

THE FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Editor: F. A. RIDLEY

Vol. LXXII—No 5

[REGISTERED AT THE GENERAL
POST OFFICE AS A NEWSPAPER]

Price Fourpence

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

The Tomb of St. Peter

THE past year has seen the Press devote considerable attention to the excavations now proceeding in and around the Cathedral of St. Peter, in Rome, with the object of finding the alleged Tomb of St. Peter and, presumably, relics of the "first Pope," to whom Christ is supposed to have committed the keys of Heaven and Hell. At Christmas, 1950, Pope Pius the Twelfth, Peter's present successor, solemnly inaugurated the search, and in recent months the Tomb of the Apostle is stated to have been found by archæologists, beneath the High Altar of the cathedral named after him. In the newly discovered tomb "relics" have also been unearthed in the shape of human bones, now also stated to have been those of the Apostle.

What are we to make of all this? To the Catholic the Pope's word, even if not technically "infallible" in a question of historical fact, will probably be accepted as final, as sufficient warrant for accepting the "discovery" as genuine. The non-Catholics, whether Rationalist or Protestant, will not be contented with the certainly partisan and probably ill-informed opinion of an Italian ecclesiastic. They will require corroborating evidence of a character that is calculated to impress scientific opinion, whether that of historians or of archæologists. Such evidence at this time of day, 1,888 years after the traditional martyrdom of St. Peter, A.D. 64, is not actually likely to be forthcoming; the present Pope is not likely to be as fortunate in this respect as the jubilant schoolboy who triumphantly declared to his doubting teacher that he had undoubtedly discovered a genuine coin of Julius Caesar, since it bore the authenticated inscription, "54 B.C.!"

However, the Church of Rome is fortunate enough to be able to invoke other types of "evidence" which are not available to more mundane kinds of institutions. Perhaps St. Peter, in death as in life, will graciously work a few miracles over his newly discovered tomb to authenticate his relics as of a genuinely apostolic brand?

However that may be, in default of such, let us conduct a brief inquiry into this mysterious business and, in pursuance of this objective, ask what the lawyers would term some "leading questions." Who was St. Peter? Why does the Roman Catholic Church now regard him as its founder? Why, nearly nineteen centuries after his alleged demise, is there all this hullabaloo about the whereabouts of his terrestrial remains? The Church of Rome is a very worldly wise institution: Why does it regard 1951-52 as the appropriate period to conduct an intensive inquiry into its founder's post-mortem resting place?

The first of the above queries is very easily answered. From the point of view of secular history, St. Peter is a wholly legendary person; he has no existence outside the pages of the New Testament and the "traditions" of the Christian Churches. In this respect, indeed, the evidence

of non-Christian history is even weaker as regards Peter than for his Master. For Tacitus and Suetonius at least mention Christ, even if only by way of hearsay, so too does the Talmud, but none of these sources mentions Peter, destined by an ironical chance to become the traditional founder of the most famous and powerful of all religious institutions; of what, in fact, was to become a new and more universal Roman Empire. The actual "historicity" of Peter is guaranteed solely by Christianity. This means that he is a legendary figure, though not necessarily a mythical one. For, after all, the Church may have preserved and in the course of time, embedded in its traditions, not only obvious legends and interested interpolations but, also, at least some authentic reminiscences of one of its actual founders and early propagandists. More than that, it is not now likely that we shall ever know.

However, whether he actually existed in history or not, the main interest of St. Peter for history is as the traditional founder of that powerful institution, semi-religious and semi-political, the Papacy: which still "religiously" preserves the name and fame of its founder, "The First Bishop of Rome." Why was St. Peter cast for this role? At first sight, a most surprising choice; for the New Testament, our sole source of information on Peter, says nothing about him going to, or dying at Rome. Whilst the two Epistles ascribed to him are sent from Babylon and, even if it is true that the name "Babylon" was sometimes used by early Christian writers as a term of abuse for Rome—it is so used in the *Apocalypse*—it can hardly have been used in this satirical sense in the superscription of a letter. "Peter" presumably wrote from "Babylon," probably from a place of that name in Egypt and not from the more famous Babylon on the Euphrates, which had long been an historic ruin when "St. Peter" wrote his Epistle.

However, despite the initial gap in the available evidence, St. Peter has been regarded as the historic Founder of the Church of Rome since a very early date, since about 200 A.D. and, perhaps, earlier. Nor is it difficult to see why. All the major Churches, not merely Rome, claimed to have been founded by Apostles: it was their hall-mark of orthodoxy, and the supply of Apostles was limited. Of the greater Apostles, only one, Paul, had a greater reputation than Peter in the annals of early Christianity, and two others, James—"the brother of the so-called Christ," as Josephus calls him in a perhaps doubtful reference—and John, "the Beloved Disciple," were, perhaps, equally eminent apostolic figures. But both James and John were already, so to speak, booked by other Churches: James was revered as their Founder by the heretical anti-Pauline "Ebionites" of purely Jewish origin; John by the Church of Ephesus, where his tomb was long shown: neither could plausibly be put forward as the Founder of the Church of Rome. What about Paul, who actually lived in Rome and wrote that famous *Epistle to the Romans*, the first and one of the most famous of works of Catholic

theology? Paul would seem to have been the obvious choice and, in point of fact, modern Catholicism has actually associated him with Peter as joint-Founder. In early Christian circles, however, Paul had a very bad reputation for orthodoxy; most of the heretical Gnostic sects claimed to be inspired by him as, indeed, the canonical *Second Epistle of Peter* goes out of its way to tell us. Indeed, as late as about 200 A.D., Tertullian expressly describes Paul as, "The Apostle of the Heretics." He only became respectable after Gnosticism died out.

Thus, by a process of elimination, Peter was left as the last major Apostle with the required qualifications to fill the required role, and fill it he has duly done for some 18 centuries.

Finally, why is it only in the mid-20th century that his tomb has been "found"? For Rome has never believed in "multiplying miracles beyond necessity," and they only occur when there is a special need for them. The actual circumstances of our time, in particular, the struggle against her present secular foes, explains the frenzied hunt for Peter's relics: in her present parlous plight, the Vatican needs all the miracles it can work and all the celestial allies it can get!

An anonymous medieval prophecy, ascribed to St. Malachy, predicts that there will be only five Popes after the present one, the last of whom, the last of all the Popes, will also be called Peter. Perhaps the tomb of the first Peter is being emptied in order to make room for the second, the first Pope for the last?

F. A. RIDLEY.

MATERIALISM AND MIND

I

MANY readers of this journal will remember the excellent series of articles by young G. H. Taylor before the war in which he did his best to clarify the latest scientific pronouncements on physics, Materialism, philosophy, and similar "high-brow" subjects. His wide reading and careful exposition enabled many of us to appreciate the latest trends in scientific thought, and particularly towards a "Materialism" which, however much scientists tried to hide, became more and more like the good "old fashioned" Materialism known to Christians as "blatant" or "effete" or "exploded."

Materialism has been defined in so many ways and so often quite wrongly that genuine Materialists like Buchner and Bradlaugh refused to use the term and preferred the word "Monism"; though it is fair to say that Bradlaugh, was always ready to call himself a Materialist if his definition of the word "matter" was accepted.

The two great Materialist "Bibles" were d'Holbach's *System of Nature* and Buchner's *Force and Matter*, and there is very little in modern science which has upset the main and relevant positions taken by these two books. Unfortunately, they are rarely read these days being almost unprocurable; and in any case they require careful and close study. Moreover, the English translation of the *System of Nature* is far from accurate and must be used with great caution. For d'Holbach, "the only existence is matter." But what is "matter"? Bradlaugh, as J. M. Robertson points out in his very valuable account of his philosophy in Mrs. Bradlaugh Bonner's biography of her famous father, "invariably spoke of 'one existence of which all phenomena are modes' expressly declaring that we can only know phenomena; which was his way of saying that we can never 'know why' in the sense in which

theologians claim to do so. At no time did he speak of 'force' as a separate entity 'causing motion'."

Needless to say, the "old fashioned" Materialist was always being asked questions—"How do you account for 'mind,' or the 'soul,' or how can 'inert' matter move or produce 'consciousness' or 'life,' or how can it 'think'?" Matter, for the believer in God, is nearly always defined as "hard lumps" and how can a "hard lump" become possessed of a soul? Or how can it become "conscious"? The whole idea behind these questions (which in some form or other must have been asked long before Christianity) is to force the Materialist to admit "Vitalism," something outside matter which has either created, or endowed matter with "life," the something outside being "God," this God, of course, the God of Christianity. And we may as well face it—if any Freethinker wishes to get out of the rut of continuous Bible-banging and meet his opponent on more or less philosophical and scientific grounds, he will have to study Materialism and its implications. As I have said, the works of Buchner and d'Holbach are very difficult to get these days, but the ordinary reader will find in Mr. G. H. Taylor's *Can Materialism Explain Mind?** a brilliantly written study, lucid and compact; and if its definitions and arguments are once mastered he will find no difficulty in meeting (and beating) almost any anti-Materialist.

Strictly speaking, Materialism does not "explain" anything. If my fruit tree bears a lovely crop of cherries I can record the fact; but I cannot "explain" it. If everything is right for its bearing fruit, this particular tree will give a crop of cherries; but to get everything right I or my gardener—and nature—must do a lot of things which are purely materialistic, that is, without the aid of "God." In fact, God does not come into the picture at all and would not do so if we were not constantly reminded that "God did it" by Christians. When a Christian says "God did it," he invariably means that he now knows the "explanation," that he can now *explain* why the cherries grow on my tree. The truth is "God did it" is no explanation. It is merely another way (and a sillier one) of recording the fact.

Mr. Taylor does not, however, merely record facts. The subject of "Mind and Matter" has given rise to a great number of books some of them very important ones, and by no means confined to Western philosophy. Most of us have not the time, even if we had the means to buy the books, to read the various theories propounded by eminent philosophers and scientists. Mr. Taylor has gone to dozens of the best authorities and his book is not merely well documented but has the relevant threads constantly to the fore and carefully discussed.

Over and over again he provides us with an apt quotation often from professors who are not Materialists but who are obliged to confess, however reluctantly, that it is not much use talking about Materialism being exploded if in reality it is not. Take Mr. Taylor's first quotation—from Prof. A. S. Eddington: "Materialism in its old form is long since dead, but its place has been taken by other philosophies with a virtually equivalent outlook." We "old fashioned" Materialists are quite content if, in shedding certain ideas due to our imperfect knowledge in the past, we have arrived at a Materialism with "a virtually equivalent outlook." Even Bertrand Russell, whose sympathies appear to me to have always been with Idealists, has to confess, "Those who would formerly have been materialists can still adopt a philosophy which comes

* The Sunbeam Press, Bradford. 1950. 5s. net.

to much the same thing." While Prof. Bernal says, "The public is deluded into believing that idealism rules in science when materialism is winning all along the line."

It must not be forgotten, however, that the "Materialism" referred to by these three writers is "Scientific Materialism" or what I like to call "mechanistic" Materialism. We find no evidence of something outside "matter" or "nature" or "existence" endowing "hard lumps" with "energy" or "life." There are no "laws of nature" formulated by a "Lawgiver" up in the sky. That is the real crime of Materialism—that it does not recognise a God—any God; for while Christians like to think (or want us to think) that they are very tolerant towards a God not exactly their own—theirs of course being the only true one—they are always bitterly hostile towards the Atheist for whom all Gods are myths. Any God is better than no God.

Mr. Taylor shows how the "blatant" word Materialism is disliked by the average modern scientist and how he has tried to change it for other words—though in the end, all he can offer us is the same old philosophy. It is the Atheistic fight all over again—and, as always, won by Atheism.

H. CUTNER.

TRUTH IN VARIETY

FOR one person in this country who seeks the truth there are roughly ninety-nine who seek, nominally at least, the Lord. The latter practice is more popular because it makes no demands on the mental processes which in most cases run a little sluggishly after the age of fourteen.

This journal is at the service of the minority and it is good to examine what truth is. Remembering that Truth is different from truth, the one being Beautiful but of no great use and the other useful and having the aesthetic attraction of accurate functional adaptation. Like, in a word, the Harlot and the housewife.

Everyone knows what truth is but no one from Pilate on has had much luck in defining it. It seems to come, if not in fifty-seven, at least in four varieties; legal, true, scientific and imaginary.

Legal truth is that which one swears to tell all of, and nothing else but, in the Law Courts, upon pain of forfeiting all claims to future Divine assistance (which is the actual meaning of the expression, "swelp me bob"). It is the same as everyday truth and is thought, quite wrongly, to imply consistence with established fact. It is on a par with what one intended as a child when one swore on Scout's honour or "on my God's honour" (and it is refreshing to recall that whereas Scout's honour was fairly reliable in the case of a Scout, God's honour was less so in the case of a young Christian).

Legal truth requires the re-statement of fact exactly as it happened. That is to say, of course, as it is remembered to have happened. It implies, therefore, consistence with memory rather than with fact. If I swear that I was at the pictures on Friday last this is legally true so long as I am being honest about it, whether my memory is deceiving me or not.

There are two big drawbacks to remembered truth. Memory may be faulty either in particular or general. That is to say, what we remember may be false in detail and memory itself may not be the progressive factual record we imagine it to be. We may all have been born yesterday complete with memories of a purely fictitious past. Alternatively the events pictured in our memories, if they occurred, may have done so randomly and not in the tidy order of a progression from cradle to grave in which we picture them.

There is not an adequate definition of truth for science and it is not surprising that science needs something finer. Indeed, science has achieved two truths; one narrow and reliable and the other broad and so sweeping as to be a separate value on its own.

The narrow, scientific truth lies in verification. If a thing is verifiable that thing is true. And a very useful definition. But not all that science handles is subject to verification in actual experience.

For this reason a larger concept of truth has been found necessary. And this concept is, simply, consistency. Consistency with what science already believes true. Thus it is a working rule that any "discovery" must be checked by experiment if possible and must fit, as in a jig-saw puzzle, with the whole body of established knowledge. If it does it is scientifically true.

This is such a complete definition that it needed an Einstein to discover a flaw in it. The flaw lies in the fact that it is not possible ideally to check any fact by experience.

To check anything is to alter it to take from it energy; to add to it time. Take any object: whilst you are measuring it its dimensions have changed for you have used some of its energy even if only emitted in the form of light radiation. Its position will have moved in space. The atoms and electrons of which it and you are composed will have completed a myriad movements before the experiment is complete. And you yourself will have changed similarly. How then can you accurately speak of verification by experience?

Einstein took away the ordered world, rapidly being discovered, of the 19th century and left in its place a "frame of space." An indissoluble compound of observer and observed. And this in itself is a new kind of truth. It is a truth that is true for the observer and for the observer only, for it is the truth about himself and no one else. Grouped together all our impressions make a new kind of scientific truth, a subjective truth and a truth that is never more than subjective. Indeed it is truth which banishes objectivity.

Science conspires to tell us a story. It is a story our minds can understand, but a story nonetheless. As much a story as the Arabian Nights, indeed it is as much a story as the Bible except that it is a story that is consistent with itself, which the Bible story is not. For this reason it is liable to postulate another kind of truth, "true" or objective truth. But we must not delude ourselves that there is such a thing however plausible it seems. For although subjective truth shows us the world as it appears to us as observers it is quite pointless to wonder what the world might be like without us. It is true that all phenomena are, as it were, figments of the imagination. But so, too, is the imagination. And it is strange country beyond!

BISSETT LOVELOCK.

NEWS

A frightened bullock charged into a shop;
He saw two women there but did not stop;
A brave policeman, hearing frantic shout,
Entered the shop to drive the bullock out;
It would not leave, so was the poor beast shot;
And all the evening papers printed rot.

If in the Commons Jones has made a speech
About high prices that the poor can't reach;
About the smaller rations all deplore,
The dearth of homes, now greater than before,
While spending millions on our shells and shot—
You call that news? You damn well know it's not.

B. S.

ACID DROPS

In the "good, old days" of Queen Victoria that gracious "Defender of the Faith" assured the then Shah of Persia that "the greatness of England lay in the Bible." Despite the apparent loss of confidence in the Bible as manifested by recent events in Persia, the present "Defender of the Faith" still seems as convinced as his predecessor of the efficacy of the Bible in forming the national character. For we note that His Majesty has just presented a Bible to the daughter of one of his Sandringham tenants for "religious knowledge." But is "knowledge" the right word?

In Ipswich, Suffolk, at a pub appropriately described as "The Safe Harbour" clergymen recently foregathered "in order," says the *Daily Mirror* "over a pint to talk about Christianity." Had the reverend gentlemen imitated their Divine master and begun by changing water into wine or, rather, beer, we think that their "talk" would have been more effective. With the customers, that is, though, perhaps, not with the proprietors! But Christians nowadays always seem to prefer to talk about Our Lord rather than to imitate His blessed example.

The press reports that "an unfrocked Italian priest and his American wife have been offered a home by a London woman." Until, we presume, the Pope permits Italian clergy to follow the present example of their German colleagues and enjoy conjugal bliss in Holy orders?

"Pal," a mongrel dog, was given a funeral costing £350 by his master, Mr. Fred Schmidt, at Denver, Colorado, yesterday. The dog lay in state in a flower-decked mahogany coffin, while Mr. and Mrs. Schmidt and their friends filed past. The Rev. J. B. Knifton spoke briefly at the funeral." We assume that he spoke upon the text: "Is Thy servant a dog?"

Believe or be damned used to be the gentle Christian way of dealing with unbelievers—implemented with generous doses of torture and the stake. The results have been by no means encouraging and, as Christianity is appealing less and less to intelligent people, a different approach has had to be found. This is what Canon Collins of St. Pauls thinks, according to the *Daily Mail*: "To build the Christian faith upon acceptance of the Creeds is to build it upon sand. To exclude from membership of the Church those who lead good lives but cannot believe in the Creeds means that dogma has become master, love the slave; freedom is cast aside, truth muzzled, the Holy Spirit put to flight."

Not so very long ago, Canon Collins would have had a very burning time as a heretic for talking like this and he has to thank Freethought and its martyrs for making it possible for him really to throw over the Creeds and still retain his job in the Church. But he really ought not to get away with it altogether. When Jesus declared, "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned," he was saying something all the Churches taught and have taught for centuries. And that includes the Creeds. Abject faith is the real test, and not "good lives," and well the Canon knows it. For what he now teaches is *not* Christianity.

Although many parsons no more believe in angels than we do, they are always ready to discourse on them as if they really had individual existences; and, after all, are they not depicted in the Old and New Testament as the

Rev. A. G. James triumphantly points out in the *Methodist Recorder*? Besides, Aquinas and Swendenborg believed in them, and an angel "has much to commend itself to the Christian conscience." We entirely agree. Christianity without its angels, devils, hell, heaven, and miracles would surely be a poor thing, and Mr. James is quite right when he eloquently concludes that "if angels walk unknown among us, it is because our faith burns low." God forbid it should ever sink as low as that!

Mediums and psychic investigators very nearly again bowed over the unflinching and blatant Materialism which refuses to believe in haunted houses. As a rule a spirit prefers a "moated grange" for therein he can clank his chains so powerfully. But recently some disturbing noises and other "phenomena" came from a pre-fab house and all Spiritualists chortled with joy. That is, they did until recently, when some plumbers and carpenters fixed the materialistic cisterns, tightened rattling doors and electric switches—and hey, presto! the spirits vanished in a smoke of laughter. Still, there are plenty of Spiritualists who scorn such unbelief and who will fight to the death for the retention of "haunted" houses.

Naturally, even in the U.S.A. can be found plenty of spiritualistic phenomena—and a "poltergeist" recently had been hard at work at a place called Fern Creek where spooks threw about household things at the farm of an elderly couple. Eventually the actual spook was caught, broke down, and admitted she was a little girl of eleven staying at the farm who had thrown about all sorts of things when the old couple were not looking—and with such success that hundreds of people had come along to get a glimpse of the naughty supernatural being. Will this confession make people believe less in "poltergeists"? Not one scrap. No doubt this case will be featured in the next book written by Mr. G. N. M. Tyrrell, an ex-President of the Society for Psychical Research, and a profound believer in poltergeists, and every Spiritualist will bow to such an infallible authority.

We note that Mr. M. Barbanell, in a discussion on "spirit" photography in *Reynolds*, claims it is all quite genuine—though we have an idea that he once backed out of proving it in a court of law. It was Mr. Barbanell who vouched for the "spirit" photography of a Mr. John Myers, one of the "specialists" in the business. There is a simple and easy way of testing the claim—let the medium come along to the studio of any of our national papers and be photographed by a staff photographer with a roll of film, the condition being that the medium is not allowed to touch the camera or film. That is all. There is not a "spirit" photographer in the world who would accept this condition.

A momentous decision was taken the other day. Only two candles are legally allowed on the altar of a church, but the Chancellor at the Consistory Court of London the other day allowed six to be put on the altar of St. George's at Southall. No one seems quite sure what the extra four signify—the other two are there "to signify that Christ is the Light of the World." We would have thought the less said on that score the better, for two candles give very little light these days. Why not a couple of powerful searchlights? And is not the true reason that Christ is the "Light of the World" because, with his halo, he is the sun?

"THE FREETHINKER"

41, Gray's Inn Road,
London, W.C. 1.
Telephone No.: Holborn 2601.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

MRS. NEWBURY.—You are quite right. Mr. Bransby Williams' impersonations of Dickens' characters became world famous.

THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, £1 4s.; half-year, 12s.; three months, 6s.

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.

Correspondents are requested to write on one side of the paper only and to make their letters as brief as possible.

Lecture Notices should reach the Office by Friday morning.

SUGAR PLUMS

We hope that all readers in or near the London area will keep Thursday evening, February 14, free. For on this date the N.S.S. will be holding an important demonstration at 7 p.m. at The Conway Hall, London, W.C., under the title, *The B.B.C. versus Democracy*. The purpose of this meeting is to raise the question—a vital one to all democrats—of the religious monopoly of the B.B.C., and to demand that *all* points of view, majority and minority, religious and anti-religious alike, shall be allowed free expression by an institution paid for by *all* the taxpayers. In putting forward this demand, the N.S.S. appeals for the support, not only of Secularists and Rationalists, but, equally, for that of all genuine democrats and progressively-minded people who believe in that elementary right of democracy, free speech—even on the air! The chair will be taken by Mr. F. A. Ridley, Editor of *The Freethinker*, and the speakers will be Mrs. Janet Chance, Mr. L. Ebury, Mr. Victor Morris, and Mr. E. W. Shaw. We hope that a record audience will mark this important occasion.

Mr. F. A. Ridley has been having a busy time recently. On January 13, he addressed the Bradford Branch, N.S.S., upon "English Religion in 1952." The Branch Chairman, Mr. Harold Day, was in the chair. On January 20, a friendly discussion took place at the "London and Brighton Hotel," Peckham, S.E., under the auspices of the South London and Lewisham Branch, between Mr. Ridley and Mr. Len Ebury, on the controversial question: "Are all religions equally false?" a question upon which the two protagonists have already crossed swords in the columns of *The Freethinker*. On Saturday, January 26, Mr. Ridley presided, and made the chairman's speech at the Annual Dinner of the N.S.S. at the Charing Cross Hotel. The following day, January 27, he addressed the Manchester Branch N.S.S. at the Chorlton Town Hall, on "The Menace of Rome," Mr. W. Collins taking the chair.

Those of our readers who, during the past year or two, have followed the change in mood and belief of our former regular contributor, Mr. John Rowland, will be interested to hear that there will shortly be published, by the Student Christian Movement Press, his own account of his "conversion." The title of the book is *One Man's Mind*, and the price will probably be seven shillings and sixpence. Mr. Rowland has promised to see that we get a review copy of the book, and we hope to have something to say about it in due course.

"THE FREETHINKER" FUND

Donations for two weeks ended Saturday, January 26, 1952:—
Chester Branch, 10s.; Lt.-Col. T. C. Rowland, S. Hill, £1 1s.;
J. Johnson, 5s.; A. Hancock, 1s.; R. Bordon, 10s.; C.E.R., £1;
Eva Ebury, 3s.; P.V.M., 5s.; H. Courlander, £5 5s.; P. Turner, £1;
R. Johnson, 7s. 6d.; A. Hancock, 2s.

Total for two weeks: £10 9s. 6d.

Total received to date: £441 3s. 10d.

THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY DINNER

ALTHOUGH the shadow of the deaths of last year's President and Secretary, R. H. Rosetti and John Seibert, was felt by the members and guests at the 46th Annual Dinner of the N.S.S. held at the Charing Cross Hotel last Saturday, everybody made the most of the occasion, not merely to enjoy the dinner, but to renew old friendships and make new ones. The dinner itself was voted easily the best since the war, and the speeches and the concert shared equal honours if the well-merited applause from the audience is any indication. Visitors from as far afield as Derby, Leicester, Hants, and Somerset were present.

The Acting President, Mr. F. A. Ridley, filled the chair as if he had done so for years, and his own well-delivered address provided the keynote for the other speakers. He stressed the essential non-political character of the National Secular Society, its main object being to make Secularists and attack religion. He pointed out that the Roman Catholic Church after being almost moribund during the 19th century in England, was certainly gaining power here, and at no time was the work of the Society in consequence more needed than now.

The guest of the evening—he was not a member—was Professor H. Levy, who can be both gay and serious, and who proposed the toast to the N.S.S. A practised speaker and debater, he held his audience's attention first with a humorous parable, and then with an earnest plea to guard the liberty of speech and publication so hardly won by our fathers. Prof. Levy appeared to have little use for present-day America.

In response to the toast, Mr. L. Ebury gave a trenchant speech outlining the part played by the popular appeal from platforms in the open air, and the difficulties encountered in opening new ground. Needless to add, the toast was heartily acclaimed.

After the interval, the new Secretary, Mr. P. V. Morris, proved himself an accomplished speaker in proposing the toast to "Our Guests." Voicing the Society's sorrow at the loss we had sustained by the death of R. H. Rosetti and John Seibert, he welcomed the young people present, and hoped that during the next year we would be able to recruit many members from our young friends. He also welcomed the presence of representatives from the R.P.A., Mr. F. C. C. Watts, Mr. C. Bradlaugh Bonner (the grandson of Charles Bradlaugh who founded the N.S.S. in 1866), Miss C. Kerr and others as well as members of the Rosetti family and friends. And he voiced the general regret that Mr. Chapman Cohen and Mrs. Cohen were unable to be present—probably the first Dinner they had missed for many years. The suggestion that the greetings of all present should be sent to them was heartily supported. In response, Mrs. Janet Chance (who was also a member), made a fighting speech delivered with all the earnestness and humour her friends know so well.

The artistes responsible for the concert were at their best—with Mr. Cyril Addison at the piano. He shines equally as a fine accompanist, playing Chopin, or one of the more modern light pieces. Miss Eileen Cusack is one of our most popular singers, and gave a beautiful render-

ing of "Wunderbar" and other favourites. Mr. Douglas Brooks' fine baritone voice filled the room with "A Wandering Minstrel I" and for other songs he later "duetted" with Miss Cusack. Miss Anne Redgrave was delightful in song and dance, while Mr. Fred Gwyn's funny stories and songs had everybody laughing.

Mr. Morris, Mr. Kenyon and their helpers (mostly behind the scenes) must be congratulated on the success of the evening and the way everything ran so well. One can hardly imagine a more delightful evening.

H.C.

IMMORTALITY

A Dialogue

(Concluded from page 32)

As he is the centre of attention, Gulbrunus squares his shoulders with importance; and the oath is taken.

Father Gulbrunus: It is a joy for me to hold that grand old Book in my hand and swear by the Lord.

Cassandri: Praise the Lord!

The Devil: Silence in the courtroom! Gulbrunus, it is alleged that you were an ardent Christian and renounced the ordinary life to become a priest; that you were charitable when you thought that it would help you to get to Heaven and would not have been charitable if you had not expected a reward; that you were opposed to all religions besides your own and considered me to be their author; and that you were an intolerant enemy of philosophy and science and often secretly wished that you had lived a few centuries earlier so that you could have had the pleasure of burning and putting on the rack and wheel those whose arguments you could not confute. Is that true?

Father Gulbrunus (*Distinguo*): I distinguish a difference between your terms and the actual facts; but what you say is, I suppose, generally true.

The Devil: Answer the question directly. Is it, or isn't it?

Father Gulbrunus: It is.

The Devil: It is with pleasure that I pronounce another Christian judgment and send you, Father Gulbrunus, to Heaven.

Father Gulbrunus: Ah, joy, joy! I have found Heaven at last! It is indeed *ad maiorem Dei gloriam* that I have devoted my brief and sorrowful life on the earth, brief though my years were many and sorrowful because of the vanity and pain of human life and of the grief wherewith I sorrowed for the lost and dying sons of men.

The Devil: It is as a reward for your virtues and labours that a place in the Sixth Heaven is being given to you . . .

Father Gulbrunus: Sixth Heaven? But I prayed to God to be sent to the Seventh Heaven. There must be some mistake here.

The Devil: No; no mistake has been made. In the Sixth Heaven you are to be surrounded by 24 red-haired nuns, all of the sternest and most unassailable virginity and known in their earthly careers for their hatred of the wicked desires of the flesh, with whom you will sing hymns and praises to God on His throne in the Seventh Heaven. And I should say, in order to clear up a delicate point, that in Heaven nuns let their hair grow.

Father Gulbrunus (*Aside*): Twenty-four virgin nuns! Oh my God! Have I not seen enough of nuns on earth without the affliction of seeing them forever and ever in Heaven?

The Devil: You must know that, while the Seventh Heaven is the proper eternal abode of the godly, priests and preachers are excluded from it because even in Heaven they attempt to deceive and dominate the people. They are, therefore, sent to a separate Heaven, the Sixth, in which they may enjoy their own company and that of the beautiful and saintly nuns who have died still preserving to the last their chastity, the priceless jewel of their sex.

Father Gulbrunus (*Aside to Cassandri*): May I have a word with you? It grieves me to see so worthy a man as you go to Hell; so I will go in your place. I cannot be a true Christian and see you go to perdition. Brother, will you accept my offer?

Cassandri: No.

Father Gulbrunus: What do you mean, no?

Cassandri: What I said.

Father Gulbrunus: Do you mean, rascal, that you will not go to Heaven when someone offers to send you there in his stead? Blasphemer, think of what a bargain you are refusing! You have lived the life of a lecher and a denier of God and deserve to be sent the next instant to the fiery furnace of Hell there to be burnt throughout all eternity, there to dwell with hardened infidels, with bloody conquerors, with Hobbes, Voltaire, Hume, and other ferocious atheists, there to commingle forever with devils and evil spirits, where the worm dies not and the fire is not quenched and there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. You will endure each second horrible and unspeakable tortures—and that for eternity. Think of it, wretch! Imagine being prey to the monstrous and undying passions that will surge unchecked through your quivering frame and through the frames of all who dwell with you. Conceive the ghastly terror that will ever be present in that awful place. You will curse and scream for one drop of water to cool your parched tongue as did rash Dives of old. Think! I, who am a Christian and a servant of God, will give you my place in Heaven and gladly accept yours in Hell (*under his breath*) which, God knows, couldn't be much worse than the Heaven of priests and virgin nuns which I have received.

Cassandri: What's that?

Father Gulbrunus: Nothing . . . nothing . . . I merely said that I didn't see how anyone could refuse so generous an offer. I dislike to be egotistic, for our Lord specifically speaks against it, but don't you see what a wonderful thing I am offering you? If you but consent, you may sing praises to God and enjoy the delectable presence of my 24 red-haired, most sternly and unassailably virgin nuns. With them you may play a harp and rest in peace for eternity.

Cassandri: I never did like to sing hymns nor to hear them sung; and to listen to them eternally would be one of the greatest punishments. As for your virgin nuns, friend, you may keep them. So much of the falsity and inconstancy of women have I seen on earth and so clearly have I seen that they were never destined to be the ideal companions of men but merely their frail opposites in the strange process of life that I would gladly be free of the presence of women throughout eternity. From the description of Heaven which I have just heard, I would rather go to Hell.

Father Gulbrunus: The Devil takes you for an infidel!

The Devil: Enough of these asides! Gulbrunus, you may leave for Heaven with the attendant who will show you the way. And I want to talk to you, Cassandri, before you go to perdition.

Father Gulbrunus (*Leaving with the attendant through a door of the courtroom*): Alas! Alas!

The Devil: Cassandri, I suspect the cause of your complacency in this matter.

Cassandri: Bravo for you, my Lord!

The Devil: You know as I know that Heaven and Hell are fictions and that what happens to man after death is unknown.

Cassandri: And I know that, when ushered through the door leading to the imaginary Hell of torment prepared by the inhumanity of men, I shall probably exist no more.

Exit with attendant.

WILLIAM RITTENOUR.

"CIVIL WAR" IN ISRAEL

THE recent disturbances in Jerusalem have managed to force their way into the headlines of the National Press. This is not surprising, as many anti-Semites take a sadistic pleasure in watching the internal troubles that are besetting the new State of Israel—and the Press often panders to this feeling. However, I am not denying that there have been serious disturbances which merit the attention of thinking people. I am simply pointing to the obvious fact that the Press places a construction on events which suits the particular prejudice of the newspaper as well as its reading public.

The source of the trouble in Israel at the moment is to be found in the West German proposals for negotiations with the State of Israel. Naturally, the survivors of European Jewry who now live in Israel have very strong feelings on the subject of any type of negotiation with Germans of any description. These feelings have been fanned by the Parties of both the "Left" and "Right," though these descriptions are purely ones of convenience. The extreme "Right," for instance, refused to sit on the right when the Knesset (the Israel Parliament) opened its first session. The extreme "Right" Party, the Cherut, insisted that it was the Party of the extreme Left. The Parties were arranged in alphabetical order to overcome this particular difficulty.

The Parties of the Left, the Mapam and the Communists, particularly the latter, have supported the violent demonstrations that have been organised by the extreme Right. For to the Cominformists, any opposition to Western Germany, which is under American influence, has their blessing. Thus we have the spectacle of Right and Left united in unholy alliance against the Government Parties—Mapai (quasi-Labour), and the Religious Bloc.

Where does the Religious Bloc fit into this pattern of events, during which no less than 400 people were arrested, and 400 injured (including 141 policemen)? The answer is simple: a largely neutral attitude to this fierce conflict has prevailed in these religious circles. In general, the Religious Bloc probably sympathises with the Cherut, but its weakness in Parliament and in the country dictate a policy of caution and "neutralism."

The Israeli demand for £535,000,000 restitution from the West German Government has precipitated this first-class crisis. I do feel, however, that these violent demonstrations could not have been stirred up independently of some very deep economic and social discontent in the country.

The demonstrations have shown at least one thing, the Religious Bloc is weakening its grip on the politics of Israel. The trouble is that other forms of fanaticism may win out.

AKIBA.

CORRESPONDENCE

WHO'S BEING RATIONAL?

SIR,—Mr. Ratcliffe asks how politicians can guarantee peace and fulfil such a commitment. The answer is by behaving rationally. The analysis of such behaviour is to be found, as I pointed out, in *The New Statesman* and *Peace News*.

Just for a moment, though, consider how calm and rational our politicians are to-day! When Russia offers concessions, our politicians tell us the Russians are hypocrites; and when Russia disagrees, they tell us she is impossible. So the politicians cook up the pathological "enemy." It's the politicians' job to negotiate, and if they are too emotionally disorientated to do so, they ought to be removed to the psycho-analyst's clinic. Neither is there such a thing as "negotiation from strength" (a typical irrational noise made by politicians)—this simply means dictating one's own terms, a clear refusal to negotiate.

Politicians are fêted and paid handsomely because they're supposed to be clever enough to create guarantees. Rationally (see *The N.S.* and *P.N.*) guarantees could be created, yet the only certainty to-day is that an armaments race had never made for peace. The way to get peace is to prepare for peace and not for war.

If the politicians in power can't be rational, must the public choose annihilation rather than taking thought? If as many of them as fill in football coupons wrote to their M.P.s, if millions marched on Whitehall, or what about the technique of non-violent non-co-operation? There are ways to dismiss incompetents, and it is generally admitted that they are desirable for we were told the German nation shared Hitler's terrible guilt by letting him remain in power. Is there not a special responsibility for Freethinkers—men who claim to have escaped from superstitions—to lead "The Public" to the rational?—Yours, etc.,

OSWELL BLAKESTON.

THE LATE R. H. ROSETTI

SIR,—It was with great regret that we learned of the death of Mr. R. H. Rosetti, and my husband and I wish to offer our sympathy to the Society in its loss of so valiant a worker and supporter, who has done so much to further the aims of Freethought in his country. I trust the memory of his work will be a spur to those of us who remain to carry on the fight.

Wishing you and *The Freethinker* a very successful year.—Yours, etc.,

(MRS.) ELIZABETH COLLINS.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

OUTDOOR

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

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (St. Mary's Gate, Blitzed Site).—Lunch-hour Lectures every weekday, 1 p.m. Speaker: G. WOODCOCK.

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon, F. A. RIDLEY and W. G. FRASER.

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

INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m.: JOHN E. BINKS, "A Medieval Fairy Tale."

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1). Tuesday, February 5: S. E. ELLIS, B.Sc., "The Problem of Dwindling Natural Resources."

Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: Dr. H. ROSENAU (Manchester University), "The Problem of Survival" (with lantern slides).

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: Prof. E. A. THOMPSON (Notts University), "The Fall of the Roman Empire."

South London Branch N.S.S. (London and Brighton Hotel, Queen's Road, Peckham, S.E.).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: F. A. HORNIBROOK, "Culture of the Abdomen."

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON, M.A., "War—Public Enemy No. 1."

West London Branch N.S.S. (The Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, Marylebone, W.1).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: R. S. W. POLLARD, J.P., "The Reform of the Law."

YUGOSLAV HOLIDAYS (Apr. to Oct.).—Dormitory accom. in hostels, camps of Yugoslav Trade Unions, Youth Movements, etc. Reductions for youth; family exchange. Write: Sec., 16, Doneraile House, Ebury Bridge, London, S.W.1. Send stamp; state holiday month.

THEATRE

"A Midsummer Night's Dream." By William Shakespeare.
The Old Vic Theatre.

THE conflicts between the old religion of Witchcraft (la Vecchia Religione) and Christianity are—for all practical purposes—at an end. Witches and Wizards and Horned Gods play no part in our lives. Fairies have become nothing more than features of imagination in our childhood.

I will make a guess at it and submit that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was the forerunner of the modern fairy tale, for in it Shakespeare has depicted them as charming little ethereal beings fit to be loved by children. But, in fact, the Fairies were dreaded by the followers of the Old Religion for their strict adherence to their religious ritual, and anyone offending them could become the victim of curses or malicious practices that were intended to harm them.

Robin Goodfellow, who is identical with Puck, represented a Grand Master leader of a coven, and was a local God Incarnate. Certainly a fearsome fellow, though he appears harmless enough in this play. It is Oberon, King of the Fairies, who is made to appear something of a Demon-King, and who rules the whole roost. This part is played by Kenneth Griffith in the production under review, and he seems to take delight in giving him a sinister appearance. Puck—in the spirit of pantomime—is taken by a juvenile who manages reasonably well, but what a contrast this is to Leslie French who for about a score of years has delighted us every summer in Regent's Park by his excellent performances of this part. As much as we miss him we miss the music Mendelssohn so aptly applied to it, and the ballet of elves and fairies entering as if from nowhere through the bushes. It is perhaps poor consolation that the ballet last summer was far below the usual standard.

The play has a charm of its own, and this production by Tyrone Guthrie is so remarkable for its imaginative touches—which all add to its charm—that it is worth a visit. But Mr. Guthrie does unusual things in different ways. For instance, we know Hermia was intended to be short, so she is played (and with full competence) by Jane Wenham. Irene Worth, who plays Helena, stands fully a head above her, which is as it should be, but why should she have to stand an extra twenty inches above Hermia to embrace her, by getting up on the rostrum. Miss Worth, who has already proved how well she can act as Desdemona, can do the most awkward things gracefully. Douglas Campbell plays Theseus with great dignity; Jan Bashford—in the small part of Hippolyta, comes through very well. And Bottom? Well, it seemed that Paul Rogers had been waiting for it all his life. It suits him like a perfectly-fitting glove.

RAYMOND DOUGLAS.

RELIGION AND SCIENCE

I THOUGHT that my letter, published in *The Freethinker* of November 18 last, would probably sting some more or less orthodox Freethinkers into a reply; I did not think that its 200-words or so would produce a 1,000-word article, like that of Mr. A. Yates (*The Freethinker*, January 20). But since Mr. Yates makes so many specific challenges I may perhaps be allowed a little space for further comment.

First of all, let me say that I did not attempt to review or to summarise what Dr. Millikan had to say; I merely

quoted from his book to show that here, again, there was an eminent scientist who had come to see that the Huxley-Haeckel line still current among Freethinkers was out of date and old-fashioned, in that recent developments of science have not confirmed the idea held by many (including myself a few years ago) that there is a necessary contradiction between the religious and the scientific point of view. Indeed, Dr. Millikan quotes, as an appendix to his book, a statement on this issue, published some years ago under the signatures of a number of eminent scientists and religious leaders in the U.S.A. He says that the statement was intended to destroy two dangerous misconceptions still held by many people. Those two misconceptions are: "That religion to-day stands for medieval thought; and that science is materialistic and anti-religious." Both misconceptions, of course, are held by many Freethinkers.

On the wider issue, whether these scientists who have now become more accommodating on the religious issue can be accepted as authorities on religion, I have, of course, little to say. It is Mr. Yates who should do a bit of explaining here. For it is, after all, Freethinkers and Rationalists who for so long have held up the scientific thinkers, from T. H. Huxley to J. B. S. Haldane, as the real authorities on religious questions. I do not say that Millikan, Einstein, Planck, and all the others are expert theologians—they would not say so themselves. I adduced these names in reply to the usual arguments so often advanced by Atheists and Agnostics, to the effect that science is essentially irreligious, and that scientists cannot be in any way religious men. That many of the greatest figures, drawn from the contemporary world, or from the world of the immediate past, are more religious than would have been thought possible in the 1890's seems to me to be a phenomenon worthy of attention. To go on pretending, as Mr. Yates and so many other Freethinkers do, that scientists are men convinced that the religious attitude to the universe is nonsense is to deceive yourself and to try to bolster up an attitude no longer acceptable by a man who thinks freely. But it would seem, nowadays, that a Freethinker is *not* a man who thinks freely. He is a man whose thought is circumscribed by certain dogmas laid down when science was very different from what it is to-day. Indeed, the Freethinker of the more orthodox brand is nowadays the dogmatist. He *knows*; and to be sure of all the answers to all the questions is the failing for which he has twitted theological thinkers for a long time in the past. Was not something once said about a man with a beam in his eye laughing at another man who merely had a grain of dust obstructing his sight? That is a saying, it seems to me, which has its application in this controversy.

JOHN ROWLAND.

We quote, with only the briefest of comments, the following from our contemporary, the *Methodist Recorder*:—

"Under the heading, 'The Week's Brain Wave,' we learn this truly startling news: 'The worst moment for an Atheist is when he is really thankful and has no one to thank.'" Thank you, brother Editor!

THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY HANDBOOK.
(General Information for Freethinkers.) Price 9d.;
postage 1½d.

PETER ANNET, 1693—1769. By Ella Twynam. Price 2d.;
postage 1½d.