

The Freethinker

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Editor: F. A. RIDLEY

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ONE of the claims now persistently made on behalf of Christianity by its propagandists and "apologists" is that the Church has always promoted freedom: how often, for example, are we presented with the alluring picture of the freedom of the individual, with his immortal soul and "human dignity," in striking contrast with the soulless materialist "robot" of modern, totalitarian régimes. The fact that the Christian Church is the oldest, the most persistent, and the most comprehensive of all totalitarian régimes, is one sedulously concealed by our modern "apologists" and broadcasters.

However, it is a fact beyond dispute. To-day, the Churches make a parade of encouraging the freedom of the individual because they cannot help falling in with the prevailing fashion and, in any case, it represents a useful stick to beat their present-day Communist foes.

"Other times, other manners." When the Christian Churches were at the zenith of their power; when they really controlled Society instead of, as at present, struggling hard to keep their precarious foothold within its predominantly secular framework, Christianity was as totalitarian as any modern secular creed. Indeed, actually more so in its own dogmatic claims. For whilst the political police and "concentration camps" of modern secular dictatorships end at and in the grave, the *real* terrorism of the Church only *began* at death: the actual horrors of the Catholic Inquisition and the Calvinist Kirk were represented as a mere prelude to the eternal post-mortem horrors to come in the infernal Hereafter, to which all who incurred the ban of the Church were inexorably doomed. Far from being an anti-totalitarian force throughout its history, the Christian Church has been, historically, the most totalitarian force known to, at least, the Western world. To find its equal in this respect, one would have to seek it in the similarly totalitarian religions of the East: Islam and Hinduism, in particular.

If one seeks for a convincing proof of what were in reality, the sociological effects of Christianity, one can find them in the relations of Christianity with other hostile cultures throughout its long domination over European society. It is all very well for the Church, to-day, to denounce Hitler's tyrannical régime yesterday, or the Communist dictatorships of to-day. In its own day of power, to be measured in centuries against Nazi and Communist decades, it suppressed opposition with equal ruthlessness to that of any modern secular régime: the positive proof of this age-long repression is to be found in the dungeons and *auto da fes* of the Inquisition. Its negative and, perhaps, even more efficacious aspect is to be found in the complete suppression of all anti-Christian ideas, and of the literature, some of it known to us by name, which expressed such heretical ideas.

For the indisputable historical fact which, beyond anything else, finally negates the claim of Christianity to be the champion of human freedom is to be found in its

millennial censorship of *all* anti-clerical and heretical ideas. Here as elsewhere, "the proof of the pudding lies in the eating." It seems clear from external evidence that an extensive anti-Christian literature existed during the early centuries of Christianity and that, even in the "Ages of Faith," opposition to the dominant creed was by no means entirely lacking. Yet this anti-Christian literature is a vanished literature; a literature almost entirely obliterated by the powers of organised repression retrogressively evolved by the medieval Catholic Church to repress what increasingly became regarded as the supreme crime in the calendar, "the mortal sin" of heresy; a process which

culminated in the 13th century with the systematic organisation by Rome of a special tribunal for dealing with "heresy," the Holy Inquisition, the "Gestapo"—to employ a modern analogy—of the medieval Church.

However, long even before the official establishment of the Inquisition, the process of organised repression was far advanced. From the end of the fourth century and onwards, a law "against dangerous thoughts" was enforced with increasing rigour. At the end of the fourth century the death-penalty against "heresy" was officially put into operation by the secular power. (Actually, a British-born emperor had the doubtful honour of signing the first death warrant for the new "crime," unknown to the pagan legislation of antiquity—Christians and other nonconformists who were put to death by pagan emperors were proceeded against as traitors to the State, not as "heretics" with regard to the pagan gods, a fundamental distinction.) To their credit, it must be recorded that several contemporary churchmen protested against what one of their number, St. John Chrysostom, accurately described as the introduction "of a new and inexpiable crime upon earth." However, the death-penalty for heresy, whilst remaining an "inexpiable crime," soon ceased to be a "new" one.

The suppression of the individual heretic was soon paralleled by the obliteration of heresy and of its written records in the probably extensive pagan anti-Christian literature which had been written under the tolerant régime of the pagan empire prior to Constantine. In 449, the Roman Emperors, Theodosius and Valentinian—the first a moron and the latter a murderer!—issued a comprehensive Imperial Edict which banned all literature which might "arouse the wrath of God and procure the ruin of souls," under which sinister heading were included all the pagan authors who had written against the Christian religion; a few still known by name, the majority unknown to-day thanks to the thoroughness with which their works were "smelt out" and obliterated by the clerical witch-hunters and their secular tools. Many such decrees were issued with similarly dire results, throughout the "Ages of Faith," the "Dark" and "Middle Ages."

The result of this serial story of repression is that all anti-Christian literature prior to the Reformation has now almost completely disappeared. Only a few fragments,

VIEWS and OPINIONS Christianity and Totalitarianism

By F. A. RIDLEY

preserved by accident or (as in the famous case of Celsus' masterly critique of nascent Christianity, *The True Word* (second century)), in the "refutations" of Christian controversialists, have survived. Other anti-Christian works, household words, it appears, in their days, are only known to us by name: the books themselves have simply vanished.

So much for the love of freedom possessed by the Christian Church when it actually had the power to put

its ideas into effect and to embody them in public law! If ever there was a totalitarian régime in all history, that established by the Christian Church in its hey-day is deserving of that appellation. Its present protestations of toleration and ostentatious regard for human freedom are, in reality, analogous to the compulsory vegetarianism of a man-eating tiger, the claws of whom have been blunted by age, and whose teeth are far gone in decay!

Monism, E. Haeckel's Post-Christian Religion

By ARTHUR WILD

(Concluded from page 370)

HIS biologic theory leads him to advocate the killing of diseased children—like in Sparta—and even of adults who themselves desire it. Physicians who artificially protract the sufferings of incurably ill people are doing neither useful nor humanitarian work. In this and similar instances he calls for a radical change of the legal code. In politics he thinks that the theory of evolution teaches that aristocracy and not democracy is the most natural form of government. He calls the ideal future State of Social Democracy a great prison. The psychological differences between the lowest savages and apes seem smaller to him than those between the latter and men of the highest culture. He speaks even about the higher Aryan and the lower Semitic races. This is the reason why he was sometimes praised by Nazi authors although others found him pro-Jewish. His really universal outlook did not prevent him from seeing, as a very old man, in the First War only the German viewpoint. He calls England, Russia and France "a gang of robbers," and speaks about the "fratricidal English." Even those who claim that all his accusations of this country and the other two allies are justified, will, no doubt, admit that some accusations—partly even more serious—can be addressed to the other side. Especially members of smaller European nations whose territories Haeckel intends to annex to Germany and whose inhabitants he wants to Germanise, read his last writings with uneasiness not much different from that experienced in reading the last work of the logical giant Comte drifting towards the mysticism of the number.

Wilhelm Ostwald, scientist, writer, painter and organiser, an able leader of the Monistenbund after Haeckel, replaces Haeckel's concept of Substance by the concept of Energy. The basis of his ethics and politics is his "Energetic Imperative"—"Do not waste energy, but use it"—from which he derives e.g., his condemnation of war and multilingualism. He is against the medieval regulatory spirit still ruling in German schools and Universities in his time and rejects any kind of dogmatism. In certain respects—though a biographer and admirer of A. Comte—he represents the opposite of this typically French systematizer. Haeckel's and particularly Ostwald's religion does not mean "binding" to the same degree as all previous religions—Comte's included—did, but it means freedom supported by science. In other words it is more of a method than any rigidly fixed teaching, eternal or transitory. Monism thus becomes a real freethought movement with many different shades of opinion ranging from positivism and critical realism to dialectic materialism.

The Catholic critic of Haeckel's Monism Fr. Klimke maintained that this movement meant the greatest challenge to Christianity in all its history. Haeckel's "Riddle of the Universe" has been read more than any other book ever written on Philosophy. In Germany it became the favourite reading of pupils in highest classes of secondary schools and of elementary school teachers. In McCabe's translation it found its way to the English speaking readers. In Japan

it was introduced as a textbook in schools. The enthusiasm over this book was, however, not quite general. The adversaries of Monism organised themselves in the Keplerbund (1907). The theory of evolution was banned from German schools until the end of World War I. Most professional metaphysicians opposed Haeckel seeing in his work an intrusion on their ground by an outsider. Many scientists agreed with Haeckel's views, but saw in his books dangerous reading for common people. In spite of that in the first two decades of the present century the majority of authors writing in Germany on philosophical subjects were monists—in the widest sense of this word. Their influence abroad was enormous and was interrupted only as a result of World War I. Haeckel is a populariser of science and scientific outlook in life in the best sense of this word. Much of his teaching has been completed, modified or even proved to be wrong by further development of science. Still he contributed to the spreading of the only real knowledge mankind possesses. In 1952 for such an undertaking teamwork would be required no doubt, although an entirely new edition of the "Riddle of the Universe" brought up to date does not seem even now to surpass the forces of a single remarkable man.

Comte says that it is easier to speculate about something than to do it, therefore theory must precede practice, people must be educated in advance for the higher type of society of future. If a rational order of human society is possible at all, in other words if science can lead or at least advise us in questions of practical life as individuals, classes and nations, both Comte and Haeckel made the most remarkable attempts to show the way—the slow but safe way of education. They do not neglect the irrational sides of the human psyche either. Both their religions aim not only at the rational True, but at the less rational Beautiful and Good as well.

If God is Love

If God is love, that love must grieve
 To see his children on the rack,
 While truths enmeshed with lies deceive
 Dim minds that tread a darkening track.
 We grope and grope through countless creeds,
 Throw seer and sage to murderous hordes,
 How often what was goodness breeds
 The clang and clash of demon swords!
 To conquer hell the cross was raised,
 Where Christ's blood flowed to pay our debt.
 What swarms of bloody deeds have praised
 Hell's mocking throne, so firmly set!
 In vain do we time's vistas scan
 For God's strong love fiends' malice cleaves.
 It is the brooding brain of man
 Such fair and dreadful patterns weaves.

A. D. HOWELL SMITH.

Calvin and Calvinism

By T. F. PALMER

THE celebrated Dutch humanist, Erasmus, startled cultured Europe with his sceptical criticism of traditional Scriptural interpretations. But it was the German monk, Martin Luther, who initiated the widespread revolt against the orthodox teachings and scandals of the Catholic Church. For a time, the revolt against Rome penetrated every part of Western Europe and, in Switzerland, Ulrich Zwingli was even more iconoclastic than Luther. But his headquarters at Zurich lost its pre-eminence after Zwingli perished on the bloodstained battlefield of Cappel in 1531.

The Catholic cantons of Switzerland of the Reformation time remain so now. After Zwingli's death the centre of his cult passed to Bern and then to Geneva, then a small city of 13,000 inhabitants. But this change was not made until 30 years civil strife had convulsed the country. For the peasantry, sunk in slavish superstition, were too deeply immersed in customary ideas to accept the new evangel without a struggle, while the vested interests of the Duke of Savoy and the Prince Bishop were menaced by the Reformers. Yet, in 1536, Geneva secured its independence, while its citizens encouraged the ministrations of certain French missionaries who were spreading novel doctrines in the Pays de Vaud.

The most prominent of these preachers was Farel who induced a travelling student to remain in Geneva and become a minister of the evangelical party. This student, then aged 27, was no other than John Calvin, already the author of a dissertation on Seneca sufficiently heterodox in character to render a prompt departure from Paris advisable where the heretic-hunting Francis I was on the throne.

Apparently this young Frenchman was the very antithesis of Luther. In his *History of Europe*, Dr. Fisher declares that: "Of Luther's vast animal power, of his gaiety and wit, his coarseness and humour, his wild vein of romance and crabbed scholasticism, his naive peasant superstitions and morbid self-criticism, there was nothing in Calvin." The latter was quiet and reserved, but a man of stern disposition, fiercely intolerant towards opponents and grimly determined to create an evangelical Republic in Geneva and to become the leader of the Protestant or Huguenot movement in France.

The Venetian ambassador in Paris informed the Doge of Venice that Calvin's authority over the Huguenots in France was supreme. His prestige was enhanced by the fact that, as the leading minister in Geneva, where the magistrates were appointed by the people and the pastors by their congregations, he ranked as ruler. For there was no privileged class and no one at least in theory, above the law, but all equal in the sight of God.

Calvin's doctrine of predestination, derived from Paul and Augustine, under which regardless of merit, some are chosen for immortal bliss, and others for eternal damnation in a fiery hell, logically considered, makes human effort futile. Yet, Fisher's contention seems substantially correct when he observes that: "Among European peoples none have been sterner in the practice of religion or more ruthless in the pursuit of wealth than the professors of a doctrine which seems to make all human effort unavailing and to invite to a life of apathy and ease."

A despotic State was created in Geneva which influenced the spirit and structure of all the Reformed

churches. According to Calvin, all the unworthy were refused the Communion table during the first three centuries of the Christian dispensation. So, he was determined to restore this allegedly ancient custom and to confine this predominant Church privilege to those of stainless character. That the proof of this purity necessitated an inquisition into the private lives of citizens did not deter him. He favoured a system under which both laymen and pastors were closely spied upon and, although it was alien to his desire to place lay authority over spirituals, he was willing to grant authority to the magistrates to strengthen the power of the Church. However illogical any method might be, it was fully justified when it promoted true godliness. Therefore, a Supreme Council was appointed to impose penalties on all delinquents in faith or morals. As our historian notes: "Adultery, blasphemy and heresy were punished by death. It was a sombre, fault-finding, inquisitorial government which, being taken as a pattern in other lands, was a source of much cruelty and suffering in the New World as well as in the Old. In Geneva itself it led to the burning of Servetus, the Unitarian, with the concurrence and approval of Calvin himself."

During the conflict between the Crown and Parliament, Calvinism became prominent in England, but with the return of Charles II it receded. With the migration of Puritans in the *Mayflower*, however, in 1621, it was established in the New England colonies in America and exercised a powerful influence both in spiritual and temporal affairs. But now there is a marked reaction against Puritan austerity and gloom in the U.S., notably among Freethinkers, Pragmatists and so-called Christian Scientists.

Calvinism fought a prolonged and sanguinary battle with Catholicism in France. The Huguenots made many converts, but the establishment of a State within a State led to the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, when many thousand Protestants perished. All efforts to compose the differences between the rival cults failed. In 1562 an amnesty conceded the open celebration of Huguenot rites. But each party continued intolerant and religious rancour increased, and violence became constant. Images were shattered, churches attacked, priests assaulted by one side and pastors on the other. Then, under Catholic leadership, a Huguenot congregation was massacred at Vassy and civil war was the result.

After the sacrifice of countless lives and the devastation of both land and buildings, the Huguenot, Henry of Navarre became king and, at long last, the Edict of Nantes granted a limited toleration to the heretics. This Edict remained in force until the time of Louis XIV when, under clerical pressure, it was revoked in 1685. From 1681, however, the Huguenots were plundered and their women and girls raped. This persecution led to thousands of conversions to Catholicism, but others, mostly trained artisans, escaped to England and Holland and very materially aided the industries of these lands.

Profound ignorance makes a man dogmatic. He who knows nothing thinks he can teach others what he has just now learned himself; while he who knows a great deal, can scarce imagine anyone cannot be acquainted with what he says, and speaks for this reason with more indifference.—*La Bruyère*.

Acid Drops

In proving that God Almighty does really and truly exist, the B.B.C., in their broadcast to schools, enlisted the services of a Mr. R. C. Walton, who, strangely enough, does not appear to be a Professor of Science, or of Philosophy, or of Mathematics, but just an ordinary layman. Mr. Walton did not trouble to delve into metaphysics but proved right away that God exists by pointing out that the Universe had a Creator who was God Almighty, and in a trice the problem was solved. As for the Problem of Evil which sometimes upsets other fervent believers and which should have had no difficulty for such an out-and-out Theist and Christian, Mr. Walton managed to weigh in with so many words that poor Evil was thoroughly ousted. But nobody knows how and after all—does it matter?

According to a writer in the *Daily Express*, some Mau-Mau ceremonies are based on Roman Catholic rites—mainly to insult the Roman Catholic Church, the bishops of which “have solemnly excommunicated adherents of Mau-Mau.” Apart from the fact that the adherents will get over the excommunication quite easily, the fact is that Roman rites and Pagan rites are both based on credulity and superstition, to say nothing of ignorance. Whether we call it Black Mass or White Mass, or now even Mau-Mau—is there very much difference?

The famous Design Argument, that well-tried and hardy old annual, has just had a new ally in what is called the Langhorn Beetle. This particular beetle is far more dangerous than the death-watch beetle; it attacks woodwork and destroys it, and in Southern Europe it is considered a major pest and people have to insure against it. As any defender of the Design argument would tell you, when the Lord does anything he does it exceeding well, and the Langhorn Beetle is magnificently built for completely destroying any woodwork within its reach. And how can any blatant Atheist deal with that magnificent argument?

It is astonishing (but should not be) to find that, as soon as some prominent person dies, his spirit visits some completely obscure medium; there are people who actually believe this. For example, we have the late Gertrude Lawrence, with Doris Keene, George Arliss, “Scout” Baden Powell, and no doubt plenty others, all coming to a seance held by a Mrs. Radford. There is not the slightest doubt about it, she tells us that it is so, and she ought to know. Mrs. Radford has helped “old stagers” and therefore the spirits of famous stage personalities *must* come to her. Or must they?

And talking about Spiritualism, we have just heard (ninety years after the event) that Abraham Lincoln was told to free the slaves by—a spirit. It is quite true, a Brazilian journal vouches for the fact. Such momentous discoveries by such eminent authorities should surely make us think twice before boosting our blatant Materialism. Well, we do think twice—and we call the Brazilian magazine a shameless perverter of the truth.

Congratulations to Mr. A. Waddell, the 77-year-old farmer who has sturdily refused to pay tithe all his life. He has had his farm sold, and has been declared bankrupt, but he never changed his opinion that the tithe was iniquitous, and, for this, he went to jail and has just been released. We still have our Carliles, Taylors, and Hertheringtons, and the Church, backed up by the Law.

will still persecute and prosecute. Rest assured that it will not be the Waddells who finally give in, but the Church.

The conversion of Dr. C. E. M. Joad was such a world-stirring event that *Picture Post* serialised part of the story to show how a one-time Agnostic has gone right over to Christianity, with its Virgin Birth, Devils, Miracles, Hell, Angels, and Heaven. Somehow or other, this does not appear to have impressed some of its readers. “Wash Joad right out,” implored one of them, “and give us pictures.” Another said, “One gets the impression that Dr. Joad could have argued himself out of the acceptance of religious belief as easily as he argued himself into it.”

There were, naturally, the usual hallelujahs—Angels in Heaven no doubt singing chorals at their joy in another lost soul saved—but what a pitiful betrayal of reason Dr. Joad has shown in the dreary account of his “pilgrimage.” Still, he is better with Jesus than with those of us who remember Bradlaugh, Ingersoll and Foote.

Review

The Seeds of Time, by Irene Rathbone. Published by Faber and Faber.

THOSE of our readers who have enjoyed some of Miss Rathbone's books, notably “We That Were Young” and “They Call It Peace,” both reviewed in the columns of *The Freethinker*, will agree that any book she writes is worth reading.

Her latest work, “The Seeds of Time,” is no exception. Although it is fiction, this book has a realism all its own, showing how certain groups of people thought and behaved just before the war.

The scene of the story is laid chiefly in an English village some little time before Munich, and the story portrays the way in which the characters in the book re-acted to the storm that was brewing and their desperate assurance to themselves and their friends that the weather prophets were all wrong; that it would blow over and soon they would be basking once again in brilliant sunshine. They could then resume their rounds of golf, their cocktail parties and the occasional charitable bazaars.

But there is a great deal more than this in the story. There are the viewpoints of people of widely different politics—Robert Bedlow, the well-to-do city man who hates to be disturbed and encourages himself and his friends by repeated Coue suggestions that all will be well and shuts his eyes to the tragedy of Spain appeasing what he calls his conscience by saying, “If these damned foreigners want to fight, let them fight: the main thing is for us to stand clear”; his wife Marian, who tries to think her husband right in his views but knows, in her inmost soul, that he is wrong, and in consequence, has many unhappy moments; Henry Shane, the principal character, a good type of the middle-aged upholder of the Liberal tradition; and the young girl Viola whom he marries. Viola, however, has a strong personality and the development of the girl into the woman of pronounced views, is an interesting character study.

Miss Rathbone has shown, in her previous books, that she is a woman of strong views, courage and decided opinions, and in this latest work of hers, these qualities are just as forceful as ever.

F. A. HORNIBROOK.

HOW THE CHURCHES BETRAY THEIR CHRIST. An Examination of British Christianity. By C. G. L. Du Cann. Price 1s.; postage 2d.

THE FREETHINKER

41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C. 1.
Telephone: Holborn 2601.

To Correspondents

BASIL J. EDGEcombe.—Thanks for translation. The Tower of Babel was, indeed, a misfortune to mankind.

F. HILTON (Epsom).—Your contribution safely received.

"SATAN" (Bournemouth).—Your infernal epistle duly arrived. Will appear in due course. We did not know that you lived in Bournemouth!

We gratefully acknowledge donations for *The Freethinker*.—Mrs. A. Vallance, £2; Mrs. D. Behr, £1.

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. In U.S.A., \$3-50.

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.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

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: F. A. RIDLEY.

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

INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Satis Cafe, 40, Cannon Street, off New Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: F. J. CORINA, "A Freethinker Behind the Iron Curtain."

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m.: A. C. DUTTON, "Woman."

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, W.C.1).—Tuesday, December 2, 7 p.m.: S. K. RATCLIFFE, "The Novel as Current History."

Glasgow Secular Society (Branch, N.S.S.) (McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: J. WINGATE (Perth), "The Last Days of the Catholic Church."

Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: F. A. HORNIBROOK, "Freethought, Yesterday and To-day."

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Onward Hall, 207, Deansgate).—Tuesday, December 2, 7-30 p.m.: M. J. BARNES, "The Solar Myth."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Large Lecture Theatre, Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: JOHN LAWRENCE (Editor, *Socialist Outlook*), "A Socialist Policy for Labour."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: JOSEPH MCCABE, "The Constructiveness of Rationalism."

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: G. PADMORE, "The Gold Coast."

Sugar Plums

The autumn number of our contemporary, *Religions*, "The Journal of the Society for the Study of Religions," contains a lecture delivered by invitation before the Society on May 19, 1952, by Mr. F. A. Ridley. The subject was, "The Doctrine of the Vicarious Sacrifice or Atonement," and the lecturer gave both a critique of the orthodox

dogma from the standpoint of comparative religion and an historical sketch of its theological evolution. The chair was taken by Mr. Francis J. Payne, a well-known English Buddhist. *Religions* can be obtained from its editor, Mr. F. Victor Fisher, at 26, Buckland Crescent, London, N.W.3, at 3s. 6d. per copy.

On Sunday, November 30, the speaker for the West London Branch, N.S.S., at *The Laurie Arms*, Edgware Road, W., is Mr. George Padmore, the well-known Negro lecturer and publicist. His subject is, "The Gold Coast." Events in Africa are, to-day, moving fast, and nowhere more so than on the Gold Coast which may soon become the first Negro Dominion within the British Commonwealth. Mr. Padmore is well known as an authority on Colonial questions upon which he has written extensively. He himself played an active part behind the scenes in the political transformation which led to the creation of Self-Government on the Gold Coast, and recently conducted a successful lecture-tour there. All interested in Africa—and who is not nowadays?—should make a special point of hearing this eminent African.

The value of the open-air propaganda which the Manchester Branch has conducted during the summer and autumn was clearly shown at the indoor meeting of the branch on November 18. The change from Sunday to Tuesday was regarded with some trepidation, but a good attendance of interested people assembled to hear Mr. McCall. At the close of the meeting new members were enrolled, the literature secretary reported good sales, and the questions revealed the progress which Freethought has made over the last 30 years.

On Tuesday, December 2, the speaker will be Mr. M. J. Barnes. Mr. Barnes has been very active in outdoor propaganda, and it is hoped that there will be a good attendance to hear his lecture on "The Solar Myth." The meeting opens at 7-30 p.m. in the Onward Hall, 207, Deansgate.

Correspondence

WHY NOT?

SIR,—I note that Mr. H. Cutner writes: "I would prefer to say that Collectivists, Socialists and Communists are often anti-religious." Does he think that such folk are not Freethinkers, because they do not label themselves as Individualists? Surely there are Freethinkers in all such groups. *If not, why not?*—Yours, etc., C. E. RATCLIFFE.

THE FLOOD STORY

SIR,—In Mr. Wm. Spencer's article on "The Flood" in a recent issue of *The Freethinker*, no mention is made of the most probable source of the Flood story, viz., the bas-reliefs in stone on the walls of the ancient Brahmin Temple at Borobodoer in Java. This so resembles the Bible story that I have little doubt our Biblical version was copied from the Borobodoer version. That both were a record of an actual flooding that occurred many years ago is highly probable.

This is further supported by the existence, on the borders of Cambodia and Siam, of the Great Lake that takes, every year, the overflow waters of the River Mekong at Pnompenh. The lake in question is filled each hot weather when the snows melt at the source of the Mekong in Thibet, to a depth of 30 feet, whereas, in the dry season, the depth averages only six to nine feet. Speaking from memory, the river that fills the Great Lake, called the Tonle Sap, is 60 miles long. It flows N.W. from Phompenh when the Mekong is in flood and S.E. when the Mekong is normal. I travelled up this river and across the Great Lake when visiting Siemrep to see the Angkor Wat Temples. I believe the Great Lake and the Tonle Sap were built by the Kmers to prevent further disastrous flooding.—Yours, etc.,

R. G. ABBOTT.

The Freethinker Fund

A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

SOME months back, *The Freethinker* Fund was temporarily closed. It has now been decided to open it again, this time permanently. The Editor feels that it may be desirable to explain the reasons for this serious decision.

It is not, we think, necessary to point out at this time of day how essential is *The Freethinker* to the British Secularist Movement. Since 1881, this journal and the organised movement of British Freethought have been related as shadow to substance: neither could have wielded any effective influence without the other. Without its fighting standard-bearer, *The Freethinker*, Freethought in Britain would have been reduced to a pale and ineffectual shadow. In a sentence: no paper, no Movement!

Precisely the same position exists to-day and, probably, will always exist in the future. *The Freethinker*, throughout its 71 years' existence, has achieved a unique position and has secured a world-wide reputation; its articles are quoted in Freethought journals all over the civilised world. This pre-eminent status has been attained not only on account of the literary and philosophical

genius of its famous Editors, G. W. Foote and Chapman Cohen, in the past, but by the personal devotion and financial self-sacrifice of many humble and unknown co-workers in the past, the permanent memorial of whom is to be found in the existence of *The Freethinker* for two generations and in its powerful influence, reflected to-day in so many directions, in present-day legislation and on present-day society.

To-day, the continuance and even the present existence of our paper are endangered by rising costs and by the special difficulties which every paper must encounter that fights established conventions and swims *against* the stream. We are confident that none of our readers wishes to see our paper disappear. Independence of thought is becoming increasingly rare in our age of growing centralisation. In our age, a fearless and fighting journal like ours derives additional merit from its rarity. We issue a confident appeal to our readers to give generous support to the renewed *Freethinker* Fund and so to keep in effective existence the only weekly paper in these islands that is devoted to what has been so aptly termed, "The Best of All Causes."

Charlie

By JOHN O'HARE

FOR the past few months newspapers and magazines have contained a lot of news of Charles Spencer Chaplin, a native of London, who, after a long absence, has returned from the west coast of America. As well as news of his movements, there have been numerous articles, "life stories," and reminiscences of the supreme mime of our day. A lot of this eruption was recognised as being publicity for the premier European showing of his latest film "Limelight." All reports of the man were adulatory; and in the wish to pay homage to a highly-prized human being, the lily was painted.

Peter Cotes and Thelma Niklaus, in *The Little Fellow* (The Bodley Head, 15s.), write of their subject "this side idolatry." When the subject is lovable, this is an understandable error—but it is an error. A lion should not be decked out with peacock's feathers: the ornamentation makes ludicrous that which, unadorned, is noble. Chaplin needs no Pelion of superlatives piled on the Ossa of his renown. He is sufficient as himself, the clown of the age—or, it may be, ages. To see him as a profound thinker, philosopher, musician, man with a mission, is a form of snow blindness, or a variation of the cinematic custom of adjectival over-statement. He is only these things in as much as any man of genius frivols with other occupations. Gainsborough wished to be considered a musician and Hazlitt a painter. They *were*, in anybody's way, that is the way of ten thousand other strivers; but it was canvas for Gainsborough and pen and paper for Hazlitt. And it is Charlie, the Tramp, for Chaplin. Charles Spencer Chaplin, the thinker, is Gainsborough trying to play the bassoon.

A great artist (and Chaplin is a great artist) is the most simple and childlike of human beings, for when all is said, great art is the protraction into adult life of childhood's wonder and delight—attributes soon smothered in the generality of mankind by the acceptance of the proposition that two and two make four. Creativeness does not come out of formulas. The grooves line most of us so soon and

so finally, but the artist never. Charlie, when he showed us the nobility and beauty behind the shabby façade of our economic prison, while racking us with laughter and staining us with surreptitious tears, revealed us to ourselves. Revelation—the summit of achievement.

In a B.B.C. interview selected people put solemn questions about his "art" to Chaplin. They were talking to the wrong person. The questions should have been asked of equally solemn people—"the Critics" for instance—who would have enjoyed cancelling each other out in the high-pitched nothingnesses of their own sterility. One can imagine such people cornering Shakespeare in the "Mermaid" and putting similar questions to him about "Hamlet," a play of his. And one can see Will slipping away to another pub, wondering what the devil they were getting at. It is possible that Chaplin's inferior work is the result of his listening to such questioners—"The Great Dictator," for instance, wherein he deliberately and obviously delivered a message to us. That's the job of a telegraph boy, not of Charlie who, in "The Kid," "The Gold Rush," and those glorious two-reelers, placed himself far beyond the perishable.

The Little Fellow gives us Chaplin's life from his ragged boyhood in Kennington to his best-suite sixties at the Savoy, with all the in-between. Misery, "Mumming Birds," marriages, and millionairessdom. The ingredients are not novel. Except for the incalculable intrusion of genius, Chaplin's life, as recorded here, is of a familiar Hollywood pattern. The authors comment on Chaplin's moods, his loneliness, his sudden transition from grave to gay, from taciturnity to volubility. But, of course. When has an artist been otherwise?

There is an excellent record of Chaplin's work in this book, with dates; there is a foreword by Somerset Maugham; and there are fine photographs. In a word, everything is there—except Charlie. But who can capture Charlie? No one. Only a camera, a darkened room, and a white screen.

An open Letter to Sir Ian Jacob

DEAR SIR,

Are you going to be the first successful Director-General of the B.B.C.? I sincerely hope so, while regretting that your forerunners have been failures without exception.

Sir John (later Lord) Reith created the hollow framework of a machine-like organisation, but was constitutionally incapable of endowing it with the warm humanity and progressive idealism without which it could not possibly function properly. To-day he is remembered as a man of difficult temperament and narrow, sectarian views. Few would describe that as success.

Your immediate predecessor has departed, unhonoured and unwept, to occupy the editorial chair of an august newspaper; an admission of failure, since not even the *News of the World*, let alone *The Times*, could claim to wield a potential influence over the thoughts, interests, habits and actions of the vast majority of the nation comparable with that of the B.B.C. As for the Directors-General between Reith and Haley, I doubt if one in a thousand of the millions of wireless licence-holders all over the country could recall the name of any of them.

My desire, however, is not to depress you, but, if I can, to inspire you to overcome difficulties. I invite, nay, urge you to give your first attention on Monday, 1st December, to the most deplorable and calamitous black spot in British broadcasting. I hardly need explain that I refer to the B.B.C.'s Religious Department. Who knows, the long overdue investigation and reform of this corner of Broadcasting House, whose head and personnel are quite without scruples in grinding the religious axe, may well prove the beginning of a new era of confidence, enthusiasm and progress in the organisation?

The need is to get right away from the spirit of Reith. None of his successors had the independence and vision to do so. Please, Sir Ian, make it your primary purpose to make the B.B.C. serve the whole body of licence-holders as is its simple duty. Reith took payment from all alike, but did not render service to all alike. He was a sabbatarian, so he made dullness and gloom the rule for Sunday broadcasting. He was a Christian, so he made Christian propaganda a big feature of broadcast programmes, while allow-

ing no criticism of Christianity by unbelievers. In principle this policy has not been changed with the coming and going of Directors-General. Sabbatarian gloom had to be relaxed because (largely owing to the work of my Society for many years) the British public would no longer endure it. Persisted in, it would have harmed the churches. So, to compensate them for the introduction of brighter music, variety shows and parlour games on Sunday, they were given increased opportunities of broadcasting more church services, more sermons, more hymn sessions and more prayers all through the week. It has been thoroughly discreditable, and should have been remedied long since.

Won't you put it right—now, without delay? It seems to me that three simple measures would answer the requirements of all fair-minded listeners:—

(a) Broadcast religious services, prayers and hymn-singing should be arranged to meet the requests of the aged, sick and infirm, but others who want them should seek them in the many thousands of places of worship that exist to provide them.

(b) Talks and discussions about religion should be broadcast by representatives of all points of view, and all views expressed should be open to free and candid criticism.

(c) The expression of secular ethical codes should be given every chance to combat the widespread anti-social activities against which years of sustained religious exhortations have proved unavailing.

During the past year I have written on several occasions to Sir William Haley and to Mr. Harmon Grisewood. Their replies have been object lessons in the art of politely evading the important issues raised. This explains why I see your succession to the position of Director-General as an occasion for a renewed appeal for the fair treatment of listeners by allowing them to form judgments from hearing all sides of disputed questions. Like the great majority of the public I know nothing of your personal outlook, so I can truly sign myself,

Yours hopefully,

P. VICTOR MORRIS,
Secretary, National Secular Society.

NOT SO FOOLISH VIRGINS

By A. R. WILLIAMS

TEN virgins took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were wise and five were foolish.

They that were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them. The wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried they all slumbered and slept.

At midnight there was a cry made: Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.

Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said unto the wise: Give us of your oil: for our lamps are gone out.

The wise answered, saying: Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you; but go ye rather to them that sell and buy for yourselves.

While they went to buy the bridegroom came. They that were ready went in with him to the marriage, and the door was shut.

Afterward came also the other virgins, saying: Lord, Lord, open to us.

He answered and said: Verily I say unto you I know you not.

II

The five virgins sank upon the ground, remaining with bowed heads as sounds of revelry penetrated to their ears from the inner courtyard.

Silence was broken by noises from the youngest. Starting as longdrawn sighs, they rose to tiny but rhythmical gurgles, broken by gasps.

Raising their heads, the other four looked at her, a white form in the semi-darkness, shaking slightly as she emitted the sounds they heard.

Rachel: asked the eldest: are you weeping?

The youngest virgin straightened herself, replying: Nay. I'm laughing. We've missed the wedding feast, but think of the fun we had with those Roman soldiers. Mine was young and strong and—

She concluded by a giggle of ecstasy, folding her arms under her breasts and hugging herself.

Ripples of merriment at recollected joys spread round the other four.

(Concluded on page 384)

Ingersoll's Grand-daughter

By H. CUTNER

IN the two reviews I have written of Ingersoll's *Life and Letters* in this journal, I very much regret that I did scant justice to its brilliant editor, Mrs. Eva Ingersoll Wakefield. Some of us are, alas, prone to take the work of an editor as granted. It looks so very easy when the book is before one, *un fait accompli*. But going once again through this handsome volume, I must be permitted to say that Mrs. Wakefield's work in bringing it together, and in her vividly interesting notices of incidents in the life of Ingersoll, is extremely fine literary work.

It must have taken, at first, very hard labour to sort out the letters of Ingersoll into various classes, showing him as an Agnostic, an orator, a literary and art critic, as a husband, father and friend, and as a Humanist. Nothing looks more simple to do—and nothing surely requires more loving care, as well as sheer industry.

With each division, Mrs. Wakefield had to deal with her grandfather as an Agnostic, an orator, etc., and this needed either first-hand knowledge or "research" among his friends, or the reading of contemporary notices in books and journals—no mean task.

In her "Foreword" Mrs. Wakefield indicates the sources into which she had to delve, and only those who have had to do similar work can really appreciate how very difficult it often is—to find the right reference, to know what to put in and what to leave out.

She very modestly insists that she has "in no wise attempted to write a genuine and thorough-going biography of Robert Ingersoll, but merely a biographical outline or sketch." Well, this may be so, but it is a brilliantly written outline; and no one reading it can fail to understand the many-sided genius of Ingersoll, his passionate love of truth and justice and mercy, his hatred of all oppression and "totalitarianism," his loathing of slavery and of the Christian hell the fires of which he did so much to put out—for ever.

And if there are people who believe that Freethought is bound to destroy "culture"—that is, love of music, art and literature—let them read in this volume what Ingersoll has to say on these very subjects—and thank Mrs. Wakefield for letting us see the letters in which he expresses his love and admiration for all great art, irrespective of nation and creed. As Mrs. Wakefield insists:—

"He declared immortal the marbles of the Greeks, the plays of Shakespeare, the music of Wagner. The matchless paintings and etchings of Rembrandt set his soul aglow with wonder; the sumptuous colour and gorgeous beauty of the creation of Titian and Rubens; the beatific genius of Michelangelo; the magnificent realism of Franz Hals, touched responsive chords in the artistic nature of Ingersoll."

Add to this his great admiration for Shakespeare and Byron, for Mozart, Liszt, Mendelssohn and Schubert, among many of the giants in their particular spheres, and you have the lie given to those Christians who jeer at Freethought as killing "culture." All this is beautifully brought out by Mrs. Wakefield: it had to be told, and right royally has it been told by her.

She has not been afraid either to point out how Ingersoll loathed vivisection. It may have been a purely sentimental loathing, based on neither science nor any personal investigation. Does that matter? For my own part, the splendid letter he wrote against it, and given in full by

his grand-daughter, is one with which I agree in every particular. I think it required no little courage to write it, and no little courage to include it in this volume, though I cannot here go into the question why I think so. Mrs. Wakefield might have left it out, for no doubt many of his warmest admirers disagree with him here, and perhaps feel it lowers him as a thinker thus to oppose what is considered by almost the whole of medical science as absolutely necessary. I applaud its publication—and it honours the editor.

The English edition is very competently edited by Mr. E. Royston Pyke, who, with the publishers, no doubt considered that a few passages, if not omitted, "would have come strange to the English reader." Personally, I deprecate any abridgement if it can be avoided; and even if some passages would appear strange (which I take leave to doubt) would have preferred the book as edited by Mrs. Wakefield. She has certainly done a splendid piece of work.

Life

Did we but know the cares of Life,
We never would be born:
Nor wish to breathe the treach'rous air
Of Life's deceptive morn.

Afar, afar the elfin horns
Of this and that belief:
Why waste our substance on the stars?
Observe the woodland leaf.

One promise made of after-life,
If we will but resign
Our reason, faith, in mortal men,
Priests speak, but, where's the sign?

Did we but know the griefs of Life,
The myths of creed and faith,
We would not leave the natal cell,
But stay, a wandering wraith.

VILLENEUVE.

(Concluded from page 383)

The eldest stood erect, saying: Rachel's right. We had a beautiful time with Roman soldiers. Why not again, enjoying ourselves more than we should inside?

Why not, indeed? agreed the three hitherto silent.

Then come along: invited the eldest: We'll have a gay time till morning; in the Gardens.

To the Gardens: chorused the other four, springing to their feet.

With arms linked all five set off swiftly along the road to the Gardens, murmuring together like a tiny crooned song: To the Gardens; where the Roman soldiers come.

TWO BARGAINS

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."

We have also 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.).