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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

"The Mortal God"

IN the year 1651, at the climax of the great English Revolution of the mid-17th century, from which finally emerged the Britain of modern times, the English political philosopher, Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury, published his famous work, *Leviathan*. In the course of this trenchant and powerful book, which probably yields to nothing in the English language in sheer logic and intellectual power, Hobbes celebrated the glories of what was then actually already a dying regime, the absolute monarchy of the Tudors and early Stuarts, just then in process of liquidation at the hands of Cromwell and his revolutionary "Ironsides." For the express purpose of Hobbes in writing his great treatise on political philosophy was to celebrate the Tudor-Stuart absolute State, "over all causes and persons supreme," "the mortal god," as Hobbes himself termed it.

Our philosopher was the literary champion of the absolute State and the unconcealed purpose of his thesis was to defend what would nowadays be styled its "totalitarian" character and powers. His frontispiece depicted a formidable giant crowned and carrying a sword, whilst the title page was adorned by a motto from the book of Job: (*anglice*) "there is nothing on earth that is its equal." However, the intervention of its champion came too late to save the English version of absolutism. The *Leviathan* was the swan-song of that State and, true to the metaphor, the English totalitarian State sang loudest before it died!

While the great champion of absolutism was actually writing his irrefutable proof of the social necessity of absolutism, without which (according to his own terse expression) life would be "nasty, brutish, desolate, and short," the English revolutionaries were busily engaged in battering down that State and in bringing to the scaffold its last absolute ruler, Charles I (January 30, 1649). As so often in history, life was actually larger, if not than logic, at least than the logic of reaction.

To-day, the absolute monarchy of Henry VIII, Elizabeth Tudor, and of Charles Stuart, is a thing of the past in these islands; so completely so in fact is this the case, that only a few historical specialists probably even know that it once actually existed, and that from 1485 to 1640, England was subject to an absolute State as omnipotent, as efficient, and as absolutely ruthless, as any recorded in history prior to, at least, the present (20th) century, which has armed dictatorship with new technical adjuncts. It was not by any kid-glove methods that the State of Tudor England "broke the bonds of Rome!"

To-day, the thesis which found in the England of the 17th century its most powerful defender, is, once again, walking abroad in the world. Something like a third of the modern world submits to totalitarian dictatorships, in which law and morality are reduced to the current practice of the State, and wherein the individual possesses absolutely no constitutional rights whatsoever against

the omnipotent State and its ubiquitous agents. Nor is it only a question of Communist and Fascist States, of Hitler and Mussolini yesterday, or of Stalin and Franco to-day; in every country, thanks largely to technical changes, the power of the State continually gains ground at the expense of the individual. Moreover, even in the religious sphere, it is the Church of Rome, the totalitarian form of Christianity which, more and more, plays a leading rôle in a society that is steadily moving away from Liberalism in thought and deed; the *laissez-faire* State of the 19th century, the "lazy State," as one of its protagonists (Alexander von Humboldt) defined it, is now, in the Old World at least, a thing of the past.

The two most dynamic and original creeds of our era, Fascism and Communism, are both totalitarian in essence in the case of Fascism inevitably so. Whether this applies to Communism is more doubtful. Communism, as an economic system, has taken many political forms in the past; even many anarchists, nowadays, claim to be Communists also! The Lenin-Stalin variety is, perhaps, more Russian than Communist in, at least, its political character. It may be relevantly recalled in this last connection that the Master himself, Karl Marx, declared to a Russian correspondent that the sociological analysis of Marxism related exclusively to Western European conditions and did not apply in and to a still medieval Russia; a "forgotten word" amongst present-day Communists.

What is the rôle of Freethought in a world so conditioned; in which the dominant political forms are to-day moving steadily away from the liberal regimes of last century, which respected the integrity of the individual and were as a rule neutral in questions of ethics and culture? The modern State is not neutral in such matters; both Communism and Fascism believe in "conditioning" the individual from birth to burial. Both, in effect, agree with and actively practise the time-honoured formula of the Jesuits: "Give me the child and I will fashion the resulting man."

The totalitarian nightmare, the robot-State in its completed form, has often been depicted in literature, most recently by Mr. George Orwell in 1984, but, we may relevantly add, it is only since the arrival of the 20th century with its mass-psychology and its technical apparatus for propaganda, that the omnipotent State, the modern version of the *Leviathan*, Hobbes' "mortal god," has realised all its latent potentialities; no Roman Caesar, medieval Pope, Egyptian Pharaoh, nor Peruvian Inca, ever remotely approached the power of the modern "total State." The actual powers possessed and exercised by the Gestapo and the Politbureau would have made the most absolute despots of the past, from Diocletian to our own Henry VIII, turn green with frustrated envy!

It is the submission and contention of the present writer that the major and most dangerous enemy of contemporary Freethought lies precisely in the omnipotent State; in Biblical language, "the little

finger" of the "mortal god," the State absolutism is, to-day, it would appear, considerably "thicker than the loins" of the Churches; compared with the argus-eyed political police of the modern absolute State, how feeble and archaic appear the rusty thunderbolts of Canterbury, York, and even the Vatican! Incidentally, if the last named is still a world-power, it owes this position largely to its own totalitarian character. However, the medieval autocracy of Rome is making heavy weather against the modern and up-to-date absolutism of the Kremlin; as to judge from the bitterness of its denunciations, Rome fully realises!

"The 20th century," declared Mussolini, "is the age of the State," that is, of the despotic State, old Hobbes' "mortal god." Genuine Freethought cannot, or so we contend, survive in such an age; for Freethought is, by definition, the direct antithesis of conditioned thought, by whomsoever conditioned. We suggest that, in the mid-20th century, in an era of "total war" and of the total State, Freethought has enemies newer, but not essentially less dangerous than a visibly disintegrating Christianity, and that, to paraphrase Milton, "new" bureaucrat "is but old priest writ large." Like all living things in the evolutionary process, Freethought, too, cannot take its existence for granted, but must fight for "the survival of the fittest," including itself and its own future in such an alien age.

F. A. RIDLEY.

WHAT THINK YE OF CHRIST?

IN 1935 there was delivered to my breakfast table a book from the R.P.A. by Gordon Rylands. My eight-year-old daughter read out the title: *Did Jesus Ever Live?* Quickly came her answer: "Of course He did." I imagine some parson, like the Rev. Wallace Hadrill of Stratford Broadcast fame, chuckling over this and murmuring, "Out of the mouths of babes . . ." or "A little child shall lead them." They do—notably the parsons, whose decreasingly successful business is based upon the mentality of children remaining in many adults.

The question at the head of this article—it comes from holy writ—was much posed in pulpits in my youth. Now Mr. Herbert Cutner approaches it in quite a reverse way in his *Jesus: God, Man or Myth* (Truth Seeker Co., New York, \$2.50). His answer to the question would make the parsons almost as rampageous as the late unlamented Adolph Hitler would have been, had he read an apologia for the Jews. Of course, they pretend impartial inquiry. I recorded here a pretentious prating on the subject by the Provost of Southwark (now Bishop of Croydon) in Southwark Cathedral. As well might a literary professor claim to be open-minded in examining the question of Shakespearean authorship, and there are many parallels between the myth of Stratford and the myth of the Saviour. A typical parson's prejudice was revealed by the late Hensley Henson, Bishop of Durham. In his diary on 8th January, 1935, he wrote:—

"I read through an article in the current issue of the 'Hibbert Journal,' entitled, 'A Mathematician on the Origin of Christianity.' The mathematician was an American named William Benjamin Smith, who died in 1934, and was the author of a book called *Ecce Deus*, which attracted some notice 20 years ago. This article is as perverse, even grotesque a piece of anti-Christian theorising as I have ever read. The stupidest fundamentalist is by comparison a rational and modest student."

I have approached Mr. Cutner's book with an impartial mind, as I did when I presided, at Conway Hall, over a debate between him and Howell Smith. I have neither disdained the mythicists nor asserted that the historicists have no case. Let me say, therefore, at the outset, that of the half-dozen or more books I have read on the issue, Mr. Cutner's is the most fascinating, forcible, and convincing.

Having read Mr. Howell Smith's able but less persuasive work, *Jesus Not a Myth*, I was not surprised to find his opponent quoting the following passage from it. But "The Gospel story then is truly a legend. . . . Beneath the mystical and mythical crust there lie hidden historical facts, though it is exceedingly hard—nay impossible—to bring them all to light." Mr. Cutner's comment is: "If it is impossible to bring them all to light it would be interesting to know which have been brought to light. Of course, if there was a real man behind the Gospel story, obviously he had to eat, drink, and sleep." This certainly is a safe supposition beyond which Archibald Robertson (*Jesus: Myth or History*) can hardly go, for he wrote:—

"We know next to nothing about this Jesus. He is not the founder of anything that we can recognise as Christianity. He is a mere postulate of historical criticism—a dead leader of a lost cause to whom sayings could be credited and round whom a legend could be written. He contributed one element, and only one, to the myth of the God-man."

Yet, strangely, Mr. Howell Smith has discovered quite a lot. To him it seems reasonable to believe that Jesus of Nazareth was "a wandering Galilean teacher, proclaimed the coming of Messiah's reign, taught his fellow countrymen to love God as their Heavenly Father, was very kind to the poor, and pleaded their cause against the oppressors in the spirit of the Hebrew prophets . . . healed many sick persons and soothed madmen (those 'possessed with devils'), and finally roused the hatred of the Jewish hierarchy, who handed him over to Pontius Pilate . . . to be crucified as a rebel against Rome." Yet, Mr. Howell Smith registers his consent to Matthew Arnold's dictum that "miracles do not happen," and this must cut out most of the healing. On another page he makes a remark that recoils upon himself in referring to the myth of William Tell. "Precision in biographical detail, exact chronological setting, vividness, presentation, and the absence of the small scope of the miraculous in his story, do not guarantee the historicity of any person whose name has come down to us." It is apt here to quote E. A. Freeman, the historian.

"I have seen in many books so much of this story of Alfred the Great told as people nowadays think possible, viz., the story of Alfred's charity to the poor man. Now it is quite possible that this may be true and that the rest is tradition which has grown around it. But we have no evidence that it is so, and we have no right to take a piece of story in this way. The writers who tell us one part tell us the rest, and if we tell the story at all, we should tell the whole story. It is not fair to pick out just so much as we think possible and to tell that much as if it were certainly true."

Howell Smith, seeming to endorse the Anglican Freeman, says the elimination of miracles "disembowels the evangelical records. Selection of credible data then becomes largely subjective." He is impressed by the fact that all the evangelists mention the birth at Nazareth as against those who deny there was such a place. Many writers describe Dick Whittington's pausing on Highgate

Hill to hear Bow bells, though there he must badly have lost his way if he was bound for his ancestral home in Gloucestershire—perhaps for lack of a medieval policeman! Do not writers copy one another? Another Shakespeare parallel here!

Yet, despite the discovery of the Unitarians' Jesus, what concessions Mr. Howell Smith makes to the mythicists! "The silence of Jewish writers of the first century about the life and death of Jesus . . . is certainly impressive. Certain features of the legend of Jesus are unquestionably of astronomical origin. . . . The manger in which the Babe of Bethlehem was cradled is probably a solar feature." He refers to "the myth of a Son of God sacrificed by his Divine Father, which may have been still current when Paul and his Christian predecessors first preached faith in a suffering and resurrected Jesus."

About 50 years ago there was a vogue for "Marked Testaments." The passages of significance for salvation were printed in red. Ironically they were more numerous in the Pauline epistles than in the words of the Saviour. If Messrs. Robertson and Smith marked the passages they thought had historical value there would hardly be more red than there is in Mr. Cutner's politics.

Not that I am entirely convinced by him. He inclines to the view of J. M. Robertson that what the Christians call history was largely drama, and Howell Smith says: "To what extent a dramatic ritual has coloured the Passion story we cannot say; but there seems to have been some such colouring." Of course, no one treats seriously speeches put into the mouths of men who lived hundreds of years ago. Ancient chroniclers, like Geoffrey of Monmouth, record the address of Caesar to his legions before they invaded this island. Some of the sayings of Jesus, however, are not happy in a drama—Mr. Cutner thinks them occasionally unintelligible—and may have been fragments of the utterances of a fanatical and enigmatical preacher in Palestine.

I am, however, with Mr. Cutner about the argument from the absence of Jewish scepticism, one to which I had given too much weight. If it could be shown that in the first century, in the lifetime of the oldest inhabitant of Palestine who could have been a contemporary of the so-called Nazarene, a heated debate took place in which no suggestion was made that his figure was an invention, this would go far to dismiss the idea. The very large majority of people, however, accept the beliefs they find prevalent around them—Whittington and his cat; William Tell and his accurate aim; Shakespeare and his plays. I imagine, therefore, that by the second century, when admittedly discussion about the Messiah did take place, the argument would be whether he was such, with little inclination to investigate whether Jesus have ever lived. As to the words of Trypho, I am with Mr. Cutner. I find nothing to imply a belief in a Jesus of flesh and blood.

With regard to Paul, ever since I passed the stage of simple faith and begun to question anything in holy writ, I have wondered at his silence regarding that marvellous life. It seems to be agreed he had never met Jesus, which corroborates the famous passage in Gibbon in which he comments upon the indifference of the outside world to the miracles of Judea. The very few mere hints that he had heard of him are in proportion to his deeds as Falstaff's bread was to his sack, and I can easily believe they were interpolations, just as J. P. Collier thought it well to have a reference to Shakespeare in the papers at Dulwich College, and put one in. It passes my comprehension to understand why,

after that experience on the Damascus Road, Saul, alias Paul, did not scour the country to meet those who had seen those wonderful deeds and heard the doer's words. Nobody can persuade me that if he did so mention of what he found would have been omitted from so many epistles.

Mr. Cutner's controversial ginger is apt to be very "hot i' the mouth," and he is out to scarify reverend Rationalists. I have not found so many as he has, but I have noticed a disinclination to criticise the sayings of Jesus even on the part of those who have only a perfunctory—if any—belief in Christianity. At the Ancient Society of Cogers (readers of *The Freethinker* would enjoy their ruthless debates on Saturday nights at the White Horse Tavern, Fetter Lane), Freethinkers have small support and the most ambiguous adjective "Christian" is freely used. I attribute the fact that I was a "C.O." in the First World War to a hang-over from Sunday school. I had given up all the theological beliefs, but still hankered after the Sermon on the Mount—it would be interesting to know how much of this was ever preached, according to Howell Smith—so much so that a religious objector, seeking to compliment me, called me Christian. I was glad, therefore, to be reminded that Francis Newman had been more bold, and I may mention that much more recently so was H. G. Wells—in *First and Last Things* (1917). He said that the character of Oliver Goldsmith appealed more to him. "The Christian Christ is too fine for me, not incarnate enough, not earth enough." It sounds as if Wells thought he was much of a god. If Wells had written of Jesus as did John Stuart Mill—Mr. Cutner quotes the passage—how much we should have heard of it! How many Christians know that a Bishop sixty years ago—the passage is in *Lift Up Your Heads*—intimated that if anyone proposed that the state could carry out the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount "his proper place was in a lunatic asylum."

This reminds me that two clergymen abandoned their belief in a historical Jesus—Rev. K. C. Anderson of Dundee, and G. T. Sadler of Wimbledon. The latter is quoted by Mr. Cutner. They retained their ministry! It is hardly necessary to say that they were nonconformists. Even Bishop Barnes would not get away with this in the Anglican Church.

A hymn I once sang ran:—

"Over the line why should I remain
With a step between me and Jesus?"

Alter the last word to "Jesus-mythicists" and it represents my present position. When Archibald Robertson says "We know next to nothing about this Jesus," some will say: Then what is there to argue about? For Mr. Robertson—if not for Howell Smith—the *Jesus of the New Testament* never did exist.

Some of us could wish he never had in the minds of our parents and teachers. What think ye of Christ? My answer now is that he has had a most mischievous influence. This is a peculiarly personal matter with me. My autobiographical book, like that much finer one of Sir Edmund Gosse, might have been called "Crucified by Christ."

"Thou has conquered, oh pale Galilean,
And the world has grown grey with thy breath."

I am sorry that the price of this book and its publication in America may make it difficult of acquisition by readers of *The Freethinker*. Nowadays, however, libraries are enterprising, and an entry in the Recommendation Book might bring a copy.

WILLIAM KENT.

NUNC DIMITTIS

I am glad, Mr. Editor, that you have found space to publish Mr. Rowland's article. As one of your most distinguished contributors it is only his due, were *The Freethinker* not an organ for freedom of expression and merely an instrument for channelling opinion on some prescribed lines. It merits a reply; in fact, it becomes incumbent on us to point out the false path upon which Mr. Rowlands has set his feet.

But first, as an atheist, I must repudiate his stigma of dogmatism. I have never heard of any authoritarian definition of Atheism, and though I am conscious of a general agreement of views among atheists, they pretend to nothing in the way of a *credo*. We atheists see no evidence of any Supreme Architect or Divinity, nor do we find that the postulation of a god facilitates the solution of any of our problems; we work, therefore, on the hypothesis that there is no god. To state that this attitude is dogmatic is to abuse the word. A negative proposition cannot be dogmatic, Mr. Rowlands.

The claim that Christianity signifies a high moral purpose is belied by its own history, which shows its practice to have been nothing of the kind. The Christian, Tertullian's, response to reproaches that "as to your saying we are a shameful set, steeped in luxury, avarice and depravity, we do not deny its truth in some, but not all, nor even a majority of us," can hardly be described as a confident assertion of moral superiority. But I do not need to quote from books on Christian behaviour throughout the centuries; Mr. Rowlands knows them as well or better than I. Nor would he claim that the existence of noble Christians was evidence of its Eternal Verity, since in that respect it shares distinction with most organised movements.

His assertion that the Christian sects he favours are logical may or may not be true. Certainly I regard the Catholic Faith as one of the most logically worked out theses I know of, given its assumptions. Given its assumptions, even Nazi-ism was by way of being logical. But that's the rub—given its assumptions! It is the assumptions that we find intolerable and as having consequences detrimental to human society. On many irrational assumptions a logical superstructure has been erected, and it may be that the Quaker or Unitarian superstructure can be so described. I do not know; I find only that its assumptions are irrational and absurd; and the real tragedy is, Brother, that you once knew it but that now, like your new found hero Paul, you have been smitten with blindness!

You want to stop this process towards catastrophe; with all my heart I am with you, as are so many of your erstwhile—comrades of Reason. But when you go on to say we should seek help from that very superstition which has contributed so much to that cataclysmic process, I find your proposal not only absurd but a little mad. Do you really think that your new found friends can save the world, with the blood of a ruined Roman Empire and a Thirty Years War still on their hands? Or have they, like Brigham Young, had a new revelation?

Since you do not indicate how this sectarian Christianity is going to set about saving the world, it is difficult to offer effective criticism. But you do less than justice to many freethinkers, such as F. A. Ridley, to mention only one, who do concern themselves with the effort to create new social institutions. By the way, what has York done in that line, apart from talking about it?

I would point out, however, that Christianity, liberal, modern or what you will, is still a belief that man is a

creature of God's design and purpose, that He is concerned with the soul he has put in him and not with his corporal welfare. And logic tells us that, in that case, where the spiritual and the material conflict—and conflict they often must—it is the material that will be disregarded.

Atheism, on the other hand, recognising no purpose other than that conceived by man, no obedience to an authoritarian God-maker, and no after-life of some spiritual, non-physical part in a static eternity, puts its duty to Man as its first and highest duty. It is, therefore, ultimately the most enlightened and most humane of faiths and the best guarantee for Man's salvation on earth.

P. C. KING.

AMERICA WITHERS

WHEN some years ago the American Protective Association and similar voices warned that the Roman Catholic political machine was set to undermine this Republic, the cry seemed more of fanaticism than of prophecy. To-day it has become a grim reality. Smoothly, silently, without a whisper of religion, Catholics are slipping into offices high and low, whether the pay is attractive or not (at first). Eighty-two Congressmen are Catholic and the Attorney General is Catholic. The Post Office Department is in Catholic hands. So is the Department of Printing and Engraving. They hold high and many places in the Navy. They have it in their power to have an internal explosion in a vessel, as happened in the *Maine*, and cite a Russian sub: The "un-American" Committee is Catholic dominated. When the F.B.I. snapped up a rebellious Catholic archbishop, meaning to plaster him with the stain of Communism, he said, "You boys are all Roman Catholic, aren't you?" Neither the "un-American" nor the F.B.I. can be driven to investigate any fascist order. We could stand upon any American height, as did Hannibal on the acropolis of Italy, and say "Yonder lies Rome."

Rome is behind a very great part of this war hysteria. Not a politician, not a candidate, not an editor will expose this drive. Through control of the Press, the radio, Congress, every department of government, the whole American people have been frightened into believing they must, even as a Protestant nation, devote all, pour everything to the side of Catholicism in its fight with Communism. Russian influence has dried the Old World stream of gold flowing to Rome to 10 per cent., the other 90 flowing from America.

The wealth of the Church in this country surpasses the dream of a Midas. Through "dummies" the Pope owns 702 millions of real estate, tax free. The invisible wealth is not to be estimated. Controlling interest in railroads, bank stock, insurance stock, industrial stock, no end. The Church control of government is so complete that it pays no taxes, makes no report on funds although taking out corporation papers. The Bishop of Washington has a standing order with his bank to purchase \$200,000 worth of American stocks and bonds PER WEEK. Pleading poverty, it bleeds its own members almost beyond endurance. In 1948, pleading charity, it raised in this country 39 million dollars, spent seven of it for charity, kept the other 32 million. One Congressman said "If you want to raise a ruckus just propose to have any but a Catholic secretary." Every President since Harding has had a Catholic private secretary, a cardinal lending his to F.D.R. Railroad executives are forced or induced to have Catholic secretaries. Is there any secret, State or other, that Rome does not get?

In some towns in America the public school is boarded up, the parochial supplanting it, the merchants compelled to donate to it, and support or suffer ruin through boycott. Many other schools with Catholics on the board hire nuns to teach, their salaries going to the Church. It is said that the schools of Chicago are in danger of non-recognition by the National Association of Education because of sabotage and rank mismanagement by Catholic boards.

A guard of priests in Hollywood see to it that Catholic propaganda is in nearly every film, priests and nuns being portrayed as angels, while atheists and preachers are depicted as scum. The Jews have every reason through centuries to hate Rome, yet submit and truckle through the films.

There is Senator McCarthy, doing service to Rome, bragging that he will be the first Catholic president. He was for Nazidom. He lately succeeded in saving the S.S. soldiers from execution for shooting in cold blood American prisoners at Malmedy. He called Hitler's representative to Rome "the most valuable man we had."

Not a column but a book is needed to detail the losses of democracy to Roman traitors within, and we see their prelates brag that they are Romans first and Americans afterward. A California priest shouts that the Catholic Church is taking the offensive now, and is not content with counterblows. They call it Catholic Action. Action it is. But where the keen, fluted Italian stiletto is being driven from behind, between the shoulder blades, and into the heart of Liberty, is in our courts. This disarms, defeats the people. The courts are supposed to be the refuge and the guardians of justice when prejudice, class tyranny, and outrage raise their ugly hands. Alertly, slyly, Catholics have been placed on the benches of both lower and higher courts. Just a few months ago we saw the Pope issue orders to Catholic women to vote, and another command to Catholic judges to render decisions in accordance with canon laws and not the law of the land. So boldly, so openly has the Church taken the offensive!

Chicago is under the merciless heel. The chief Justice of the Criminal Court of Cook County has repeatedly suspended habeas corpus to hold Protestant ministers in jail for complaining that Catholic officials are corrupt and lawless. One of these cases was carried to the Supreme Court of the United States. The whole issue was the First Amendment, that Gibraltar of American liberty. The Court straddled, Vinson refusing to vote. That approved it without having to make a record decision. A Catholic federal judge of Chicago did the same thing, and habeas corpus (the right to await trial, on bond, outside of jail) is a sacred right not to be suspended except in time of war. Such action gives the hierarchy the power to put complaining individuals in jail without trial and hold them there.

Without permitting a hearing, without a court order, Catholic officials of the Department of Revenue seized a Protestant church deposit in a Trust Company of Greenwich, Conn., of \$105,000 on the ground that the church should pay 100 per cent. tax on its building fund, while a thousand million of similar Catholic church funds go free of all tax.

Headed by Bishop Noll of Ft. Wayne, Ind., is a Catholic board of censorship in Washington sitting in judgment on mailing privileges, scanning, threatening publications. It has great influence with the already Catholic-dominated Post Office Department in shutting off mailing privileges. It has barred atheist material as immoral. In the Navy the flag of the Papacy is often hoisted above the Stars and Stripes. Boys enlisting, de-

claring they are atheist or without any religion, are tagged Catholics. Already high Catholic voices are insisting that the Church has the right to put heretics to death just as the Government does murderers and traitors, even a greater right since the murderer kills only the body while the heretic kills the immortal soul.

Against sacerdotal tyranny, lawlessness and outrage, Americans look to their courts for protection, especially do they regard the Supreme Court as the last ditch of freedom. But what are they to say when they see a Federal judge in California have ten ordinary citizens, four of them housewives, hauled before him, accused of nothing, charged with nothing, but questioned by him as to political beliefs? They quickly secured an attorney, who advised them that such questions were illegal. They refused to answer, and the judge sent them to jail, there to remain until they would answer, a life sentence should they remain firm. What a marvel that that attorney was not sent to jail with them! That is another terrorist move by courts. Soon our lawyers will fear to defend the trampled.

The Press, the radio, every avenue through which the people might learn about the raping of the goddess of Justice are closed. Must what we thought were inalienable rights wither away, until we go through what Europe has suffered, before we break forth in unholy wrath and rebellion against the holy sceptre by the Tiber?

F. P. WORTMAN.

A TEA-DRINKING SINNER

I tapped at the Pearly Gates one morn
All by myself feeling rather forlorn;
But St. Peter opened the Gates with a smile,
So I powdered my nose and addressed him in style:
"St. Peter," I said, "if I may be so bold;
Do you serve 'Orange Pekoe' in cups of gold
Steaming and fragrant for young and old?
Do the angels with folded wings queue up
And gossip like us o'er a morning cup;
Does your Reverence join in the chitter and chatter
With a golden cup of scented water,
In the fashion of the day?"
But St. Peter was worried, and bit his thumb,
For this was a problem that struck him dumb.
He was "stumped" by this very importunate Sinner
Who fancied herself a Celestial winner.
He was anxious of course to arrange a deal,
And regretted that Saints had no sex appeal;
He could not forget that there might be a fee
Of a guinea or two for a Sinner like me;
(And a wallet of notes for a LU-I-GI).
So his features relaxed and he whispered to me,
"Sure a harp and a halo of gold filigree,
Are a thousand times better than cups of tea."
But I shook my head and said: "Not for me."
I cared nothing for harps and haloes of gold.
And Pete was astonished at what he was told,
Though I stammered and wondered I could be so free
With a Gentleman Saint of his pedigree.
But St. Peter was gracious—his pockets were bare,
And to turn back a sinner was more than he dare.
With fate in the balance 'twas no time for jest,
I was thrilled when invited to come in and rest.
While he called a Committee and made my request.
For an hour or more I was left alone,
Then the voice of St. Peter came over the phone:
"We've had a discussion and now we agree
To open a shop and serve sinners with tea;
We're sure to make profits, and can't make a loss,
If we open a tea shop and MAKE YOU THE BOSS!"

A. W. MORISON.

* F. A. Luigi—a friend of the writer—a ruthless realist and devastating critic of all forms of wishful thinking.

Liberty is not a means to an end, it is an end itself. To secure it, to enlarge it, and to diffuse it, should be the main objects of all social arrangements and of political contrivances.
—BUCKLE.

ACID DROPS

Wonderful lectures by Roman Catholics have been in full swing in commemoration of the "centenary" of the return of Popery celebrated with the help of our National Press and the B.B.C. They prove, we are solemnly told, beyond the shadow of a doubt that Roman Catholicism is eagerly sought for by the people of England, that controversy against it has almost completely declined, that there is no longer, or very little, "widespread doctrinal opposition to the Church of Rome," and so on; and the poor sheep who listen to all this actually believe it! As they never read anything but what their priests allow them to read, they probably imagine that the Archbishop of Canterbury will in a week or two swallow the Assumption of Mary and the Miracles of Fatima.

"Now is our chance" of converting England is the message of Bishop Cowderoy, and it will be done if there is "unceasing prayer," his dupes are given to understand. These bishops must live in a world of infantile imagination. From the moaning and whining which emanates from them ordinarily as to the "indifferentists" in the Church as well as those who "backslide" and those who go over to the enemy, one would never imagine that Rome was so all-conquering as they trumpet now. But we gladly allow one of their claims. Protestants these days do seem afraid of any controversy. Very, very few appear to have the pluck to meet them on their own ground.

We are pleased to note, therefore, the "Open Letter" to Bishop Cowderoy by the Dean of Chichester in the *Church Times*. He makes it quite clear that "corporate union" between the Churches is quite "unthinkable" and is not afraid to tell his opponent why. But all the same he pleaded that they should both stand together against the common enemy—Communism, which is the real "anti-Christ." We seem to remember the vigorous Protestant controversialists of the 19th century used to call Popery, the "Anti-Christ." And it is still the same Popery!

Still another "Life" of Christ—*The Work and Words of Jesus* by Prof. A. M. Hunter, which you can buy for 12s. 6d. A reviewer tells us that "his discussion on the Virgin Birth is reverent and frank." Well, if he believes in it, it surely ought to be. And needless to say, he believes everything else in the New Testament, so that the book "leaves a strong and deep impression of the awe and mystery which surround the Person of Christ." We would lay a wager at almost any odds that Prof. Hunter has never read Leo Taxil's *Life of Jesus*—if he had, he could never again write of any "awe and mystery" surrounding such a mythical being.

Mr. Fred Hoyle's recent lectures are still bringing in disgruntled attacks by Christians. The latest is from a pious gentleman called Riley and it is given space in the *Church Times*. It appears that Mr. Hoyle's theory of "continuous creation" is "contradicted" by his theory of an expanding Universe because "expansion must always be towards the greater from the less, and therefore it postulates a beginning." In this way, we suppose, Genesis is vindicated, there was a Fall of Man with Jesus as our Saviour, the Assumption of Mary is now a dogma, and Mr. Hoyle completely overthrown. Hallelujah!

Whatever else the Catholic Hierarchy may complain about, they must admit the almost complete tolerance of the large majority of non-Catholics in this country towards them. But one may be allowed to ask, had the position been reversed, would the Roman Catholics here have shown the same tolerance to Protestants? We not only doubt it—we go further. Protestants would not have been allowed to celebrate any centenary of the "restoration" of their "hierarchy" for there would have been no Protestant hierarchy allowed. They would be lucky if allowed openly to proclaim their "non-Catholicism." In fact, they would have been lucky if not actively persecuted.

In sober truth the brand of Popery for English consumption is not exactly the brand one finds in Eire, for example, or Spain. It is specially brewed, all honey and sweetness. One must catch a Roman Catholic a little off his guard to learn the truth about Rome's vindictiveness and its hatred of English Protestantism. And often this hatred can be seen and read between the lines of many Popish speeches not only from the "hierarchy" but also from its distinguished converts.

Already questions about the Assumption are being asked of the Catholic journals and the *Universe* has replied to one correspondent like this: "How can the Assumption be a revealed doctrine seeing it was unknown during our Lady's lifetime? The answer is quite simple. The period during which doctrines could be revealed lasted until the death of the last of the Apostles, and our Lady was dead by then." And that answer should satisfy even Dr. Fisher. Or should it?

Prof. P. S. Noble, of Aberdeen University, is only one pious Churchman out of a crowd who bemoans the fact that bright boys are no longer attracted to the Church. They go into medicine, law, the Civil Service, but appear to shun any call to God—or is it perhaps that God these days no longer calls them? Principal Taylor thought the "root difficulty" was the prevalence of a "secular temper" in the community. That is one easy way of putting it. Another way would have been to say outright, the spread of "Secularism." Bright boys no longer believe.

The Methodist Church Press Officer addressing the Bradford Methodist Women's Luncheon Club told members, "if they had any unfavourable news which they did not wish to see in the Press, take them into your confidence and you will be amazed at how that confidence will be respected." That may be quite true, but was it wise or tactful openly to reveal the dishonest and contemptible methods of this pious business? Equally surprising, the *Yorkshire Observer* of September 20 gave it further publicity without any comment.

The much-publicised broadcast by Lord Horder to begin the series, "Man Without God," and in which he was supposed to show that he was "without God," duly took place. Alas, Lord Horder made it quite plain that he was not speaking as one without God, in fact, he approached the subject very reverently, almost as reverently as the Archbishop of Canterbury or Cardinal Griffin. Anybody who thinks that under its present direction the B.B.C. will allow a forthright attack on the God idea to be broadcast must be thinking that we are living in an Atheistic Utopia.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

Mr. BAYARD SIMMONS writes:—We are all at the mercy of typography! In my defence of Mr. H. G. Wells in last week's *Freethinker* I wrote that Mr. Rowland's claim was baldly put: this has come out as badly put. Mr. Rowland has enough to answer for to the readers of our journal without being accused of putting his case badly. All those who have read with pleasure Mr. Rowland's articles—as I have for twenty years—will know that he is a most capable writer. Baldly, of course, means "without qualification or addition."

A. STOTT.—Many thanks for cuttings.

A. LAZENBY.—The *Freethinker* is primarily concerned with religion, but, of course, politics and economics have often to be dealt with when connected with religion.

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

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

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

SUGAR PLUMS

To London readers this may be in time as a final reminder that Professor H. Levy, M.A., D.Sc., lectures in the Conway Hall on Thursday evening, October 12, at 7 o'clock, on "The Ethics of War." The lecture is under the auspices of the National Secular Society and admission is free.

The Kingston Branch N.S.S. after a very successful open-air season are now able to carry on indoors during the winter by securing accommodation at the "Fighting Cock," London Road, Kingston-on-Thames. The opening lecture will be on Sunday evening, October 22, at 7.30 p.m., and the speaker will be Mr. F. A. Ridley on "Political Catholicism." The Branch has some excellent workers and deserves the support of all Freethinkers within easy distance.

Roman Catholics are still puzzled as to whether a register office marriage is a legal one; and, needless to say, the priest who advises the *Universe* on these matters, carefully keeps out the one salient point necessary in his reply to them. It is, simply, that whatever the Vatican may decree in this country, the only legal marriage is the secular one—though if the happy pair want the blessing of the Church, or of a Mosque, or of a witch doctor's incantations afterwards, that is as they wish: it has no effect whatever on the legality of the marriage. The priest mentioned says that a register office marriage is not valid in the eyes of the Church, but he forgot to add that a priest cannot himself marry a couple unless he has been licenced by the State. This is the law, and the Vatican can do literally nothing about it.

All readers who are interested in sexual problems and who are disappointed that they are not allowed altogether to air their views in these columns, should note that in the *Journal of Sex Education*, edited by Dr. Norman Haire, they will find just the journal they are looking for. The latest number contains many brilliant articles and reviews, and its Editor answers difficult sex problems in uninhibited terms. The subscription is 10s. 6d., and the address is 36, Devonshire Mews West, London, W.1.

"Greetings in the spirit of Freethought" is the apt wording on the front of a new Christmas greeting card issued by the N.S.S. Inside is a timely verse from the pen of our contributor, P. Victor Morris, in keeping with the Society's outlook. It is an attractive, thoughtful and dignified production, approved by the Executive as likely to produce a favourable response towards Secularism in the minds of recipients. Members of Branches can get copies, price 6d. each with envelopes, from their Branch Secretaries. Others can send for them from this office, 6s. per dozen, post free, samples 7d. each. Most Freethinkers like to follow the old custom of sending greetings and good wishes to friends at the season of the winter solstice, and it is felt that the new card will supply a want in this respect.

A NOTABLE CENTENARY

WHEN George William Foote died 35 years ago, Freethought lost one of its most brilliant writers and speakers, and one whose name will always be linked up in its history with those of Bradlaugh, Ingersoll, and John M. Robertson.

For nearly 50 years, his articles, pamphlets, and lectures, brought the message of Freethought to all sorts and conditions of people—they attracted the attention equally of humble artisans and great novelists like George Meredith. Foote was a lover of the English language both in writing and speaking; simple, direct, forthright, he was always lucid, and always master of his medium. And it is not unfair to claim that he could even challenge Ingersoll in popularity.

Foote was born 100 years ago in Plymouth—perhaps one of the family of the same name to which belongs Samuel Foote who, in the 18th century, became famous as an actor and dramatist. It is a pity that no biography has yet been written of him, but according to Wheeler's *Dictionary of Freethinkers*, Foote came to London in 1868 already "converted," and thenceforth he devoted his life to what he was wont to call the "best of all causes."

One of his chief characteristics was his complete independence of judgment. Although Bradlaugh and Holyoake were the acknowledged heads of the Freethought movement in England, Foote declined to be overawed by them, and his ready pen, as early as 1874, produced *Secularism Restated* which was a review of the two rather different expositions of Secularism made first at the famous debate between Bradlaugh and Holyoake in 1870. The stand he took then was typical of his attitude all his life:—

"I have always thought," he writes, "that Secularism needs restatement by someone, who, belonging to neither side of the dispute, may fairly be considered beyond legitimate suspicion of partiality. . . . Whether or not I am actually in this instance possessed of the necessary qualifications, it is of course not for me to determine. But I do say that my only desire is to unveil Truth herself to the gaze of all men, and that I care not on whom may light the effulgence of her glory, on friend or foe. To those who object that my experience scarcely entitles me to criticise my superiors, I reply, that my words have an intrinsic worth or futility altogether independent of any circumstance of age, reputation or experience."

I am not sure whether this was his first pamphlet, but it is full of big words, carefully thought-out expressions, and philosophical disquisitions. I should dearly have liked his opinion of this early effort later in life when he really had the necessary experience of Secularism and Freethought. In any case, he wrote quite a lot on Secularism later—perhaps no one better.

All these early pamphlets, most of them quite forgotten these days, are remarkable for such a young man. Like John M. Robertson, Foote appears to have been able to write well almost from the beginning without any experience in the art of writing. Never did he betray the "amateur"—he was always the accomplished professional. And one could wish that these early efforts were collected and published in one volume for the benefit of posterity.

Foote changed his style to a marked degree when Bradlaugh was prevented by religious bigots on both sides of the House of Commons from taking his seat; and this perhaps also accounts for the comic Bible pictures (most of which he got from the publishers of Leo Taxil's works) which formed such a marked feature of the early volumes of *The Freethinker*.

He had already served a good apprenticeship in founding Freethought journals before he started *The Freethinker* in 1881; and it says much for his editorship that in many things this journal has kept to the "lay-out" he settled then. Ably seconded by his life-long friend, J. M. Wheeler, *The Freethinker* has been a great force in propagating Freethought. From the outset, it displayed a fighting front to Christianity—though it is here that I must insist on the scholarship both Foote and Wheeler always showed in their stubborn attack on the enemy.

Some of the best of Foote's articles were collected in his *Flowers of Freethought*; others made volumes like the biting, witty *Bible Romances*. Still others were reprinted as pamphlets, remarkable not only for their keen, fighting qualities but also for their powerful criticisms of all aspects of religion. It should be added that Foote was also an energetic Liberal in his younger days and, like Bradlaugh and Ingersoll, opposed Socialism and royalty. His debate with the rather cocksure Annie Besant, "Is Socialism Sound?" can still be read with advantage.

It is impossible to do justice to his varied activities in a short article—one can see what he did through the years by consulting the first 34 volumes of this journal and the five volumes of *Progress* which appeared between 1883 and 1887. He lectured and debated all over the country, and it may surprise many Bernard Shaw fans to learn that he even debated with that redoubtable controversialist. And many of us still remember the last he had—a debate with a converted Jew, the Rev. J. Warschauer, which took place in 1911. His scholarship and dignified bearing on that occasion were great assets to the cause of Freethought. He gave his "Christian" opponent such a sound thrashing that the rev. gentleman would not consent to a report of the debate to be published. It can be seen all the same, verbatim, in the volume of *The Freethinker* for 1911.

Foote achieved lasting fame in 1883 for his magnificent stand against our infamous "blasphemy" laws, and the wonderful speeches he made at his trial before one of the worst examples of Roman Catholic bigotry who ever sat on the Bench—Mr. Justice North, whose name, it might be added in passing, would have been completely forgotten had it had no connection with Foote. This pious gentleman was, I believe, removed from his post, and given another where he was unable to force his intolerant creed on other "blasphemers." Readers who are interested should try and procure a copy of Foote's *Prisoner for Blasphemy* for his account of the three trials one of which resulted in a year's imprisonment, to the disgust of all liberal and enlightened minds, including people like Dr. Moncreu Conway.

Foote was also tried before Lord Chief Justice Coleridge—a judge of a 'totally different calibre from North, and one who treated him with every courtesy; and his speech in defence is a masterpiece. He never bettered it and there is no doubt it astonished Coleridge by its wit and learning. The trials and the twelve months in jail he had to serve, left their mark on a sensitive and brilliant man of letters, and I do not think he ever fully recovered from its effects.

When he died in 1915, he looked a tired old man though, in these days, 65 is only "middle age."

As I have said, it is a tragedy that so far no biography has appeared of such a doughty fighter for Freethought as George William Foote. In the volumes of *The Freethinker* can be seen a great deal of his public life, and perhaps one day some enthusiast will give us a permanent story of this great Freethinker, with a complete bibliography and guide to his writings, lectures and debates.

Just one word more. When Bradlaugh was compelled to relinquish his office as President of the National Secular Society there was only one man who could step into the place vacated by the great Iconoclast; and Foote, for 25 years, filled the post with honour and dignity. And it was he who managed in the famous Bowman case to settle once for all that bequests to Freethought should be valid in the eyes of the law.

Let us raise a glass in this centenary year of his birth and drink to the memory of George William Foote.

H. CUTNER.

CAPTAIN CARVALLO

THE dullness of modern playwrights, and their backwardness on the subject of religion and other controversial issues, is proverbial. This is understandable for a rational attitude to these problems is hardly good box office, and is sure to lead to a vicious and under-handed attack by critics. It is, therefore, rare to see a film or play which shows religion as it really is.

"Captain Carvallo," a play now showing at the St. James's Theatre, London, is a welcome exception. Its author, Dennis Cannan, shows an unbiased and healthy attitude, not only to war, but also to religion. And, curiously enough, the result is not a dull play, not two hours of preaching at the audience in order to convince them, but rather the funniest, wittiest comedy London has seen for quite a while.

The scene is a farmhouse in an unnamed occupied country. The farmer, an elderly lay-preacher, is obsessed by his fire and brimstone religion. He has a rather handsome, but middle-aged wife who is a Sunday-school teacher. Since he is too old to join the forces, our lay preacher is an active partisan. He has been sent on a mission to a nearby town, and just when he is expected to return, a complete stranger walks in, dressed in the lay-priest's clothes. He explains, that he too, is a partisan, and that he and the priest have found it necessary, for military reasons, to exchange identities for a time. The stranger, however, is a professor of biology, and a militant atheist. The point of the play is, that this scientist has to pretend to the enemy officer billeted at the farm, that he is the farmer, that he is an antediluvian priest, whereas in fact he is a convinced materialist and most anti-religious.

This fact leads to the most hilarious situations anyone could ask for. It gets even funnier when the real priest-farmer returns, and both he and the atheist get an order to kill the enemy officer. The lay-preacher is enthusiastically in favour of killing the unrighteous, and

supplies chapter and verse from the Bible to justify murder. He has a large quantity of explosives hidden behind a row of Bibles, and in discussing methods of dealing with the officer, quotes every known form of slaughter from biblical sources. The atheist, however, is rather kind-hearted, and has compunctions about killing the handsome and very likeable young officer. Meanwhile, the priest's wife has fallen in love with him.

But I must not tell you the whole of this magnificent plot. Suffice it to say, that this is the first time in a play, that I have seen an atheist in a commendable and favourable light, and a priest shown as a ridiculous, crafty and vicious character, as so many of them are. And yet, it is all put over in such a convincing fashion, that not even the religious could take offence at it. It is the most entertaining show in London. The acting is excellent, especially Peter Finch's and Richard Gould's performances. Every Freethinker should see this play.

E.

SCIENCE, RELIGION AND MORALS

III—CHRISTIAN HISTORY

- (1) In investigating the historical aspect of Christianity one is again faced with difficulties of indefiniteness.
- (2) This is increased by the confusion which occurs between what is ordinary and what is theopneustic history.
- (3) Christians make a special and unique claim for the historical evidence by which they support their allegations.
- (4) They maintain that the divinity of Jesus, i.e., that he was actually God incarnate, is proved historically.
- (5) Their position is that there is documentary proof that God, in the form of Jesus, lived and died on earth.
- (6) This claim, both as fact and as history, seems unique to-day in both aspects, at least in the Western World.
- (7) Divine inspiration for certain people was claimed often before and has been claimed often since.
- (8) That is a distinct and different claim from that which maintains that Jesus actually was God.
- (9) Christians often maintain that the history which supports their contentions is just ordinary history.
- (10) That this position is difficult to maintain is shown by the recurrent controversies during the Christian era.
- (11) As would be expected, the historical part of the Christian Bible has been the subject of a vast literature.
- (12) One comes to realise that among this mass of detail there are certain underlying and divergent principles.
- (13) As this literature can be studied by those interested only these broad principles need be considered here.
- (14) Historical evidence is often a complicated subject and its valuation varies with different histories.
- (15) It is necessary, however, to have certain standards or canons of such evidence to make it of any real value.
- (16) A general survey of this whole field of historical Biblical study shows a great diversity of positions.
- (17) At one extreme are those here called Literalists who consider the Bible to be wholly literally true.
- (18) It is both unnecessary and useless to consider their position in any detail on their own grounds.
- (19) They are as immune to the obvious contradictions in the Bible as they are to any historical valuations.
- (20) They follow the statements in the Bible with an undeviating literalness which is pathetically childish.
- (21) At the opposite extreme are the Mythologists who deny the historicity of the Gospel Jesus entirely.

(22) This modern school of historical Biblical criticism includes some erudite and careful historians.

(23) While many other historians admit the validity of their arguments to a limited degree this school is a small one.

(24) Between these two extremes is a large field occupied by most of those who seriously study the subject.

(25) The obvious difficulty for these last is where to draw the line between valid and invalid history.

(26) It is very difficult for everyone to rise above the unconscious influences of their environment.

(27) However conscientious a historian may be some unconscious biases must always remain.

(28) This is so with ordinary secular history, as the examples of all historians testify.

(29) Indeed, it is often maintained that the chief function of a historian is not factual but interpretative.

(30) In relation to the present subject it is particularly important to strive for an unprejudiced attitude.

(31) To do this the first process seems to be to isolate the purely historical parts of the story.

(32) That is to say to subtract all that is parabolic or didactic or abstract, and deal with the residue.

(33) This is the method followed, fairly successfully, by certain leading authoritative historians of this subject.

(34) When this is done in regard to the Gospel Story of Jesus it will be found to be very small in extent.

(35) After dealing with the history one can then consider other aspects such as the theological and ethical.

(36) In these other aspects of Biblical teaching the accuracy of the records is a matter of importance.

(37) Some major principles of Christian Churches are based on the literal accuracy of certain statements.

(38) From D. F. Strauss to Bishop Barnes these historical and interpretative details have been discussed.

(39) Here an endeavour will be made to view the Gospel Story in broad outline generally as if it were true.

(40) The endless discussions as to what in the Bible is true and what it means can be studied elsewhere.

(41) The Gospel Story itself is short, generally reasonably simple and almost devoid of theology or metaphysics.

(42) In the early centuries of their existence, however, the Christian Churches rapidly developed an involved theology.

(43) This is shown by the complicated and heated discussions at the great Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325).

(44) These notes are concerned only incidentally with the long subsequent history of the development of Christianity.

(45) Where necessary allusions will be made to people or principles by reference in the legal sense.

(46) During the first fifteen hundred years of its era Christianity had become extremely complicated in theory.

(47) In many ways the Reformation was a reversion to an earlier type of thought, stressing individuality.

(48) In recent times Christian apologetics have endeavoured to reconcile medieval thought and modern science.

(49) It can be understood that in Christianity, as in all religions, serious investigators are few and restricted.

(50) It seems evident that for most Christians their religion is not a subject of research but of emotional satisfaction.

W. EDWARD MEADS.

INDIGESTION

A disease which the patient and his friends frequently mistake for deep religious conviction and concern for the salvation of mankind. As the simple Red Man of the western wild put it, with, it must be confessed, a certain force: "Plenty well, no pray; big bellyache, heap God."—AMBROSE BIERCE.

FREETHOUGHT DICTIONARY

DEBUNK.—An endeavour to arrive at the truth of a matter by stripping it of its overlaid pretensions or mystery. Originally American slang and now in general use. Thus, Henry Ford's dictum that "history is the bunk" summed up the fact that all school history books are subtle propaganda in which the bare facts are omitted, altered or improved upon to present a favourable case for the nation concerned. This, of course, stems from politics.

A similar thing is found in many walks of life; priests, doctors, lawyers, chemists, being particularly prone. Doctors were originally barbers-cum-blood-letters and gradually built up a profession which is at once the most conservative and prejudiced trade union in the world. Although every medico practises faith-healing, nobody is quicker to condemn any faith-healer outside the profession, while commercialism is rampant in its ranks. As Shaw said: "The chief difference between a doctor and a quack is that the one can sign a death certificate."

Lawyers similarly make a closed shop of their job and as all governments are mainly composed of lawyers it becomes an easy matter to promulgate laws so overlaid in legal jargon as to compel every layman to pay for an interpretation. Not only that, but in any litigation the same verboriousities can be declared favourable to either side, so that only an expensive court case can decide.

Chemists do exactly the same thing by selling a prescription in dog latin costing a few pence for as many shillings, though they and the doctors combine together to denounce patent medicine vendors for poaching on their preserves. As for the Church—the thing has been notorious for ages and it really does not seem that any debunking of religious pretensions will ever eliminate this festering sore from the body politic.

This is because of man's unfailing propensity to accept the false, the specious, the wished-for possibility and to indignantly reject any reasonable theory or proved fact until that fact has become so moth-eaten as to be platitudinous. The spread of education is, in effect, nothing but an attempt to cram a quart of bare knowledge into the pint container with which the average human being manages to conduct such sordid operations as stock-broking or preaching. The mere accumulation of facts cannot possibly make a thinker out of anyone born without the inherent capacity for thought.

Army tests in the war which was going to end wars and actually brought on a worse, showed that more than 50 per cent. of adult male conscripts did not progress mentally beyond the ability of a child of twelve. Obviously a much smaller minority will arrive at the mental capacity of, say, an undergraduate. By such elimination one can assess the percentage of any population capable of original thought at about five per cent. The other 95 per cent., the politicians, the bible-bangers, the yes men, me toos, and professors, are as immune from education as a mosquito from malaria, though without that creature's ability to inject the virus into others.

This is why we find men with the arrested mental development of a fish-hawker or a bishop still proclaiming the illimitable goodness of God, although science is simply a mass accumulation of proof that, supposing any supreme power is actually directing incomprehensible universal operations, it is doing so with the most complete disregard of man's welfare. Should such an infinite force exist, the idea that it interrupts its orderly operations to strike this man with lightning; to

cause that one to be run over by a train; to drown a third; to do this either because it is cross with the one for disbelief in its goodness or so loves the other for his piety that it wishes him closer to hand; that is an idea which was begot in the brain of the first witch-doctor and has been perpetuated by his successors in clerical office simply to emphasise a mystery to which they alone hold the alleged key.

It should be the life work of any thinking, reasoning being to debunk all such nonsense whenever and wherever possible.

F. W. RENNIE.

ALMOST LIKE A CHRISTIAN

READING a book by Rev. Selby Watson, M.A., noticed some of the pages, headed, "Shakespeare's Profession of Faith," and this reminded me of my inquiry, some time ago, respecting clever forgeries, referring to the Tudor Period, and knowing that articles treating of the Shakespearian controversy had appeared in "The Freethinker." I had the opinion that a précis of what is known as "Ireland's Shakespeare Papers" would be acceptable for literature lovers.

During 1790, Samuel Ireland, author of "Graphic Illustrations of Hogarth's Pictures," and critic of Shakespeare's plays, began publishing papers attributed to Shakespeare.

Samuel's son, William Henry Ireland, had been articulated, at the age of 16, to Mr. Bingley, lawyer, of New Inn, where there was ample opportunity to examine ancient deeds. Young Ireland visited antiquarian book-sellers and collected sheets of old writing-paper, and a book-binder named Laurie supplied a liquid for the MSS., which, when held to the fire, looked like faded ink.

His first forgery was a letter of presentation to Queen Elizabeth, accepted as genuine, and, elated by this success, there followed the lease of two houses from Shakespeare and Hemyng to Michael Fraser. Then, knowing that it was questioned whether Shakespeare was a Roman Catholic or a Protestant, the youth wrote, "Profession of Faith," as if it had been written by Shakespeare, and which the Clergy said that the phraseology was equal to their Service Book. There was a signed letter from Queen Elizabeth to William Shakespeare; love letters to Anne Hathaway, and a letter from Shakespeare to Lord Southampton, also his Lordship's reply. The forger dared a complete play, authentic as Shakespeare's, based on the story of "Vortigern and Rowena," done by Wm. Henry Ireland, 1796, when 19 years of age.

The father announced this play as Shakespeare's composition and in his handwriting. Moreover, the play was acted at Drury Lane Theatre by Kemble and Sheridan, and the box office receipts for the first night were £206, in which the Irelands shared.

The MS. of this play, with the other documents, were ready for publication, and Samuel Ireland, in order to obtain evidence that they were genuine, invited eminent scholars and well-known critics of antiquarian writings to examine the MSS.

Sir Frederick Eden pronounced the "lease" to be a genuine lease, and other specialists were: Jas. Boswell, Dr. Johnson's biographer; Dr. Samuel Parr, LL.D., Cambridge University; Dr. Joseph Warton, Prof. of Poetical Literature, Oxford University; Isaac Heard, Garter King at Arms; and John Hewlett, Translator of Ancient Records, Common Pleas Office, Temple, all of whom signed a Declaration that these Shakespearian and other papers are genuine original manuscripts which were

published as: "Miscellaneous Papers and Legal Instruments under the Hand and Seal of William Shakespear."

Then came Edmund Malone, lawyer, and erudite author and critic, who proved clearly that the whole of Ireland's "papers" were palpable frauds; as may be read in Malone's "Inquiry," page 100, published 1796.

Finally, Wm. Henry Ireland wrote his confession, published with his apology, in "Authentic Account of the Shakespeare Manuscripts," dated 1796.

WM. AUGUSTUS VAUGHAN.

CORRESPONDENCE

THE CLASS WAR

Sir,—Possibly owing to some obliquity of vision on my part, I find it strange to meet such a determined freethinker as Mr. Cutner, and the Archbishop of Canterbury on the same platform as regards the atom bomb. "It may have to be used to stop 'ideologies' which, in the opinion of those who believe in them, are necessary to save the world"—in other words ideologies with which Mr. Cutner and Dr. Fisher are unable to agree. Does Mr. Cutner really and truly believe that ideologies can be "put a stop to" by atom bombs? After all the signal failures recorded in history? "Gradually," says Mr. Cutner, "religion gave way to 'class war'." What does this muddled statement mean? The class war began long ages ago, when the first man acquired the first slave and forced him to work on pain of punishment or death. It has gone on its relentless way ever since, and history is one long, bloody tale of struggle between possessor and possessed, between owner and slave, between master and wage-worker, with the religion of the day on the side of the upper dog. Further, Mr. Cutner, "Karl Marx taught that revolutionary terrorism must be kept up as long as possible." Would he oblige us by quoting chapter and verse? We are not among those who "blindly follow without analysis." In the meantime it may not be superfluous to remind Mr. Cutner that it was a "Christian" nation who first used the atom bomb, that the same "Christian" nation has been dangling it over the head of the world ever since, and that cruel and relentless war has been waged unceasingly by four "Christian" nations against smaller nations from that time up to the present, with all the horrors of pin-point bombing and fire against people who have no defence against these horrors.

Meanwhile the followers of Karl Marx are busy rebuilding and rehabilitating their war-devastated countries and spreading the light of science among their peoples. Your contributor, C. E. Palmer, has a surer sense of the historical moment in which we are living, while going to the opposite extreme to Mr. Cutner. "The converging paths of expediency and morality have at last met and for civilisation there is now but a single route to follow if it is to continue to exist." True, and it is not the route of the high explosive bomb under whatever letter of the alphabet. "An eye for an eye," and both are blind. We must find a better way and find it soon, and freethinkers should be among the pioneers.—Yours, etc., (Mrs.) G. MATSON.

THE BLESSED VIRGIN

Sir,—I believe you wrote in one of your articles not long ago that the appearance of the V.M. in U.S.A. was to be expected soon.

It has really happened! According to "Life" of 11th September, 1950, she turned up at Necedah (not Icedah or Ucedah!) Wisconsin, population 838, ten months ago. A Mrs. Fred Van Hoof saw a vision and "concluded it was the V.M."; thereafter it appeared to the woman five times, and at the last time promised to appear once more—on 5th August.

The Roman Catholic Church officially took no interest; indeed, the local Cardinal said "superstition must not replace religion." Despite all that, the news spread and on the appointed day no fewer than six special trains, 102 buses and 17,000 cars spewed a huge crowd into Necedah (not Icedah or Ucedah!). Trade in rosaries was brisk; lame feet were bared and crippled hands exhibited by devout visitors awaiting a miracle.

This huge crowd sang and prayed in deep religious fervour whilst Mrs. Van Hoof awaited inside her house the arrival of the visitant. In the afternoon Mrs. Van Hoof staggered forth and stated that the V.M. had indeed turned up—and that the vision had said "Destruction is above us. America must pray now, not tomorrow."

And that is all "Life" on its front pages has to tell us!—Yours, etc., F. C. HENWOOD.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Report of Executive Meeting held October 5, 1950

The President, Mr. R. H. Rosetti in the Chair.

Also present: Messrs. A. C. Rosetti, Ridley, Morris, Johnson, Ebury, Woodley, Page, Corstorphine, Barker, Hornibrook, Mrs. Quinton, Mrs. Venton.

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

New members were admitted to Nottingham, North London Branches, and to the Parent Society.

The illness and serious operation on Mr. Seibert was reported. He is in hospital and making progress towards recovery. The Executive's sympathy with Mr. Seibert was expressed and a motion to acquaint him with that feeling was passed.

In response to an application from the Merseyside Branch, two speakers from London, for which the Executive will be responsible, were granted. An invitation to provide a speaker to take part in a debate at a Coventry Discussion Society was accepted and Mr. F. A. Ridley agreed to go.

Sheffield Branch reported a possible infringement of the right to affirm in a local court. The Executive took the matter up, but as the man concerned described himself as Church of England, the right to affirm on the grounds that he had no religious belief, or that the oath was against his religious beliefs, did not apply to him.

A legacy of Ten Pounds under the Will of the late Thomas Dixon was reported.

Instructions were given for further advertising the Society in the Press.

A greeting card for Freethinkers, designed by Mr. P. V. Morris, was submitted and approved for publication.

Agreed that the next Annual Dinner on January 13 be appointed as celebrating the centenary of the birth of G. W. Foote.

The next meeting of the Executive was fixed for Thursday, November 16, and the proceedings closed.

R. H. ROSETTI, President.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

OUTDOOR

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

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Platt Fields).—Sunday, 3 p.m.: Messrs. C. McCALL, L. SMITH, R. BILLINGS and G. WOODCOCK. (St. Mary's Gate, Blitzed Site).—7-45 p.m.: Messrs. C. McCALL, L. SMITH, R. BILLINGS and G. WOODCOCK. (Alexandra Park Gates).—Wednesday: Messrs. C. McCALL, L. SMITH, R. BILLINGS and G. WOODCOCK. (St. Mary's Gate).—Lunch-hour Lectures every weekday, 1 p.m.: Mr. G. WOODCOCK.

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon: Messrs. A. CALVERLEY and F. A. RIDLEY (Highbury Corner).—7 p.m.: Mr. L. EBURY.

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

West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park, Marble Arch).—Sunday, 4 p.m.: Mr. C. E. WOOD.

INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m.: LEN CROMPTON, "Impressions of Czechoslovakia."

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall Library, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Tuesday, October 17, 7 p.m.: S. K. RATCLIFFE, "The Demise of English Poetry."

Glasgow Branch (McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: GUY ALDRED, "Richard Carlile and After."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: Mr. J. HARRISON, M.P., "Foreign Affairs."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: S. K. RATCLIFFE, "Can We Be Hopeful?"

West London Branch N.S.S. (The Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W. 1).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: WILLIAM KENT, F.S.A., "Samuel Pepys as a Servant of God."



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