but with that notable exception practically every side of the religious life of Great Britain had its say.

The original article, which stimulated this interesting and, I think, important correspondence, was entitled "Roman Catholics and Other Christians," and was, in essence, an appeal for more co-operation between the Roman Catholic Church and the other Churches, especially in the West. It dealt with what were described as the "sufferings of Catholics in Eastern Europe," and stated that the Roman Catholic Church was leading the struggle against "Marxist paganism." Nowhere, of course, was there any mention of the fact of the real reason why Roman Catholicism has become Public Enemy Number One to the Communists—the fact that the Vatican is the spearhead of a movement which is far more directly political and economic than theological in its aims. The end of the article states: "The victory of persuasion over force is that by which Christianity was first established; it is also that whereby it will be maintained."

Now, whatever one may feel about the merits or demerits of any suggestions for the reunion of the Christian Churches, there can be no doubt at all that the Vatican does not believe, ultimately, in the "victory of persuasion over force"; indeed, it is quite the reverse. The spirit which inspired the Spanish Inquisition is still alive, and, as the special correspondent who wrote the article admits, the crusading ardour with which the Roman Catholic Press has tried to support Franco in Spain is enough to damn it in the eyes of all true lovers of freedom everywhere.

But what did the correspondents who rushed to write to *The Times* have to say about this? Most of them made no comment on the political issue. It eventually became an argument on the technical and theological

aspects of reunion, and developed more or less directly into an assumption on the part of the Roman Catholics that they are the unchanging Church and that if the other Churches are to enjoy the supposed benefits of reunion they must accept at any rate the preliminary aspects of Vatican policy and outlook. This was, of course, not stated as baldly as I have done it here, but that is, in actuality, what the statements of the Romanists amounted to.

One Roman Catholic bishop, for example, commenting on the fact that members of the Roman Communion will not even pray with their Protestant friends, wrote: "A Catholic and a non-Catholic saying the Lord's Prayer could not have united minds or mean the same thing." The best comment on all this came from the Unitarian, Mr. E. G. Lee, who wrote: "Meanwhile, Christendom will be rent with the terrible outward and visible signs of a disrupted and broken inner life, the multitudes will be left helpless in their tragedy, and the leaders of the Churches will apparently shrug their shoulders, or more likely look on with compassion and pity, until the world comes round to *their* particular private interpretation of the nature of God."

That, indeed, is the genuine tragedy that lies behind this lengthy and in many ways interesting correspondence. Few people will be found to believe that the propagandists of the various Churches are entirely sincere in their advocacy of the value of Christianity to the world while they place their own special aspects of religious belief in the forefront, regarding as valuable what most separates them from their fellow-believers who happen to belong to another communion.

Freethinkers, in common (as I have already suggested) with Unitarians and members of the Society of Friends, will regard themselves as standing on the sideline in this argument. But at the same time they will realise that this is a controversy which is not without some value and importance in the world. Naturally, there are many who feel that the whole thing is so artificial that it is not worth a moment's discussion. But most of us realise that the religious beliefs still shared by millions in all parts of the world are of considerable importance, no matter whether those beliefs are true or false. And when an attempt is made—which is what this controversy really amounted to—to tie the members of the various Churches in this country to the theological and political efforts of the Church of Rome it is time that a halt was cried to the whole thing. If there was any sort of indication that Rome would compromise, give up some of its special beliefs in order to help in a general reunion of Christendom, then there would, perhaps, be some hope of that religious revival for which so many people have been looking for so long. But there can, in actual hard fact, be little hope of anything of the kind while Rome persists in taking its own special line, making itself 100 per cent. certain that it is in the right, and that other Churches deviate from rectitude as they deviate from the party line of Rome.

JOHN ROWLAND.

The justification of Father O'Sullivan of Hutyon, when charged for running a football pool for the benefit of a building fund for a Catholic church and school, is so blatant that he really deserves to succeed: he was of the opinion that "it would be a good thing to cash in on the human weakness of wishing to have pools." The Roman Catholic Church has traded on human weakness for so long, that it makes no apology for so doing. Apparently the court before which the case was tried did so in a rather half-hearted way, for the fines inflicted were ridiculously small: more human weakness perhaps!

CORRESPONDENCE

COMMUNISM

SIR,—Will you be good enough to allow me to reply to the letters of J. Plimmer and J. W. Barker, which appear in your issue of 25th December. Both of these good folk appear to be in a fog concerning this subject, and would be well advised to get down to fundamentals instead of trying to score small debating points.

During this correspondence I have sought to maintain the following propositions:—

(a) That British democracy is far preferable to Communism, as we can freely express our opinions without a rigid censorship. I have not said that our democracy is perfect.

(b) That it would be undesirable, and even disastrous, to introduce into Great Britain the policy and methods of Communism, because the rule of censorship and tyranny which is inherent in the communistic system of government is foreign to freethought and secularism.

(c) That Freethinkers should oppose Communism coming into power here, owing to its proved negation of freedom, its persecution, and its terrorism. This is what I mean.

Mr. Plimmer, by bringing freethought ideals into action. Now, Mr. Editor, you have generously permitted me space to give quotations from writers who have visited Russia and studied Communism. One of my critics intimated that I was too fond of quoting! So far I have quoted the evidence of Sidney Webb, W. J. Brown and Mrs. I. Wells, who are all against Communism.

It is complained that I have not given examples of communistic tyranny, but a re-perusal of my letters will show that I have given many cases.

For more examples I would advise all Freethinkers to read "Come Hammer, Come Sickle," by Sir Paul Dukes, who lived in Russia for over forty years, and his short history of Russia before, after and since the revolutions of 1917 should not be missed. He considers the Russians are a grand people, but their government a mixture of good and evil, mostly the latter.

May I also cite the evidence of some ex-members of the British Communist Party. Charlotte Haldane has just written a revealing book on Communism. It is called "Truth Will Out." Mrs. Haldane joined the Party in 1937, and went as their agent to France, Spain and China, working for some time as an underground member of the Comintern in Paris. During her second visit to Russia the "black-out of all liberty" under the Stalinist regime convinced her that she had been misled. On her return to England she broke with the Party.

Douglas Hyde, who was on the editorial staff of the "Daily Worker," has renounced Communism. He says "this thing is morally indefensible." Mr. Hyde became convinced that Communist opposition to the Marshall Plan could bring nothing but misery to the common people of Britain, that the movement was destroying those very freedoms and decencies for which it claimed to be fighting. Mr. Hyde was responsible for the "Daily Worker" production drive. "Then the Cominform was set up, and after some time the new line came through to the British party leaders. We were to oppose the Marshall Plan and drop our support for increased production."

Finally I would refer Freethinkers to Fred. Copeman's account of how the Communist Party cut across his interpretation of freedom. In "Reason in Revolt" Mr. Copeman states that from his experience of being a member of the Party and visiting Russia, Communism is the very negation of freedom. "How many have taken the trouble to study Stalin's rise to power? No dictator has trod a bloodier path, or a more dishonest one. The old guard, all friends of Lenin, were murdered in order to retain a personal power greater than that ever held by any other man."—Yours, etc.,

ALFRED D. CORRICK.

THE SHAKESPEARE PROBLEM.

SIR,—May I be allowed to say a few words in reply to Mr. F. C. Parson—his letter teems with mere opinions put forward as "facts." Far from having a "rustic" and poorly educated mind, the writer of the plays of Shakespeare had the most aristocratic mind in the whole of English literature. Of that, no one familiar with the plays could possibly deny. In most cases his "rustics" are laughed at or treated as clowns. It is simply untrue to say that the plays "abound in the rustic English of Warwickshire, etc." They do nothing of the kind. Will Mr. Parsons give us, say, twenty of these Warwickshire "rustic" phrases if he still maintains it? Will he also give us the names and full references to "those nearest to him of his own generation" so that we can all see what they really said? I hope one day to deal fully with some of the absurd claims put forward for the "rustic" minded genius.—Yours, etc.,

H. CUTNER.

ATHEISM.

Sir,—Is not Mr. G. S. Smelters' article of 8th January an unnecessary verbal complication of a very simple question "On Defining Atheism?" His writing is an example of that jargon that is corrupting clarity and comprehension in politics such as "disinflation," "re-deployment," etc., of which Sir Stafford Cripps is the masterly exponent. I find the robust directness of Mr. Foote enough on Agnosticism versus Atheism which are the same. Neither has any knowledge of God.—Yours, etc.,

M. BARNARD.

"RUSSIAN CAPITALISM."

Sir,—When I gave a list of the countries I had visited, I certainly did not expect Mr. Bott would put forward the theory that it was due to our "democracy" that I was able to go abroad. I can assure him that Travel Agencies require cash, and a ballot paper is of no value for foreign travel.

It will be no news to most of the readers of *The Freethinker* that the controversy with regard to the U.S.S.R. has now extended over thirty years, and, due to peculiar commercial circumstances, I knew what was happening from the beginning. The Russian Revolution not only gave me an idea of new political and economic forces, but it also revealed the character of the political system in this and other countries. Needless to say, I was not bribed to hold these new opinions, but all critics of the U.S.S.R. seem to overlook that the prevailing mode of production has nothing to boast about, and the fact of two world wars in thirty years implies, even to the most ignorant, that there is "Something wrong in the State of Denmark."

The Russian Revolution and the war of 1914 revealed that when the Government (Foreign Office) has their knife in any country all the official sources of information are suspect, and this includes the Press and the radio. This attitude has persisted for so long that one expects it, and the fact of this hostile propaganda being suspended during the recent war proves that criticisms of the type Mr. Bott puts forward are part of the organised propaganda. They have been made before and disproved and will be made again.

In "The Yankee at the Court of King Arthur," the magician, who professes to tell what is happening in distant lands, is flummoxed by the Yankee who asks, "What am I doing with my hands behind my back?" and I would commend this critical attitude to people who are handed fairy tales about other countries.

Readers who are interested in what has happened in the way of propaganda during the last thirty years, should read "The Great Conspiracy against Russia" published in the U.S.A.

Those who want details of the Political and Economic Developments of the U.S.S.R., should consult the Webb's, "Soviet Communism. A New Civilisation"—a very complete work and that by people who had previously written many books on English history.

Even the hostile criticism shows that there is immense constructional work. Mr. Bott acknowledges this, but calls it "Capitalist" development. What has he to grumble at? Surely as a critic he should be more than satisfied to find that Socialism has failed and that the older Capitalist system has supplanted it? And why all this hullabaloo about other countries following the lead of the U.S.S.R. if the results are the return to Capitalism?

There is yet another book which I would commend to political critics, and that is "The Rights of Man," by Tom Paine. In this will be found the basic reasons for the lying propaganda of his time, and, incidentally, of the propaganda which has characterised the last thirty years.

It is quite evident that despite all the hostility there is something different and something better in this world making for greater security and the improvement of the standard of life. Unless we believe this, then progress is at an end. This idea, like all new ideas, has to fight the most virulent and unscrupulous opposition of the believers in the old.

In apologising for the length of this letter, I must leave to readers the decision as to whether I know anything about "Scientific Socialism" such as Mr. Bott claims. Having visited the U.S.S.R. on two occasions with my family, I can at least claim that we have seen for ourselves, and no Free-thinker would be silly enough to defend something which he knew to be fictitious. Neither would he be so cowardly as to see something attacked which he knew to be true without pointing out the facts. As Ingersoll said, "We must take sides."—Yours, etc.,

T. D. SMITH.

ANARCHISM.

Sir,—It is a pity that S. E. Parker had to include in his letter on Anarchism the statement that readers of *The Freethinker* understand the individualism of Anarchists to mean "Damn you, Jack, I'm all right."

The word Anarchism and the names Kropotkin, Proudhon, Tolstoy, etc., have appeared in *The Freethinker* before and readers of this journal are quite capable and accustomed to seeking out for themselves what words and names really stand for.

Regarding Alfred Corrick: In his letter in the December 4 issue he is clearly talking about present-day Communists inside and outside of Russia, not about the ideas of such men as Marx, Morris and Kropotkin. He condemns present-day Communists and particularly the Russian Communist Government for their tyranny and persecution of all forms of opposition. In this he has the support of most Freethinkers, as far as I am able to judge.—Yours, etc.,

H. POINTER.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m.: Lecture: Rev. DUDLEY RICHARDS, M.A.

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Tuesday, January 24, 7 p.m.: "What is Existentialism?" Mr. J. B. COATES.

Glasgow Secular Society (McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "World Government." Speaker to be announced.

Lewisham and District Branch N.S.S. (Hope Hotel, 73, Loampit Vale, S.E.).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: "Can an Antiquarian be a Christian?" Mr. W. KENT, F.S.A.

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: "The Need for World Government." Dr. E. L. LOEWENTHAL.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "Capital Punishment Today." Mr. R. C. FITZGERALD, LL.B., F.R.S.A.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W. 1).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: "Civil Liberties Today." Mr. R. S. W. POLLARD, J.P.

OUTDOOR

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

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

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

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

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