

The Freethinker

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Editor: F. A. RIDLEY

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DURING the past generation the Christian Churches have acquired new weapons: the science which they despised and the growth of which was so long retarded by ecclesiastical authority has furnished the propaganda of organised Christianity with new technical assets. The Press, the Cinema and, very particularly, the Radio, have been pressed into the service of "Gospel Truth." For example, the amount of space allotted to religious programmes on the B.B.C. is continually increasing, or so, at least, it appears. Moreover, the Churches have the air to themselves; for any opposition is virtually negligible. The theologians and preachers of this Christian land have unlimited Time and Space at their disposal to put over their case.

It must, we think, be conceded that they make very poor use of it. For the intellectual level of Christian "apologetics" in the contemporary world appears to get steadily lower and lower. Time was when the Christian Churches could rely upon the professional services of able, even of great men. For it would be merely sectarian prejudice to deny that the leading thinkers of the Church were men of outstanding ability in the actual circumstances of their day and generation: St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, Bishop Butler, Cardinal Newman; such men and their intellectual peers were formidable advocates; men who many a creed might well be proud to have at its disposal. But to-day? Those masters of deductive logic, the medieval schoolmen, must surely turn over in their graves when their celestial repose is so often disturbed by the empty rhetoric and the glaring "non-sequiturs" which nightly comes over the air from the clerical "apologists" on the B.B.C. From St. Thomas to the average modern Bishop; from Calvin to—but let us mention no names for fear of libel! "How are the mighty fallen."

However, in our submission at least, the utter futility of present-day Christian "apologetics" goes deeper than the mere lack of outstanding individuals. Our age is, after all, a technical age; certainly its strong suit is not abstract thought. Who, nowadays, would or could hack his way through the impenetrable jungle of metaphysics in which the medieval doctors so delighted, or grasp the purpose of those Alice-in-Wonderland distinctions which formed the substance of scholastic theology? Our era is one of specialists; it is not an age favourable to "universal men," to all-embracing intellects such as St. Thomas or Leonardo da Vinci. None the less, the contemporary decay of the "divine science" of theology goes deeper than any mere intellectual deficiency amongst its protagonists. It represents a fundamental and, to all appearances, a mortal decay.

The evolution of theology itself, from the days of its probable founders, the ancient Egyptians, to our own day, is closely bound up with the contemporary evolution of secular culture and cannot, or so we contend, be regarded as, in all its phases and manifestations, a purely

retrograde phenomenon. On the contrary, theology was, in many respect at least, in its origins, a civilised and civilising force. It represented, in fact, what a recent writer in this journal, Mr. H. Cutner, has aptly described as "civilising" primitive Christianity. For, whatever view one may take of the actual circumstances of Christian origins, there does not seem much room for doubt that it started originally as, what would be now termed a revivalist movement which called upon mankind to repent and seek the Kingdom of God immediately before the Messiah, Christ Jesus, came in glory from the clouds to put a final end to this earthly dispensation. Hence, the

early Christians were much too busy getting ready for the end to have time to worry about the niceties of subsequent theological speculation. All that they were concerned with was what German critical scholars have called the "interimsethik"—how to square their individual accounts with the returning Messiah at the imminent Day of Judgment. Theological speculation only began, probably, in the second century, with the Pauline Epistles. By that time the first Christians were dead, without being "caught up into the air" to meet their returning Lord; the Messianic agitation, from which primitive Christianity originally sprang, was dying down; and both the Second Coming and the Day of Judgment had to be postponed *sine die*. (Incidentally, this is still their status in Christian theology!) It was only then that Historical Christianity, as a permanent religion and not as a mere revivalist movement of an ephemeral character, was able to make its appearance. Along with it arose the "divine science" of theology.

Theology was, essentially, as Mr. Cutner has so happily phrased it, an attempt to "civilise" Christianity, to bring the crude "revivalism" of the earliest Christians into some sort of conformity with the philosophy of the educated classes in the world in which Christianity expanded, the world of Roman law and Greek philosophy. If, incidentally, one wants to see what primitive Christianity would have been like without theology and the "civilising" influence of the Catholic Church, one can obtain a very fair idea by taking a look at some of the more primitive sects of our own day: say, "Jehovah's Witnesses" or "The Seventh Day Adventists." There, but for the Church, goes Christianity! That is what the primitive disciples of the Master were really like.

The new "science" of theology used the *forms*, the formal logic and dialectics of Greek philosophy to put over its own pre-scientific myths, derived, ultimately, from Oriental mythologies. It was, one may say, scientific in form and superstitious in substance. It was related to Greek philosophy much as astrology is related to-day to modern astronomy. That masterpiece of theological speculation, the so-called "Athanasian Creed," represents, for example, an exercise in primitive Egyptian theosophy expressed with all the subtle ingenuity which Greek

VIEWS and OPINIONS

The Decline of Theology

By F. A. RIDLEY

thought had perfected in a thousand years of continuous evolution. In its finished form in the High Middle Ages, "the divine science" was represented as a complete intellectual system, "Rationalism" personified, embracing Time and Eternity, Heaven, Earth and the Universe, in one gigantic mental synthesis, which can still be seen in the voluminous writings of St. Thomas and his contemporaries.

However, much water has flowed under the bridges since the 13th century. Ever since the Renaissance, the continuous growth of secular knowledge has undermined the imposing edifice constructed by the medieval schoolmen. In destructive succession, Copernican astronomy, Darwinian biology, the study of Church history and of anthropology and comparative religion, have battered down the walls of the dogmatic "Gibraltar." To-day, nothing remains except an incoherent mass of verbal fragments. Religious reasoning fails more and more to answer the insistent questioning of the modern world, the more puerile becomes the answer of Faith and the more fatuous the "apologetics" of modern Christianity.

World Union of Freethinkers

"HUMANI GENERIS" SPEECH BY JEAN COTEREAU (FRANCE)

THE Encyclical "Humani Generis" launched in the middle of the Holy Year provoked considerable interest in the Catholic Press; the lay Press did not give it the publicity desired, and liberal journals gave only incomplete or inadequate replies. The proclamation of the pretended discovery of the tomb of St. Peter coming shortly after seemed to arouse greater attention; and the polemics to which the Encyclical gave rise were largely limited to Catholic philosophical, scientific and literary circles.

Our function to-day is that of an invincible opposition due to the unbridgeable gulf between the principles expounded in the Encyclical and our own. We take the text from the French version in "La Croix" and in "La Bonne Presse."

The title recalls in singular fashion the Encyclical of Leo XIII against Freemasonry of April 20, 1884. This may be coincidence or intention. The sub-title runs "on certain doctrines which threaten to ruin the foundations of the Catholic doctrine."

The Pope declares (1) *concerning the main contemporary currents of ideas and their repercussions in Catholic circles*: there is always error outside the Church; the variations of opinion and the errors of men have always been a source of sorrow to all good people, and especially to the true sons of the Church. To-day their grief is all the more keen in that the very principles of Christian culture are under fire. To which the Freethinker replies that they too are good people and deplore errors, especially the error of Roman Catholics. Since human reason is limited and fallible, variation in opinion is a resultant of the free play of reason. The Freethinker would be troubled at a uniformity of thinking for it would witness a grave retrogression, the domination of a totalitarian ideology. Profound disagreement separates the different sects of Christians; and the Freethinker apprehends to-day's policy of the Roman Church which is leading to strife and war. Unanimity of thought, such as required by Rome, is obtained by coercive methods, which the Church has never ceased to employ.

The Pope lays down: "Human reason by its own power and its natural light can arrive at notions of a personal God, of a Providence governing the world and of a moral

In the theological evolution of the past, the major changes have been due to the advent of new knowledge and to the necessity of "reconciling" it with traditional Christian dogma. Both St. Thomas and the Jesuits were originally regarded by their "Fundamentalist" contemporaries as dangerous "modernists." However, to adapt Christianity to the knowledge of to-day would be an altogether tougher proposition. At the beginning of the present century, the French modernist and Church historian, Louis Duchesne, wrote to one of his associates that traditional theology was a spent force. A more recent writer in our orthodox contemporary, *The Times*, commenting unhelpfully on the present parlous plight of the "divine science," suggested that a new "St. Thomas Aquinas" might again appear to effect the indispensable synthesis with modern knowledge. Modern science, however, is atheistic and materialistic in essence: to reconcile that with theology would be too great a miracle—even for the "divine science."

law of divine origin." And he adds that reason cannot always make use of its natural powers efficiently on account of the transcendent nature of the truths in question which exact from whosoever would resort to them submission and renunciation, etc.

The Freethought world protests against this papal declaration according to which reason, if it is not obscured by the senses, deviated by the imagination or falsified by passion, must come to deistic conclusions. This is a mere insult to all Agnostics and Atheists who can reply that, on the contrary, reason when freed from religious fears and illusions is then in a position to realise to the full its powers and to found a morality on the most enduring and most sublime basis. For the mass of believers the foundation of their belief is claim of the Church to Divine Revelation. Moral truths are distinct from religious pretensions and can be attained by all sufficiently to guide them in all life's common problems. Reason, when freed from extraneous influences, basing its conclusions on scientific and historic grounds can find only a human origin for the Christian religion, not excepting the creed of the Roman Pontiff.

The Pope burks the question by terming a perversion of reason what is in its essence a revolt against his arrogant claims by enlightened and progressive minds. The Freethinker protests against the Pope's blasphemy in assimilating his own claims with those of deity. Exalted mystics made such claims which the Freethinker regards as phenomena of a perhaps morbid psychology.

2. *Intellectual movements outside the Church.*—The Pope treats of evolutionary theory, declaring that this system is not proved beyond discussion. This may be so, but the Infallible Potentate of Rome is scarcely qualified to judge of it. It is with the sole exception of a childish unscientific creationist theory the only explanation that unites a majority of known facts. That the evolutionary thesis inspires thinkers to formulate on more general lines a Monist and Pantheist theory of a universe in perpetual evolution is a source of satisfaction to the Freethinker, who has, however, no intention of tying himself down to any hypothesis of this kind as to a Credo; though he holds that it is illuminating and instructive, far more so than the Catholic mythology.

According to the Pope the evolutionist hypothesis enables communists to propagate with greater effect their dialectical materialism and to purge minds of the idea of God. Note that the Pope accuses the communists of spreading atheism and so taking from him possible faithful; on the other hand he attacks a rationalist conception of the world on political grounds with which it is not essentially connected. This is a trick the Freethinker deplores. Freethought is the bondmaid neither of communism nor anti-communism; and the Freethinker maintains that materialist evolution may serve as a basis to other political doctrines than those of communism. The Freethinker may be bitterly opposed to communism, but he should not fall into the trap laid by the Vatican which by pretending to oppose political totalitarianism tries to undermine rationalism as a step towards religious totalitarianism.

The Freethinker regrets, however, to see men of high scientific standing so lacking in discernment and caution as to let themselves be deceived by mystical pretensions incompatible with scientific investigation.

The Pope by claiming that evolution by its false affirmations has led to the rejection of all that is absolute, certain and immutable, denounces his own charlatanism. Evolution restores to the human mind the categories of the relative, the uncertain and the mutable which are within its reach.

The Freethinker does not undertake the defence of doctrines such as idealism, immanentism, pragmatism, which the Pope condemns. These have done much harm to rationalism and have been of service to Catholicism.

(To be concluded)

THE CHINESE ADAM

THE notion entertained by Chinese writers on the subject of the first man and the creation of the world are very curious. They begin, like our Scriptural account, with a time when the earth was without form and void; from that they pass to an idea that was, of old, part of the wisdom of Egypt. Chaos was succeeded by the working of a dual power, Rest and Motion, the one female, and named Yin, and the other male, and named Yang.

Of heaven and earth, of genii, of men, and of all creatures, animated and inanimated, Yin and Yang were the father and the mother. Furthermore, all these things are either male or female; there is nothing in Nature neuter. Whatever in the material world possesses, or is reputed to possess, the quality of hardness (including heaven, the sun, and day) is masculine. Whatever is soft (including earth, the moon, and night, as well as earth, wood, metals, and water) is feminine. Choofoots says on this subject: "The celestial principle formed the male; the terrestrial principle formed the female. All animated and inanimated nature may be distinguished into masculine and feminine. Even vegetable productions are into male and female; for instance, there is female hemp, and there are male and female bamboo. Nothing can possibly be separated from the dual principles named Yin and Yang—the superior and hard, the inferior and soft." It is curious to find that the Chinese have also a theory resembling one propounded by Pythagoras concerning monads and duads: "One," they say, "begat two, two produced four, increasing to eight; and thus, by spontaneous multiplication, the production of all things followed."

As for the present system of things, it is the work of what they call "the triad powers"—Heaven, Man, and Earth. The following is translated from a Chinese Encyclopædia published about sixty years ago: "Before heaven and earth existed they were commingled as the contents of an egg-shell are." (In this egg-shell, heaven is likened to the yellow, the earth to the white of the egg.) "Or they were together, turbid and muddy, like thick dregs just beginning to settle. Or they were together like a thick fog on the point of breaking. Then was the beginning of time, when the original power created all things. Heaven and earth are the effect of the First Cause. They in turn produced all other things besides."

Another part of the tradition runs as follows: "In the midst of this chaotic mass Pwankoo lived during eighteen thousand years. He lived when the heaven and the earth were being created; the superior and lighter elements forming the firmament, the inferior and coarser the dry land." Again: "During this time the heavens increased every day ten feet in height, the earth as much in thick-

Similarly as regards existentialism. Existentialists may be roundly atheist and anti-fascist, but, since their doctrine is anti-rationalist, proclaiming the failure of ethics and reviving out-of-date and dangerous subjects of argument, the Freethinker wonders if they will not make their way via Catholic existentialism to Romanism pure and simple. The Pope here lacks gratitude.

The Pope by condemning objective history as "the false historicism which is attached merely to human events" blasts the pretensions of Roman dogmatism. Such claims are a perversion of Christianity, a monstrous pretence of the Pope to be sole judge of the past and present.

The Rationalist feels no need of spiritual direction in historical studies. His aim is factual truth as far as it can be ascertained.

3. *The repercussions of modern ideas in Catholic circles.*—The Encyclical is a witness to a considerable unease among Catholic intellectuals. Scientists and thinkers drilled in rational discipline submit with greater and greater difficulty to Vatican dogmatism. We can hope only that they succeed in shaking off that humiliating yoke. The Pope denounces attempts to unite sects and religions, even though such action sought no more than a plain alliance of differing religions against the rationalist. Even to combat its bitterest enemy, the Vatican can consider only one alliance, that of submission. The proclamation of the Assumption of the Virgin emphasises this.

In respect to teaching, Pius XII pursues a steady policy overt and covert. This is only to be expected in such an anachronism as the Church of Rome which can survive thanks only to compromise and sophistry.

ness, and Pwankoo in stature. The period of eighteen thousand years being assigned to the growth of each respectively, during that time the heavens rose to their extreme height, the earth reached the greatest thickness, and Pwankoo his utmost stature. The heavens rose aloft nine thousand miles, the earth swelled nine thousand miles in thickness, and in the middle was Pwankoo, stretching himself between heaven and earth, until he separated them to a distance of nine thousand miles from each other. So the highest part of the heavens is removed from the lowest part of the earth by a distance of twenty-seven thousand miles."

The name of the Chinese Adam—Pwankoo—means "basin ancient," that is, "basined antiquity." It is probably meant to denote how the father of antiquity was nourished originally in an egg-shell, and hatched like a chicken. Among the portraits commonly stored up by native archaeologists, we find various representations of Pwankoo. One is now before me that exhibits him with an enormous head tipped with two horns. His hair, which is of a puritanical cut on the brow, flows loose and long over the back and shoulders. He has large eyes and shaggy eyebrows, a very flat nose, a heavy moustache and beard. Only the upper part of his body is exhibited, and one can scarcely tell whether the painter represents it as being covered with hair, leaves, or sheepskin. His arms are bare, and his hands thrown carelessly the one over the other, as if in complete satisfaction with himself. Another picture represents him with an apron of leaves round his loins holding the sun in one hand and the moon in the other. A third artist has pictured him with a chisel and mallet in his hands splitting huge masses of granite. Through the immense opening made by his labour the sun, moon, and stars are seen; and at his right hand stand, for companions, the unicorn and the dragon, the phoenix and the tortoise. He appears as a strong naked giant, taking pleasure in the carving out of the mountains, stupendous pillars, caves, and dens. During his eighteen thousand years of effort we are told that "his head became mountains, his breath winds and clouds, and his voice thunder. His left eye was made the sun, and his right eye the moon. His teeth, bones, and marrow were changed into metals, rocks, and precious stones. His beard was converted into stars, his flesh into fields, his skin and hair into herbs and trees. His limbs became the four poles, his veins rivers, and his sinews formed the undulations on the face of the earth. His very sweat was transformed into rain, and whatever insect

(Continued on page 340)

ACID DROPS

Some readers will remember the way Mr. Beverley Nichols spent less than half an hour at the offices of the National Secular Society and then told his newspaper readers *all* about Atheism, Rationalism, Secularism, etc. He repeats his ineffable nonsense in his book, *A Pilgrim's Progress*—just out—where he claims, according to a reviewer, that he finds little “to worry about down the garden path of rationalism and atheism.” He says that “although Christians cannot unite, Atheists cannot agree even in their disagreement.” What scintillating criticism! Atheists, as a matter of fact, *do* agree—that Christianity is not true, that there is no evidence for the existence of God, and that the social record in the past of Christianity is one of torture, murder, imprisonment, and foul bigotry and intolerance.

On the other hand, it is true that Atheists may not agree always on the best methods to be used in combating religion, and on such an academic subject as the historicity of Jesus. So what? The differences between the 200 Christian sects are often fundamental, but they never rested there. In the past, they slaughtered each other over the meaning of a Greek word, and the story of the way in which Roman Catholics butchered Protestants, and Protestants butchered Catholics, and both butchered heretics is perhaps the most savage and brutal one in history.

Needless to add, Mr. Nichols started out as “Church of England” and finished the same way. Did anybody expect any “yes” man to act differently?

Hell-Fire is not so popular as it once was—or perhaps the threat of Hell-Fire is no longer taken seriously. “Go to Hell!” has no more meaning these days than “by Christ!” Even the Salvation Army—or perhaps we ought to say some of the Salvation Army—is finding Hell too hot to hold, for here we have Sergeant-Major Mabel Schlette refusing to teach children that “unless they are saved, they are going into everlasting fire.” So after 30 years of “blood and thunder,” she is resigning from the Army.

We should have thought that since Hell-Fire is part of the teaching of Jesus Christ, Sergeant-Major Mabel would have thought twice before leaving the Army; but it is good to record that she still believes in the flames of Hell, though not for children; and she does not believe in it “literally.” Any good Jesuit would sort the meaning of that out for us—and even our old friend, Prof. Joad, now that he has gone so readily back to the fold, is busy explaining Hell in much the same way. If Christianity is true, he *must* believe in Hell.

THE CHINESE ADAM—(Continued)

stuck to or crept over his gigantic body were made into human beings!”

The uneducated Chinese are careless, and the educated sceptical, about these things. As a people they are not easily induced to pay much regard to whatever has reference to more than everyday social wisdom. The sort of doctrine common now among the learned is indeed found in the succeeding passage from a Chinese author: “But as everything (except heaven and earth) must have a beginning and a cause, it is manifest that heaven and earth always existed, and that all sorts of men and beings were produced and endowed with their various qualities, by that cause. However, it must have been Man that in the beginning produced all the things upon the earth. Him, therefore, we may view as Lord; and it is from him, we may say, that the dignities of rulers are derived.”

From *Household Words* for February 17, 1855.

Prof. Joad devoted a long article to Hell in the *Sunday Dispatch* on the question, mixing it up with his belief in ghosts and spooks and trying to show why people still believed in Hell. In the end, he manages to put out most of the flames, but leaves a weeny flare for dead people to go through as a purification before “intercourse with God.” It is all very funny, but said in deadly earnest. We wonder whether Prof. Joad really knows what Christianity has done for him?

We are in full agreement with the Archbishop of Canterbury on the controversy arising out of the refusal of somebody to allow a father to put up a marble angel on the grave of his small daughter. Dr. Fisher agrees that the statue should not be put up—as he says, “Italian marble is an alien intrusion to be deplored”; if nothing else, he obviously thinks that it smacks of Popery. In the same way, no doubt, Dr. Fisher would contemptuously refuse a portion of the True Cross as, coming from Palestine, it was bound to be tainted with Judaism. No one has a right to put up a Dago angel for an English child.

Moreover, the good Archbishop is horrified that all this controversy might weaken faith in Angels—real Angels, we mean, not any made from Italian marble. As was reported, the chancellor of the Consistory Court said, “We do not become angels,” but “it is utterly unreasonable” to suggest that this means there are no angels. After all, even the most wicked Atheist cannot contemplate a Heaven without our own Archbishop Fisher appearing as anything else but an Angel. What would Canterbury say if he didn't?

Science Fiction

They're revving the rocket to take us to Mars,
It's simply a step on the way to the stars;
We're taking the natives the glorious news,
A Bible, a bomb and a bottle of booze.
We hope for a stop, about next Sunday noon,
To pay our respects to the Man in the Moon;
We'll shew him (by force, if we must) how to pray
For us all to call *back*, at a much later day.
The people of Mars may detest and deplore us,
But, no doubt, the Saviour has been there before us;
And, if they've advanced beyond thumbscrew and rack,
It won't take us long to shift 'em RIGHT BACK.
We may find 'em perfectly nicely behaved,
We've still got to set 'em two thousand years back.
However advanced on pure Progress's track—
We've still got to set 'em two thousand years back.
Oh, yes, we'll start out with our stuff, Simon Pure
(Including a blue print of drain and of sewer);
And, also, of course, the glorious tidings,
If they will not believe, of eternal good hidings.

ARTHUR E. CARPENTER.

“I am well aware that some people now begin to doubt about witchcraft, or at any rate feign to do so, being desirous to disbelieve whatever they are afraid of. This spirit is growing too common among us and will end (unless we put a stop to it) in the destruction of all religion. And as regards witchcraft, a man is bound either to believe in it or disbelieve the Bible. For even in the New Testament, discarding many things of the Old, such as sacrifices and sabbath and fasting and other miseries, witchcraft is clearly spoken of as a thing that must continue, that the Evil One be not utterly robbed of his vested interests. Hence let no one tell me that witchcraft is done away with, for I will meet him with St. Paul, than whom no more religious man and few less superstitious can be found in all the Bible.”—R. D. BLACKMORE, Lorna Doone.

THE FREETHINKER

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SUGAR PLUMS

We call attention to the important meeting advertised below which we hope all who can, will attend, bringing, if possible, their friends.

To Correspondents

C. E. RATCLIFFE.—The quotation you give about a Materialist having logically to be an individualist was Dr. Mayer's. But, of course, he is opposed to Dialectical Materialism—which is the "philosophy" put forward by the "Collectivists, Socialists and Communists" you name.

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.

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 Secretary of the N.S.S. at this Office by Friday morning.

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

Readers who are considering joining the N.S.S. in the New Year are reminded by the Secretary of "the organisation of militant freethought" that new subscriptions paid now cover membership until the end of 1953. Those who avail themselves of this concession help the office, which has to work at high pressure in January, when most old members renew their support of the Society. So will those interested apply for membership forms and the addresses of Branch Secretaries?

The Birmingham Branch N.S.S. will hold its usual monthly meeting at the *Satis Café* (off New Street) on Sunday, October 26. The speaker on this occasion will be a member of the staff of *The Pioneer Press*, Mr. J. M. Alexander. Mr. Alexander's subject is "Psychology and Superstition." The lecturer has specialised on the occult and magical aspects of religion. In particular, Mr. Alexander is one of the few contemporary Freethinkers to have assimilated Gerald Massey's monumental work on the Egyptian origins of Christianity, "Out of Egypt have I called my Son." We have no doubt that the Birmingham Branch will spend a profitable and instructive evening in Mr. Alexander's company, and that questions and discussion will cover a wide field.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Blackburn Market Place). — Sunday, October 26, 3 p.m. and 6-45 p.m.: J. BARNES (Manchester), "The Crimes of Christianity."

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

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Plattfields).—Every Sunday, 3 p.m.; (St. Mary's Gate, Blitzed Site), every Sunday, 8 p.m.; (Alexandra Park Gate), every Wednesday, 8 p.m.; (Deansgate Bomb Site), every weekday, 1 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK and BARNES.

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

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square). — Saturday, October 25, 7 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY and A. ELSMERE.

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

INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (*Satis Café*, off New Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: J. M. ALEXANDER, "Psychology and Superstition."

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m.: J. W. C. KEENE, "Social Credit."

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, W.C. 1).—Tuesday, October 28, 7 p.m.: DR. W. BIER, "Some Problems of Modern Psychology."

Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: L. WILKINSON, "The Coal Industry and the Work of the N.C.B."

N.S.S. Public Meeting (Conway Small Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1). — Wednesday, October 29, 7-30 p.m. Chairman: P. VICTOR MORRIS. Speakers: F. A. RIDLEY, L. EBURY, E. W. SHAW and J. W. BARKER. "Religion in Politics." Questions and discussions. Admission free.

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Large Lecture Theatre, Technical College, Shakespeare Street). — Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: JAMES HARRISON, M.P., "The Road Transport Sell-Out."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Sunday, October 26, 11 a.m.: Dr. D. STARK MURRAY, "The Cost of Health."

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W. 1). — Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: Dr. H. K. BANDA, "Central African Federation."

The First Gentleman

For him could be naught but the highest promotion.

He couldn't be left a mere junior duke

And still stay the object of queenly devotion.

The thing was a scandal, a shame and rebuke.

In statesmanship, science, art, music and letters

He yet has to show what his merits may be,

But meanwhile, ahead of his elders and betters,

He's given precedence, by wifely decree.

P. V. M.

The Moon on TV?

Dr. Wernher von Braun, Technical Director of Guided Missiles Development, forecasts a trip to the moon in rocket ships by 1977. He says we will all watch it on TV.

Another interesting prophecy—the telecast will come from a space station built 1,075 miles above the earth long before 1977.

The rocket ships will be assembled and launched from this station. They will take five days to go to the moon.—*The Daily Express*, October 10, 1952.

Sectarian Influences in Public Affairs

Public Meeting organised by
The National Secular Society

"RELIGION IN POLITICS"

Chairman: P. VICTOR MORRIS

SPEAKERS:

F. A. RIDLEY L. EBURY E. W. SHAW J. W. BARKER

Conway Small Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1

7.30 p.m., Wednesday, 29th October

Doors open 7 p.m. Questions and Discussion Admission Free

A BARGAIN

We have a few copies of THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AGAINST THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, by AVRO MANHATTAN, 470 pp., published at 5s., now offered at 2s. 6d. (postage 5d.).

WE HAVE PURCHASED the entire stock of F. A. RIDLEY'S masterly work, "SOCIALISM AND RELIGION." The only work in English now in print dealing with this vital question. We can offer this at ONE SHILLING, post 1½d. Order promptly. "One of the best things Ridley has ever written."

Quintessence of Llewelyn Powys

By G. I. BENNETT

LLEWELYN POWYS died on December 2, 1939. He had lived fifty-five short but intense years; thirty of them in a valiant but losing battle against consumption.

Perhaps a dozen or so years is too brief a time in which to forecast a writer's place in literature. In any case, a lasting reputation in the realm of letters depends so largely upon the vagarious standards of posterity. Wells and Shaw both acquired for themselves in their lifetimes an international fame; but who would presume to say how they will be appraised half a century hence?

In books of reference and literary histories Llewelyn Powys gets scant mention. His novelist brothers, John Cowper and Theodore Francis Powys, are better known, and their appeal is not to a wide circle. Despite the prediction of his biographer, Malcolm Elwin, in his *Life of Llewelyn Powys*, published a few years ago, that one day "his essays may stand on the same shelf with Lamb and Hazlitt . . . his prose may be rated high in the tradition of Landor and Pater," his ultimate literary fate seems uncertain.

Powys rarely read modern books. Old classical writers like Chaucer, Montaigne, Robert Burton, Rabelais, and Shakespeare were his principal choice; and in the writings of these and others he steeped himself. This explains—partly at any rate—his addiction to archaic words and phrases with which much of his prose is interlarded. And this, along with his outspoken heretical utterances, and his scorn for those who to his mind timorously or obsequiously accepted conventions alien to him, did much to prevent his becoming a popular author. Even his charmingly unoffending books of essays—*Dorset*, *Somerset*, and *Swiss Essays*—which had greater appeal, never reached a wide public.

Apart from his collected *Swiss Essays*, written during his last illness, *Love and Death* was his last book. As its readers will recall, it contains some beautiful passages of descriptive bucolic prose, but suffers from an over-luxuriance of poetic imagery and what one reviewer called its "medieval posturings"—that quaint style and wit which Powys so sedulously cultivated, but which is not everyone's pleasure.

Abounding in the frank sensualism characteristic of the man, it is an idyll of Powys's love of Dittany Stone, a fair elfin, idealised creature, and is, according to its author, an "imaginary autobiography." What is imaginary? The girl and Powys's love relations with her, it would seem. Such a girl and such a love as he had craved in his early years of manhood. But the background against which the simple story is set is real enough: it is Llewelyn Powys's life.

But when published in 1939, *Love and Death* had a mixed reception. If it won praise it also provoked a good deal of adverse criticism—on account, one suspects, both of its unsparing statement of truth as Powys saw it about religion and life, and the prose style in which it found expression. And, like his other books, its reading public was disappointingly small. For all that, it is a book noteworthy for its author's belief that sexual love, even between those not in a position to marry, ought in wisdom to be unashamed, and for its manifestation of his brave and stoical attitude to death, which is present in much of his earlier work. To snatch every happiness, every joy, every deep and satisfying emotion, physical and spiritual, of which a human being is capable was the quintessence of Powys's lifelong philosophy. And chronic invalid

though he was, Powys not merely preached his philosophy—he lived it.

Spending most of his time out of doors, as for his health he perforce had to do, he was yet well-suited by temperament for an open-air life. He loved the country but had little liking for city-dwelling. Given kindred human companionship, to be near Nature was all he desired. It inspired in him an exuberance that time and again in his writings excited him to exclaim that "simply to be alive, to be abroad upon earth" was justification enough for all the misfortunes, sorrows, and hazards of mortal existence. In this exultant love of life, evoked by the sights and sounds and sensations of the free countryside, there is reminiscent at times something of the spirit of Richard Jefferies and W. H. Hudson—though I think he had hardly their exquisite powers of minutest observation of the things and moods of Nature.

Llewelyn Powys was self-confessedly a heathen. Rejecting from his early days traditional religious faith, he avowed a pure and candid paganism that made no allowance for a life beyond this on earth.

"During my whole life," he wrote in *The Rationalist Annual* for 1937, "I do not believe that I have ever experienced a genuine religious emotion that might with justice be described as Christian. When I look back it seems to me that, even as a very infant, this fanciful cosmogony was antipathetic to my temperament. And the more my mind developed the more did its doctrines outrage my notions of good sense, presenting themselves as a supreme example of the congenital propensity of the human race for self-torment and for childish make-belief."

Powys was the son of a clergyman. Yet truly, I think, the spirit of simple hedonism that informed his thought, his writings, his whole life, was the logical outcome of his repudiation of belief in God. Thus it is hardly surprising that the time-revered moral code, to which most men subscribe outwardly if not invariably and implicitly in their private lives, had no meaning for him. In *Glory of Life* he declared:—

"All the commandments devised by man for the regulation of society do not concern us. Cruelty only is wickedness. To cause suffering, physical or mental, with witty intent, is the only unpardonable sin."

This was not mere rhetoric. As any who have studied the circumstances of his life know, he *did* passionately feel the urgency and truth of what he said. For man's inhumanity to fellow man, for his ill-use of animal life, he had a keen repugnance and loathing, which many people who may not otherwise identify themselves with his outlook and sentiments will readily share.

Powys had a deep and abiding hatred of war, as his writings show, though he was not strictly a pacifist. As the storm clouds darkened the international scene in the late 'thirties he expressed in a letter to a friend his fear that in certain circumstances there might be no alternative but to meet force with force. But it was not to politics he looked for a means of overcoming war. He had, in fact, little knowledge or understanding of, or interest in, politics. War was the outcome of man's gross stupidity, his obstinate clinging to false values arising from the "high premium put on personal property." True wisdom lay in jettisoning these and living a free life of the senses—"they alone will not betray us"—which he was never tired of saying was the only path to genuine happiness. Somewhat naively he wrote in *Damnable Opinions*:—

"Good governments, instead of devoting their energies towards designs of imperial pomp, should concentrate their attention upon organising their commonwealths so that each individual should be free to develop to the uttermost the inner springs of his nature as revealed to him by the senses."

Out of the score and more books that came from Powys's pen those that embody the essence and range of his thinking about life can, I consider, be counted on the fingers of one hand. They are: *The Pathetic Fallacy* (sub-titled "A Study of Christianity"); *Impassioned Clay*; *Damnably Opinions*; and his two essays, *Glory of Life* and *Now That The Gods Are Dead*.*

Few men have lived on means as slender as Llewelyn Powys and yet remained content. Because his books never sold well his literary earnings were meagre—barely sufficient at times, even, for the simple cottage life of himself and his wife. He had a contempt for worldly ambition and success, in hot pursuit of which so many expend their lives. Wealth and fame he craved not. If he did not receive popular acclaim, at least he never sought any.

"Advantage in life in no way depends upon winning the applause of worldly people. This should be taught in every elementary school. A man may very well die as a tramp in a ditch, with grey hair against blackening winter nettles, and yet have lived to greater purpose than the prosperous haberdasher in the neighbouring market town. It is always a man's response to life that counts. . . ."

So he wrote in *Glory of Life*.

In a few sentences of comparable length it would be difficult to find words with which Llewelyn Powys's attitude to life could be more aptly expressed.

* Published together in one volume by Bodley Head in 1949.

Correspondence

INTERPLANETARY TRAVEL

[Extract from letter received re N.S.S. from Mr. A. N. Richmond.]

SIR,—I disagree strongly with a reference to the Interplanetary Society on page 1 of *The Freethinker* for September 28. If The British Interplanetary Society is intended, it issues a bi-monthly journal which treats interplanetary flight in a scientific spirit fitting to a technical publication. There is plenty of 'zeal' in the Society, but proselytising . . . certainly not to the extent of the N.S.S. So it is the latter's objectives that are (apparently) raised to the level of 'a messianic apocalypse.'

At the risk of appearing a pedagogue I would point out that it has recently come to light that the moon is not a place where nothing ever happens, for evidence of volcanic eruptions and changes of certain craters' dimensions has been elicited; also that exploration of its surface is not so difficult as implied. That there is vegetation on Mars is a debatable point, as certain astronomers believe the colours (green and brown) seen to be an optical illusion. These colours also change the wrong way seasonally.—Yours, etc.,

A. N. RICHMOND.

[Our description of the moon was a quotation, whilst our authority for the presence of vegetation on Mars was the Astronomer Royal, Dr. Spencer-Jones, who described it as "practically certain." In our opinion, a more sober tone would increase the value of much of the literature issued by the Interplanetary enthusiasts.—ED.]

INVENTIONS

SIR,—Although you have closed the discussion on inventions, I should like to draw Alfred D. Corrick's attention to the fact that it was Watt who invented the steam engine, and not Stevenson. Stevenson and several other engineers were commissioned by the government of the day to build locomotives in competition with each other. Stevenson's was awarded the prize, and consequently he is regarded historically as the inventor of the locomotive.

Strictly, however, this is not so, for twenty-one years before Stevenson built his "Rocket," Richard Trevethic had built a locomotive at Merthyr Tydfil, in South Wales, and it was used for drawing trucks of coal from Merthyr Tydfil to Abercynon, where

the coal was then loaded on to boats, and dispatched to Cardiff for shipment. This was the first locomotive ever used on this earth, and the remains of the old railway line are still to be seen.

It is childish for any Britisher to argue about inventions, but we can be sympathetic to America which has no tradition, and to Russia who has only just emerged from feudalism, and it is natural for these two young nations to brag of their accomplishments, just as children brag.

Our duty as Britishers is to prevent these children using their latest toys in the shape of atom bombs, or they will not only destroy themselves, but us as well.—Yours, etc., PAUL VARNEY.

THE STRAFFEN CASE

SIR,—I would not have referred to this case again but for the fact that your two correspondents, Mr. J. Effel and Mr. A. D. Corrick, seem to be labouring under some misapprehension concerning the legal position. It is unlawful under the present law to execute an insane person, as the Home Secretary was advised by his medical panel that Straffen was. My article was a criticism of the trial and it was outside its scope to deal with the punishment. I do not understand what your correspondents mean by referring to the punishment of a person who is insane. If they mean that all insane persons should be put to death, let them say so. In my view, the very fact that a person is insane sets aside all the considerations your correspondents stress as irrelevant.

I should add that they seem to be under some strange illusions as to the nature of prison life or of the life in asylums. It is a pity, therefore, that the question should be confused by the introduction of remarks about "sentimentality" in treating convicted persons, sane or insane. There is no sentimentality in the treatment of persons imprisoned in English prisons, or detained in English asylums. That is a matter on which I have no doubt whatever, though I regret that it should be the case.—Yours, etc.,

C. H. NORMAN.

Report of Glasgow Meeting

MR. J. BARROWMAN, Secretary of the *Glasgow Secular Society*, writes us that the recent visit of the President of the N.S.S., Mr. F. A. Ridley, to Glasgow, was much appreciated. Speaking at the "McLellan Galleries," Sauchiehall Street, on "Secularism Faces the Future," Mr. Ridley outlined the evolution of the N.S.S. against its contemporary social background. Appearing at a time when Evangelical Protestantism was the predominant form of religion in Great Britain, the earliest form of Secularist propaganda was necessarily mainly occupied with "Bible-banging," exposing the infallible fetish-book and the then universally held dogma of verbal inspiration. In the history of Secularism this period will always be associated with the names of Charles Bradlaugh, the Founder of the N.S.S., and G. W. Foote, the first Editor of *The Freethinker*.

In more recent years, the necessary but negative denunciation of the Bible gave way to a *positive* philosophy, that of Atheism logically argued. This memorable step in the evolution of Freethought will, declared the lecturer, always remain associated with the name of Chapman Cohen. Mr. Cohen's faultless lucidity and incisive wit inscribe him permanently as a major intellectual influence in the history of British Freethought.

To-day, concluded Mr. Ridley, we have moved into a new era, the epoch of the "total" State and of "total" war. Freethought cannot co-exist with such an age of fear as is ours. Hence a broad sociological attitude is indicated, if the Freethought Movement is to survive and influence contemporary events. People will not turn away from the illusion of a mythical paradise whilst this world remains a hell! Freethought must associate the struggle against war and totalitarianism with its anti-religious criticism: a *positive* attitude.

Mr. Barrowman concludes his report with the news that Mr. P. V. Morris will lecture in Glasgow on December 14 on "The Consolations of Irreligion."

The chair for the N.S.S. President's lecture was ably filled by Mr. J. Wilson, of Glasgow.

In Search of the Miraculous

By OSWELL BLAKESTON

RELIGION often attracts converts because people feel starved of wonder and religion pretends to have a monopoly of "miracles." In fact we do not have to go to church to find the wonderful—all we have to do is to look over the garden wall! The religious "miracle" is simply another anthropomorphical projection: men can produce marvels, only so few of us believe in men—especially in an age of statistics. But take a glance back to a happier age. . . .

Well, if smoke came from the swan's nostrils, you knew the captain was cooking himself a meal inside the bird. Messrs. Dixon and Sons of Exmouth built the swan-boat for Captain Peacock in 1851. To-day the bird, no longer sea-worthy, sits in the garden of Regent's House at Starcross; and if you look over the wall, between the four corner towerlets, you'll see a monster swan head, sixteen feet of it.

Unfortunately, the swan has lost the wings that were sails; and from over the wall one can't determine if the two mighty swimming feet, worked by a handle like an old fire pump, are still safely folded under the apparition on the lawn. But a glimpse of the captain's "miracle" is a nice way to begin a day. Moreover, if you keep your neck stretched, you'll see a battlemented "ruin," which used to screen two cottages with one chimney, also reposing on the spacious lawn.

"Indeed," said a man on his way to chapel, "there's nothing remarkable there—it's just the way it's built!" Yet, on a flower bed, outside a villa, there's a stuffed duck; while a back-street cottage has a penny-farthing machine cemented on top of the garden well. Even if it meant nothing to a boy who told me that, with his soap-box trolley, he'd just broken through the sound barrier, it's the sort of genuine world of miracle which suggests to Freethinking me a celebration drink; and the Starcross Railway Inn is a delight of mirrors and tall vases.

Certainly, it's hard to leave the happy pubs of Starcross—almost a miracle; but there is also the pumping station for Brunel's Atmospheric Railway. The story of the train smoothly driven by air-pressure is, I think, widely known; but the locals have forgotten the miraculous appearance of the pumping station, the sole survivor of these Italianate palaces, and think of it simply as the Methodist chapel which is, unfortunately, tucked away in a corner of the edifice. They'll admit, of course, that it's a direction mark to the pier for the ferry to Exmouth; and from the ferry one can see the Cygnet, the decorative rowing boat which belonged to the Swan and which still rides on the waters of the Exe.

Regrettably, the landlord of the first pub I found at Exmouth had just stripped the walls of assagais, skulls and curiosities. However, there were two fine pub cats; and, as it was near closing time, I stayed for conversation instead of wandering in immediate search of further miracles. I spoke to a young man who'd been in Kent working on the new orchards which look like plantations of witches' broomsticks. The one thing which had impressed him in Canterbury had been the number of back-street photographers who specialised in taking a man with his bicycle. He hadn't noticed the cathedral. Then we found we'd both been recently to Rochester; and we told one another the guide's story of the queen's statue in the cathedral there which had been mutilated by Cromwell's men and which for years had carried the head

of a bearded bishop firmly grafted by a short-sighted restorer. That was an impressive laugh!

Then my spirits soared, for I was off on a twopenny bus ride to A la Ronde, the real reason for my excursion. This circular house was built in 1798 by the Misses Jane and Mary Parminter; and the central octagonal hall rises to sixty feet and a gallery with look-out windows encrusted with intricate patterns of shells and placed in walls covered with murals made of feathers. Petal rooms, radiating from the hall, are decorated with seaweed pictures, framed scenes fashioned of miniature shells with pink arches and swooping birds, with cut-out paper pictures almost too fine for the eye, with needlework and tables inlaid with tesseræ and seals, all Parminter fabricated. How tenderly the good ladies laboured at their miracles; and their precious flimflam can teach the humanitarian that often love has to be made!

"I was so upset," a visitor confided to me. "You see, someone told me about a woman in the lavatory in the park who shut a kiddy's fingers in the door, and just wouldn't open up until she'd finished what she wanted to do. They say the kid screamed for a drive you mad, and everyone around nearly went mad, . . . But I feel better now."

Maid-made miracles, then, can soothe as well as the theatrical pretence of churches. But now comes another laugh for the Freethinker. The Misses Parminter showed what religion can do to the noble mind; for close to A la Ronde they erected and endowed "The Point In View." The point in view of the Parminters was the conversion of the Jews to Christianity before the promised return to Palestine: their hope was that the almshouses, built around the tiny chapel, would accommodate Jewesses who had embraced Christianity. The whole structure, almshouses and chapel, look as queer as the ladies' intention.

I was lucky enough to be invited by one of the four resident spinsters to visit her neat little rooms. She lives in them rent free and receives the traditional grant of five shillings a week. My hostess then told me the story of John Way who asked his heir to dinner, couldn't open the port, and finally disinherited his heir when the young man helpfully produced a corkscrew from his pocket. No good Christian, reasoned Mr. Way, would carry a corkscrew.

John Way found a barrister who bore the name of Way; and he left the stranger, Lewis Way, a Christian fortune of £300,000. Shortly after, the barrister was in the neighbourhood of A la Ronde, and was mysteriously fired by "The Point In View." (The cause for religious enthusiasm need not, it seems, be excessively rational!) Lewis Way spent his fortune in an attempt to win the great princes of state and industry to the Parminter point in view. He did, in fact, succeed in persuading Czar Alexander I to reserve a tract of land in the Crimea for Christian Jews!

Well, back to the ferry, where the wind was rustling the silver paper glued to a summer booth, but peeling, like camel's hair, in strips from the showman's shrine. Back to Starcross and the swan and the duck and the penny-farthing and Mr. Brunel and—the pubs.

Sufficient man-made "miracles," I would say, for one day. After all, I only made an autumnal day-trip from Starcross to Exmouth.