

# The Freethinker

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Editor: F. A. RIDLEY

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SOME months back, an unusual communication arrived at the office of *The Freethinker*: we were requested to exchange our journal regularly with a Maltese monthly periodical entitled *The Faith*, which, as its name rather implies, is devoted to the defence of Roman Catholic Christianity and, in fact, styles itself as the organ of an "apologetic circle" named after St. Paul, who, if there is any historical basis for the story of his travels related in our canonical *Acts of the Apostles*, was one of Malta's most distinguished visitors. Naturally, we at once complied with the request of our Maltese friends. For *The Freethinker* has spent seventy-one years looking for Christian "evidence," and this seems more likely to be found in the Catholic Old Firm than in its more modern offshoots. Consequently, *The Faith* is duly "read, marked, learnt, and inwardly digested"—to use the pompous language of the Anglican Prayer Book—by the Editor of this journal; even though, by so doing, we risk our last precarious hopes of eternal salvation; since we cannot now enter the plea of "invincible ignorance" of "The Catholic Faith, which, except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved."

Nor is the London-Malta post merely a one-way traffic. For *The Freethinker* also goes regularly to Malta and, to judge, at least, from the frequent references to its editorials in the orthodox pages of *The Faith*, is also duly "read, marked," etc., etc., by the learned theologians of "St. Paul's apologetic circle" before it goes to its final resting-place in the waste-paper basket or, perhaps, follows earlier heretical publications into the "avenging flames." Indeed, our Maltese correspondents appear to be so intrigued with our incursions into their theological domain that two of their regular contributors to *The Faith*, Rev. Frs. G. Paris and J. Mizzi, have even been inspired, either by our editorials or the Holy Spirit, to write letters to London which, in keeping with the invariable practice of our paper, we published without the omission of a comma. In these "Epistles to the Freethinkers" the two reverend gentlemen made some factual criticisms of our previous editorials. We now propose to reply briefly to these theological critiques.

First in order of time came Rev. J. Mizzi. He made three criticisms, each more sweeping than its predecessor: according to Fr. Mizzi, (a) the Papacy has always been recognised as infallible in, and by, the Catholic Church; and (b) the Infallibility of the Pope, officially first proclaimed by the Vatican Decree of July 18, 1870, does not contradict the previously held Dogma of the Infallibility of the General Councils of the Church; and (c) the present writer, in declaring that the German Catholic theologian, Adam Möhler, was opposed to Papal Infallibility, misrepresented Möhler. Each of the above criticisms is incorrect, as we will now proceed to demonstrate.

With regard to (a): far from having been universally accepted in the Roman Catholic Church prior to 1870,

Papal Infallibility had been denied and strenuously opposed by many theological schools and celebrated theologians within the Catholic Church. Apart from the Eastern "Orthodox" Catholic Church, who still reject it, this is true even of the Roman Communion itself. To give only a few examples, the Conciliar Movement of the 15th century actually deposed popes; and its leader, the French Chancellor, Gerson—whom some hold to be the actual author of *The Imitation of Christ*, long ascribed to Thomas à Kempis—in a sermon preached at the Council of Constance before the then Pope, condemned the papal claim to infallibility as an impossibility in both

theology and history. The 16th century Council of Trent, called by the then Pope himself, refused to proclaim Papal Infallibility as a dogma, despite the ardent propaganda conducted on its behalf by the newly-founded Jesuit Company, who, later on, were the real authors of the dogma in 1870.

In the 17th century the Gallican School rejected Papal Infallibility and explicitly compared the role of the Papacy with that of a limited monarchy like that of the Doge of Venice or the King of England. This was the view of the great Bossuet, most eminent of French bishops. Whilst as for the still greater Pascal, the greatest intellect of whom modern Catholicism can boast, what that great man thought of the Jesuit champions of Papal Infallibility can be read in the immortal pages of *The Provincial Letters*. As for the divine origin of the papal judgement, did not Pascal go on record with the historic adjuration: "What I say is condemned in Rome; but what I condemn, is condemned in Heaven": a remark which hardly conveys any very burning belief that the voice of the Vatican infallibly represents the authentic voice of Heaven!

In the 19th century itself, it is on record that both English and Irish Catechisms in official use in Catholic schools declared that "Papal Infallibility is a Protestant calumny." Whilst even Newman thought that the Vatican Decree of 1870 was, in his own words, "inopportune." Surely this could not have been the case if, as Fr. Mizzi asserts, the belief in the Dogma then first proclaimed by the Vatican Council had always been universally accepted in the Catholic Church?

Having, thus far, blundered in history, Fr. Mizzi goes on to blunder in logic. For he follows up his previous statement by the self-contradictory statement that the Declaration of Papal Infallibility in 1870 did not affect the previously-held Dogma of the Infallibility of General Councils. To which we reply: of two things, one! If a General Council is infallible apart from the Pope, then there is no sense in Papal Infallibility. In any case, what happens if the two infallibilities clash? If, conversely, the Council is only infallible when it agrees with the Pope—and we have always understood this to be the view established officially in 1870—then the Council has no infalli-

## VIEWS and OPINIONS

### Mistakes from Malta

—By F. A. RIDLEY—

bility apart from the papal fiat. Fr. Mizzi can have it either way he likes. His proposition makes sense in neither.

Finally, another (c) allegation of error in fact. This is easily disposed of: if the reverend father cares to look up the citation which we have already given him, he will find that Adam Möhler, in his *Symbolik* (1832), was writing, not, as Fr. Mizzi asserts, against Protestantism but, directly, against the then novel and still unproclaimed Dogma of the Personal Infallibility of the Pope, to which Möhler, in common with Gerson, Bossuet, Pascal and, later on, his own pupil, Dollinger, was opposed, along with so many other Catholic theologians. Space prevents the further citation of Möhler's context, but we may, in confirmation, appropriately cite a recent Christian historian of John Adam Möhler.

"She (the Church—F.A.R.) is only Infallible in her totality. None of her individual members has any valid claim to personal Infallibility. The individual is only Infallible in and to the degree in which he feels, thinks and wills in harmony with the spirit of the (Catholic—F.A.R.) Church."

Thus Professor Edmond Vermeil expounds and summarises what J. A. Möhler himself had stated in his chef-d'œuvre, *Symbolik*. [Cf. E. Vermeil—*Jean-Adam Möhler et l'École Catholique de Tubingue (1815-40)*." Our translation.—F.A.R.]

So much for Fr. Mizzi's knowledge of the history of his own Church! In a later article we will deal with some more "Mistakes from Malta."

## England in Tudor Times

By T. F. PALMER

PROFESSOR J. D. MACKIE'S *The Earlier Tudors: 1485-1558*, forms part of the Oxford History of England (O.U.P., 1952). It is a fine volume of 669 pages with excellent maps, appendix and bibliography. An exhaustive and discriminating study of the reigns of Henry VII, Henry VIII, Edward VI and Mary, it is an informative prelude to the period of Elizabeth, which appears in a separate volume.

Foreign and domestic affairs, economic, religious, and the artistic achievements of this age are all surveyed in this work, while the merits and shortcomings of its rulers and statesmen are dispassionately reviewed, even if our historian underrates the character and humanism of the Protector, Somerset, in the boy-king Edward's time.

With the defeat and death of Richard III on Bosworth's battlefield, the Wars of the Roses ended and Henry Tudor became king. Apart from the adventures of Lambert Simnel and Perkin Warbeck, there was little disturbance in England during Henry's reign. He intimidated most of the surviving nobles, encouraged agriculture and commerce, reformed the currency, did not overburden his subjects with heavy taxation, although wealthy and powerful landowners were severely fined. In summing up the king's accomplishments, Prof. Mackie avers that: "It may be true that Henry lacked imagination and that his attitude to the changing of his day was guided rather by instinct than by the computation which was so dear to him. He burned heretics, he consulted astrologers; yet he revived the ancient strength of the English monarchy, turned it into new channels, inspired it with a new energy, and sent it forth upon the path of future greatness. He has some claim to be regarded as the greatest of the Tudors."

Whether he ranks above Elizabeth for astuteness is an open question. In any case, he was succeeded by his notorious son, Henry VIII, then a lad aged eighteen. His accession was hailed even by More and Erasmus as the herald of a golden age. Little did they and other intellectuals foresee the new monarch's later squandering of the previous ruler's rich treasury on meddlesome and profitless wars, wanton extravagance, matrimonial troubles, and the denial of Papal supremacy. For Henry became Head of the Anglican Church, increased "benevolences," debased the currency, imposed heavy taxation when the bulging exchequer bequeathed by his father was exhausted.

For over 15 years Cardinal Wolsey really ruled the realm. He proved a very able minister, and as a pluralist received the revenues of several bishoprics and other emoluments. Arrogant even to those of high degree, he made many enemies, and his inability to obtain the Pope's

consent to the king's divorce, and his unsuccessful foreign policy, ultimately led to his dismissal by his royal master, and subsequent death which was hastened by his downfall. He was, however, never a man of blood and was relatively tolerant towards heretics, while his foundation of Cardinal College at Oxford (now Christ Church) showed his sympathy with culture. Hampton Court was also his erection. Still, the Cardinal made the king all-powerful, and Henry became an autocratic and relentless ruler.

Yet the despotic and lustful king did not exercise his revolutionary powers without the consent of Parliament. He chose as Wolsey's successor Thomas Cromwell, who maintained Henry's supremacy both in Church and State, and continued the suppression and confiscation of the monasteries. These proceedings have been bitterly debated both by Romanist and secular historians. But when Queen Catherine died, and the Emperor Charles V and Francis I of France were at variance, Henry ignored Papal animosity or foreign intervention. So, acting under statute, the new Chancellor, Cromwell, appointed commissioners to inspect the remaining religious houses.

"The visitations," declares Prof. Mackie, "which should have been triennial, had not been carried out regularly, and conflicts of authority had availed to hinder investigation. The evidence is far from complete, but in the reports that survive there are many examples of grave financial irregularities, neglect of rules, indiscipline, and immorality. Even making allowance for the mutual antipathies of the various deponents, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that often standards were lowered and that abuses of various kinds were regarded as inevitable."

In a period when printed books appeared, there were no monastic chroniclers of any distinction, and few, if any, manuscripts were penned. Traditional customs had fallen into abeyance and not more than five per cent. of monastic incomes was given in charity, and even this was bestowed in large measure on relatives and friends. There were 372 of the minor houses, and the monks were estimated at 7,000. At the dissolution the heads of conventional institutions were fairly treated. As Mackie notes: "The priors and abbots were given good pensions: the religious whose vocation was still strong were transferred to surviving houses and the remainder were allowed to take 'capacities' and become secular clergy." But the possessions of the monasteries were expropriated by the Crown and extensively sold to favourites or the highest bidders.

Henry's drastic conduct was one of the causes of the Pilgrimage of Grace. This insurrection, however, was speedily and cruelly suppressed. The destruction of

religious relics and the dissolution of the larger monasteries continued. But the king was still determined to display his orthodoxy and heretics were burnt alive. Yet: "In 1538 a grand attack was made upon images used to encourage superstition. The rood of Boxley, in Kent, and the blood of Hailes, in Gloucestershire, were exposed as frauds; many images were removed and in some cases the suppression of the pilgrimage-saints was very profitable to the Crown. Pieces of gold and silver work were found in most shrines. Winchester supplied a great cross of emeralds. Chichester three caskets of jewels; and the greatest prize of all was the spoil of St. Thomas of Canterbury, which yielded to the Crown two great chests of jewels 'such as six or eight strong men could not convey more than one of them,' and, according to Sander, some twenty-four wagon-loads of varied treasure besides." (Mackie.)

The demolition of Becket's shrine was a challenge to the Papacy, while several prominent Catholics whom the authorities suspected suffered death. Becket was denounced as a traitor who had fled abroad to secure the abrogation of just laws. The Bible in English was placed in all parish churches and the clergy were admonished to induce their flocks to peruse it. The few remaining monasteries were

closed, the last important abbey to disappear being that at Waltham. Nearly all the abbey lands had now passed into lay possession, and if the later persecuting Catholic queen, Mary, was willing to restore the Church property still retained by the Crown in 1553, she found it impossible to persuade lay landowners, many of them rigid Catholics, to surrender the former ecclesiastical estates.

Henry VIII was an imperious personality whose good graces were never certain to endure. Indeed, the only outstanding statesman he constantly trusted was Archbishop Cranmer, who lived to be incinerated by his daughter, Mary, as a treasonable heretic, in whose inglorious reign some 300 heretics were burnt alive at Smithfield, Oxford, and elsewhere. Her predecessor, the boy-king's reign, that of Edward VI, was distinguished by its relative tolerance and predominance of Protestant policy. His half-sister Mary's brief reign (1553-1558) was distinctly reactionary and obscurantist, and experienced the loss of Calais, England's last possession in France. Yet, this period proved the prelude of the splendid era of Elizabeth, famous alike in statemanship, literature and maritime achievements.

## Shakespearean History

By P. C. KING

THE B.B.C. has been giving the series of historical plays of Shakespeare (Richard II to Richard III), which embody the dynastic struggles of the rival houses of York and Lancaster and the so-called Wars of the Roses. They are to be congratulated on the excellence of their production and the high level of the acting.

As an exponent of history our greatest dramatist and poet is hardly a reliable authority; he did not scruple to dress historical fact for the purposes of dramatic presentation. Furthermore, in writing this historical saga he had an eye on the ruling monarchy. Elizabeth, as the granddaughter of the usurper, Henry Tudor, considered herself of the red rather than the white variety of rose; the Lancastrian protagonists, therefore, are portrayed in a somewhat less unfavourable light than the Yorkist.

The period in question has a special significance for the rationalist; for it deals with that most religious of epochs, the Middle Ages, an epoch which closed with the death of Richard III and the seizure of the crown by the Welshman, Henry Tudor, and presaged the coming of capitalism and the end of Catholic sway in England.

The wars with France, which had shown an ephemeral success under Henry V, not in truth due to English military superiority or generalship so much as to chance, which aligned the powerful aid of Burgundy on the side of the English against the French king. When the French again found unity the tide turned against the invaders and they were driven back across the Channel. Defeat and the termination of the "Hundred Years War" left a large number of militarily trained men, aristocratic officers and soldiers of fortune, out of a job. Civil war, therefore, was hardly a surprising outcome of such a situation.

These wars have been described, by a certain class of historian, as desolating the town and countryside of England. Such a description is a gross exaggeration. Actually, the forces engaged were usually so small and so essentially a private quarrel between gentlemen—and their minions—as to have little effect on the economy and life of the common people. What they did do, however, was to exterminate the English medieval aristocracy, and there are a few families, indeed, in Debrett to-day who can trace

their title further back than to the Tudors. This slaughter of the barony had its beneficial side; for freedom from their oppression no doubt facilitated the development of England during the next century and set her on the road for her world dominance in the nineteenth century.

And what an infamous gang these aristocrats appear, so vividly drawn in the pages of the Shakespearean dramas, which leave hardly a shred of virtue or decency on any one of them! Lies, deceits, murder and spite! Base ingratitude, treachery and betrayal in all their dealings towards their cause, their king and their country! Nor were the high prelates of the Christian Church distinguishable from their lay confederates in other than their title, certainly not in any virtue.

A study of these great dramas must leave the rationalist with a sense of profound relief that this bestial band of the "Good Old Times" have, with their intriguing Monarchy and tyrannical Church, been swept away.

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### Death Watch

There really is no need to dig a grave  
Beneath the sod.  
A myriad tiny doubts will eat away  
At each dead God.

A.E.C.

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### Moscow Moon?

The Russian flag will be raised on the Moon within the next 50 years according to A. Sternfeld in the current issue of the Moscow magazine *Ogoneck*.

By then, he says, Russian-made artificial moons, marked with the Red Star, will circle the earth 16 times every 24 hours. He sees a Soviet victory in a coming race to reach the moon and predicts that rocket-powered Russian space-ships will get there in five days.

There will be a big "cosmodrome" at Kaluga, south-west of Moscow, where a new satellite will be built every two months, he says.—(*The Sunday Express*, 30th November, 1952.)

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The difference between a priest and Jesus Christ is Jesus *died* on the Cross and he *lives* on the Cross.—G. W. FOOTE.

## Acid Drops

Still more unanswerable proofs of the Existence of God are being provided our schools by the religious department of the B.B.C. The latest is what some eminent Christians have said about finding the Almighty in their books and speeches and surely that ought to convince any blatant Atheists among school children that the Lord is the Living God, and Jesus Christ is his Own Son. We wonder what some of the more eminent Churchmen (perhaps with a knowledge of Dean Mansel) think of this B.B.C. twaddle?—though it is obvious why they prefer to keep silent. After all, God must exist, or how can they still remain in the Church?

Another B.B.C. Christian Champion is Mr. O. S. Tomkins, the Associate General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, who gave his hearers a discourse on "The Christian Hope." Mr. Tomkins insists that the Christian Hope is far better for the world than "Stalinism," "Scientific Humanism," or "Democratic Utopias," and is delighted to think that the World Council of Churches is going to discuss it in America in 1954. It is hard to imagine what the world is going to do waiting two years for what these Churches will say, or what will happen to mankind if they decide that the Christian Hope has been completely shattered, let us say, by effete Materialism. What will then really happen? Shall we have to wait for the Second Advent for Jesus to tell us? Will the World Council of Churches put on sackcloth and ashes—or will they all join forthwith the Roman Catholic Church, and be on the only safe side? What a handicap it is not to have a sense of humour in these matters?

Whatever Mr. Beverley Nichols' merits may be in other fields, his recent excursions into theology have brought him attacks from Catholics, Protestants, and Rationalists alike. He appears—so his critics contend—to know almost nothing of their respective creeds and, of course, as Mr. C. Bradlaugh Bonner had no difficulty in pointing out, nearly nothing whatever about Bradlaugh. Christians of his stamp seem unable to open their mouths about the great Iconoclast without—well, departing completely from the truth. Think of calling Bradlaugh a Communist when, in actual fact, he loathed Communism as much as that sect of the Christian religion so beloved by Mr. B. Nichols!

In the "Cape Argus," Dr. Maude Royden characterises the book recently published by Gollancz, *Reluctant Healer*, as "Extraordinary—unlike any other I have ever read." It was she who put the author, William Macmillan, on the road to "spiritual healing." He found he could "heal" the sick quite easily—simply by laying on his hands, or rubbing, and he actually saw new flesh grow, completely obliterating scars, etc. It seems to us that such a healer ought to be a godsend in a hospital. What would settle the question once and for all is for him or others to go into a ward of incurable patients and commence operations with the blind and the maimed, to say nothing of those who are dying of cancer.

Have these healers ever done this? Think how easily the long queues waiting desperately for operations could be dealt with—no diagnosis, no X-rays, no rare drugs, and 100 per cent. in absolute cures. Whether healers are "reluctant" or not, they would certainly be welcomed by all hospital authorities if wards were cleared every day for new patients. In actual fact, "healing" has been done by mesmerists, by patent medicines, by Christian Science, by unqualified herbalists, and by any number of "old wives'"

remedies. And somehow or other, the "healers" almost always fail when they are up against a case that can be properly verified. This is very sad but quite true.

## Theatre

**High Balcony**, by Peter Ustinov. Embassy Theatre. MR. USTINOV knows the theatre well enough that we should unfailingly expect only the best from him. I have no remarks to make about the writings of this play or its construction, but there is little in the plot and the events portrayed in it that is not common knowledge to all who followed the politics of Germany from the outbreak of war to her defeat in 1945.

By far the most interesting element in the play is the characterisation. The minister of the Legation—admirably played by Milton Rosmer—is a calm and understanding diplomat, very much of a type. He has a wife (Gladys Boot) who lives in a world of fantasy she has built round herself in compensation for the loss of her first girl at the age of two. The surviving daughter (Ursula Howells) is—in 1939—desperately in love with a professional pianist (Brown Derby), who has the least interesting of parts. Then there are, as might be expected, the Nazi party members, an arrogant and self-righteous husband and wife, are played by Donald Pleasence and Elaine Wodson. Mark Dignam is the colonel attached to the Legation; a man who is purely a militarist of the 1914-18 war, and who cannot accept Hitler. Marne Maitland, as the foreign minister of Noland, gives us an excellent example of combined *politesse* and diplomacy. All these are interesting parts and well cast and acted.

That the play has come overwell, is largely due to André Van Gyseghem's production.

RAYMOND DOUGLAS.

## A Dream after Reading about Hell

Last night I dreamed I was in Hell,  
That dream I'll ne'r forget,  
'Twas sweet and warm like summer morn,  
And what great men I met.  
The place was full of happiness,  
I was astonished for  
Lucifer he had been sacked,  
And the boss was Bernard Shaw.  
Great changes there had taken place,  
Mark Twain was telling yarns,  
And a jazz band played grand music,  
Led by Bishop Barnes.  
And I saw there Tommy Handley,  
Arguing with Hotch,  
And chatting to a barmaid blonde,  
The Colonel drinking scotch.  
But in a cosy corner there  
I noticed two quite bored,  
They were Socrates and Plato  
Being lectured at by Joad.  
And there was Queen Victoria, too  
Up to her little larks,  
She was talking dialectics  
To Engels and Karl Marx.  
Oh, could I dream that dream again,  
And be with earth's great swells.  
I asked my guide what was his name,  
He said it was H. G. Wells.  
Then tell me why it is? I asked,  
That no one bears a sin,  
My lad, he said, hell's fires are out,  
By orders of Dean Inge.

PAUL VARNEY.

# THE FREETHINKER

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## To Correspondents

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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

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m.: Coun. J. BACKHOUSE, a Lecture.

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, W.C. 1). — Tuesday, December 16, 7 p.m.: Mrs. T. BILLINGTON-GREIG, "A New Approach to Sex Equality."

Glasgow Secular Society (N.S.S. Branch) (McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: P. VICTOR MORRIS, "The Consolations of Irreligion."

Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: GEORGE JACKSON, "Communism and Liberty."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Large Lecture Theatre, Technical College, Shakespeare Street). — Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: M. CORNFORTH, "Dialectical and Historical Materialism."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1). — Sunday, 11 a.m.: S. K. RATCLIFFE, "The Later Testament of Dr. Joad."

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W. 1).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, "The Social Origins of Christianity." (We regret it was found impossible, due to the fog, for Mr. G. H. Taylor to deliver his lecture last week.)

## Sugar Plums

Readers able to attend the National Secular Society's Forty-Seventh Annual Dinner, which takes place on 24th January, 1953, at the Charing Cross Hotel, can now order their tickets, price 16s. each as last year, from the Secretary. An attractive menu of food, speeches and entertainment is planned. Mr. F. A. Ridley will preside, and the Guest of Honour will be that active veteran of Freethought, Mr. Joseph McCabe, and, as ever, there will be the opportunity afforded of meeting many fellow-enthusiasts for "The Best of Causes," and gaining the inspiration for the future that it brings to all present. Visitors from the provinces are always especially welcome, and the Secretary will book accommodation for the night for those requiring it. As usual, vegetarians will be catered for by special variations in the menu. Early applications will be appreciated.

Formal acknowledgments have been received from the Secretary of the Director-General of the B.B.C. and from

Mr. Harmon Grisewood, Director of the "Spoken Word," of copies of this journal containing "An Open Letter to Sir Ian Jacob." It will be interesting to see whether any early action on the part of the B.B.C. will follow. Whether it does or not, the policy of boycott and misrepresentation will have to cease one day, unless this country falls into the worst sort of totalitarianism.

We are pleased to note that Miss Freda Peckman has been invited to take part in a "Youth Feature" on the Light Programme, at 6-15 p.m., December 11. The subject is "Films," and readers will, we are sure, follow her contribution with interest.

## Correspondence

SIR.—On the occasion of the Congress of the World Union of Freethinkers in Brussels, many Conference members, as yourself, expressed discontent because of the fact that the chief speeches and lectures were held in French.

Really, it is a very important problem this diversity of languages! One sees it in all world inter-relations, especially during congresses when translations cause much loss of time.

We, Esperantists, have solved this important problem. We communicate with fellow-thinkers throughout the whole world, direct and easily.

Freethinkers must use Esperanto because Esperanto is a *rational* thought out language, and if Freethinkers are not rational, who are! Greeting you fraternally.

ANDREO GAY,

From France, Freethinker and Esperantist.

### A NEW VIEW OF CHRISTIANITY

SIR.—Rationalist writers frequently take up the attitude that the virgin birth of Christ is untrue. It seems useful, however, to consider the possibility that Mary was *virgo intacta* when he was born, but that to her knowledge she had been artificially inseminated so as to avoid rupture of her hymen, to enable her and her husband to play on people's credulity and pass off the deception as a miracle. Physically such artificial insemination is not impossible, and Joseph could have done it while she was asleep.

An extension of this view is that the whole family were a lot of very artful criminals, who partly worked in with the government, which was by no means as simple as most people like to think. The Romans may very well have perceived that human progress would be difficult unless a new moral system which could gain general acceptance could be brought out, and have concluded that the way to accomplish this was to foist off this deception on the public, the child being brought up to be a supposed moral example to the public, with the certain knowledge that his supposed moral superiority would lead to friction and publicity, and ultimately, through an easily arranged clash with the government, to "martyrdom." It is certainly not inconceivable that the child became aware of the ends for which he was being used and played the game of the people who were using him, as a soft way of earning a living. If one takes this view, then the "miracles" performed are seen to fall into the same category as tricks, and one perceives that the perpetrator of these frauds met the just end of a criminal as Pilate probably secretly realised.

F. HILTON.

### "CONFLICTING BELIEFS"

SIR.—In his article, "Beyond all Reason" (*The Freethinker*, September 7), Bissett Lovelock tells us that he is an Agnostic because he believes, like *Hamlet*, "There are more things in Heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy"; and he adds, "If I did not believe so, I should be religious—or an Atheist."

Why, in such a case, he should be driven to one or the other of two conflicting beliefs is not quite clear. However, as an Agnostic, he believes in the possible existence of something, though unknown and unknowable, and will not therefore be driven to Atheism.

But, has he never considered that a "something" that is *unknowable*, i.e., cannot be made manifest to the human intellect by any assignable act or effect, must, by every rule of rationality, be regarded as *nothing*; and that to believe otherwise involves an absurdity?

But Mr. Lovelock is not likely to be influenced by an appeal to rationality; for he tells us in a later passage that he "thinks less highly of reason—pale, sub-standard, utility device," as he calls it—"than some Rationalists."

Just so. The faculty of reason is not alike in all of us, and we can use only what we have got. Hence, we are Atheists, Theists—or Agnostics.—Yours, etc.,  
A. YATES.

# The "Hibbert Journal" and Jesus-Christ—2

By H. CUTNER

SINCE writing my first article I have found that an article by Dr. P. L. Couchoud, the author of *The Enigma of Jesus*, and a firm believer in the Myth Theory, did appear in the *Hibbert Journal* with a reply by the late Alfred Loisy (or it may have been the other way). Loisy was very near to the mythical position himself, but he stubbornly refused to give up the Crucifixion; though he admitted that, if that event never took place, he would be obliged to give up Jesus altogether. He sadly realised that there were no materials whatever for a life of Jesus, and few writers so thoroughly disintegrated the Gospels more than he did in his numerous writings. But, for him, the Crucifixion was an historical fact, and therefore Jesus must have existed.

The first writer in the special number of the *Hibbert Journal* (1909) was the late Fr. G. Tyrrell who had been a Jesuit but left that Order as a result of his "Modernism." I am not sure, but he may have been excommunicated. In any case his article solved nothing, for I defy anyone to tell us what he believed about Jesus or Christ. He called his article, "The Point at Issue," and left it at that. After carefully re-reading it, I should say that Tyrrell had completely lost all belief in both Jesus the Man and Christ the God. He died in 1909—and I am fairly certain that, had he lived some years longer, he would have had no more belief than I have. He certainly considered that the orthodox position was hopelessly confused.

Needless to say, any live bishop, writing forty years ago, was bound to believe everything no matter how silly, and that is the position of the then Bishop of Southwark. His "beliefs" on the problem of "Jesus or Christ?" posed by the Rev. R. Roberts might well have been uttered by the most naive Fundamentalist though couched in better English. One can only shrug one's shoulders at such infantile credulity. Everything that Jesus said, or Peter said, or even what the Devil said, is reported literally in the Gospels, and must be believed in by all Christians.

The German, Dr. H. Weinal, in his "Jesus Our Saviour," could shake hands with the Bishop. His is a similar naive credulity. Everything in the Gospels and the Epistles is true, and then there is the witness of non-Christian writers like Tacitus and Josephus. It is true that Josephus does not really mention Jesus but he had "some kind of reason for his silence." Dr. Weinal would not agree with me that the only reason for the silence of Josephus is that there had been no Jesus for him to write about—any more than Peter and Paul. All are mythical. But Weinal appears to have been not altogether content with Jesus as his Saviour so he adds Buddha as another Saviour both of whom "compete to-day for the souls of men." This will not altogether endear him to some of our living Christian souls.

For Dr. Percy Gardner "Jesus or Christ?" is the fundamental question of modern Christianity! And he found it a very difficult question to discuss—though he was far more inclined to believe in Jesus the Man than Christ the God. He even found that "the accounts of the Resurrection in our Gospels are among the least satisfactory parts of them." But when Peter says something, or Paul—that is Gospel truth. No one can contradict himself so well as Dr. Gardner when he comes to evidence—it may be true or it may not be true, but anyway, "the

Pauline salvation by faith in Christ has been for more than eighteen hundred years one of the great possessions of humanity." The fact that it is unmitigated nonsense is not the point. It has been believed in by millions of people and that is good enough for Dr. Gardner. Or rather, he is in a complete muddle because he recognises it as "outworn theology" and is much disturbed that we have nothing to put in its place.

Dr. Schmiedel's famous article on the Gospels in the *Encyclopedia Biblica* made his name known in this country as a very modern Modernist. He called his paper, "The Christ of Theology and the Jesus of History" though, in actual fact, he believed only in "the Jesus of History." He put forward a number of "pillar" texts which he considered established the Jesus of History for ever, and I cannot remember that he ever took any notice of John M. Robertson's annihilation of these pillar texts. Schmiedel dismisses contemptuously many "fruitless controversies of the past," and almost admits that, if the early Christians had not looked upon Jesus as "a divine being," we may not have possessed Christianity at all—which for me at least would not have been any calamity. But he had no use for "Christ" the belief in whom he considered "develops unreflectively and in a naive manner."

Professor Henry Jones's essay is "The Idealism of Christ," and he is out to "convince Christian believers that the Christian religion will emerge safely out of the wash and welter of the debate, and that Jesus of Nazareth will triumph in the triumph of the faith he founded." Note that he says "Christian believers"—though a plain person like myself would be disposed to think that a Christian who was a believer would not require Professor Jones's help in this matter at all. The way he proves that Jesus the Man was Christ the God (when we brush away the theological disquisitions he splatters about so much) is by referring to "the divine humanity" of Jesus of Nazareth. As that settles the problem, let us examine what a Presbyterian, the Rev. R. Morris, has to say. He writes about "The Rationality of the Incarnation." And here I must admit I am with him. If there is a God, then of the life of me I cannot see why this God cannot be "incarnated," or "reincarnated," or provide us with an Aladdin's Lamp, or even make a clock strike less than one. With God *all* things are possible. Admit the greatest absurdity—God—and why should anybody kick at a little absurdity—the Incarnation? Professor Morris's thesis is merely an amplification of this and is not worth discussing.

Personally, I should have thought that an "Incarnation" was in the nature of things "Divine," but evidently Sir Oliver Lodge was not sure for he calls his contribution "A Divine Incarnation." He thinks that an Incarnation "is the display in bodily form, for a limited period, of some portion of an eternal spiritual essence," and I hope his readers were duly impressed. In most of his articles he uses words which (not being myself of any spiritual essence) were quite unintelligible to me. Possibly Sir Oliver knew perfectly well himself that Jesus was the Christ but, at least to me, he was quite unable to make his meaning clear. Still, what wonderful hope he must have given to many a sad and weary soul seeking for salvation among the readers of the *Hibbert Journal*!

# A Visit to Amsterdam

By EVELYN BELCHAMBERS

I AM very glad that the advent of the First International Humanist Conference at Amsterdam induced me to visit Holland, for I doubt if I should ever have visited that country without having some definite reason for doing so. The Conference itself, though interesting and, like all such gatherings, very stimulating, has left on the whole a very confused impression on my mind. The subject-matter was often difficult and over-abstract, also language presented something of a problem despite the excellence of the Dutch as linguists. Everything said had to be translated immediately into French (or into English if originally uttered in French) and, while this was excellently done, it held up the interest and taxed the attention of many of the members. The members (some 200, including many Dutch) were all given the texts of the papers on Humanism for each day of the Conference, and were instructed to read and study these thoroughly before the day's meetings. Some found this too much of a strain, in the little time that we had to ourselves, and I fear many of us barely skimmed through the papers just before going to the meetings! Then for the first half of each morning the papers in question were rapidly summarised and occasionally commented upon by various leading spokesmen of Humanism, while for the second half of the morning we subdivided into groups of about 14 and held discussions, led by a chairman, on the matters arising out of the papers. The evening was then devoted to another plenary session during which the findings of the groups were laid before the people and there was a further lecture with questions and discussion afterwards. The trouble all through was lack of enough time thoroughly to go into all the important matters, and loss of valuable time through translation, necessary though this of course was. The final day of the Conference was devoted to wording and re-wording of various resolutions (very tedious to the laymen, but no doubt important and necessary) and the decision was made to launch an official International Humanist Society, incorporated in New York. There were queries about this matter of incorporation, and some people, including myself, voted against its being in U.S.A. in favour of a smaller, politically unimportant country such as Holland or Belgium, but the motion was lost, and the Dutch themselves voted against it. I heard afterwards their reasons for doing this: apparently the churches, including the Protestants, are terribly powerful in Holland, and discussion of certain matters, notably of population and birth-control, is rendered impossible by *all* churches

there, both Protestant and Catholic, so that the Dutch wanted the new movement to have its headquarters in U.S.A.

Naturally, most of the members of the Conference were Dutch, but there were 30 British, about 10 French and Belgian, a good number of leading American Humanists and one or two other nationalities were just represented. It was a very mixed gathering, and suffered from the almost endemic humanist failings of over-academicism and a too great liking for wordy abstractions. A puzzling feature of the French and Belgian delegations was the fact that most of them were Roman Catholic even though anti-clerical—a strange blend! In many ways I think the Dutch themselves are the best humanists, and certainly the least compromised by religious hangovers. The English are dull and over-academic while the Americans, though very sincere and often inspiring, are inclined to be sentimental and to moralise in almost a Victorian manner! I, like many others, enjoyed this gathering and felt sorry when it ended, but I have to confess that I came away feeling more than a bit doubtful about the chances of a world humanist movement. The points of disagreement seem so to outweigh those of agreement as soon as one gets a number of people together. . . .

To pass on now to impressions of Holland in general, I have to make another confession: that these are far clearer and far more favourable than my impressions of the Conference! It was with some misgivings and doubts that I set sail from Harwich on my first visit to a country against which I fear I was somewhat prejudiced. The journey itself did little to reassure me, for I happened to pick one of the very worst days for the crossing, and an old Anglo-Dutch lady told me she had travelled that way some 30 times and had never known it so rough. China was breaking and unfortunate people were being thrown from their chairs by the violent rolling and pitching of the boat. Almost all the passengers were very seasick, and I feel sure I should have been but for the "Kwells" that I took. These did prevent actual sickness although I felt very unhappy and uncomfortable and it was a relief to land after seven hours on the North Sea. My friend and I were partly diverted and partly disgusted by watching the horrible behaviour of some young Canadian soldiers on the boat who did literally nothing but drink one bottle of beer after another for the whole crossing. They certainly avoided seasickness, but never have I seen people behave so disgustingly! . . .

(To be continued)

## Oscar Wilde

By JOHN O'HARE

IT is fifty-two years this week since Oscar Wilde was put into French soil after dying beyond his means in Paris. Fifty-two years—a longer period than his life, for he was forty-six when the rattle came into his throat. Few people are left who heard Wilde speak. His last intimates have dropped away. They belonged to a period, and although they exceeded Wilde's years, it was but a suspended animation, for they really died when the bells chimed for the twentieth century, when the radiant Oscar's breath finally deserted his Neroesque body. Wilde gave life to so many people.

Will anyone, quite finally, give us the secret of Wilde's

survival? Books about him pile up remorselessly; his plays are produced perennially; the cinema has embraced him; he is quoted here and he is quoted there; he enlarges so many volumes of other men's memoirs; yet rarely has a man's work been so derided, nor so much been written about a man to prove that he is not worth writing about. A short while back Mr. St. John Ervine added an anti-Wildean book to the pile, and showed therein conclusively how clumsy and amateurish in plot and construction are Wilde's plays. Mr. Ervine should know, for he is a playwright himself: he has plotted and constructed plays so soundly that it is unlikely they will long survive their

author's burial service. But perhaps there are other things that go to the making of a play—entertainment, for instance. However, that is by the way, for Wilde lives on the stage larger than life (he was always larger than life), and the stage is a more appropriate place for a play than the sinister side of a bookshelf. And there is always *The Importance of Being Earnest*, a stage masterpiece.

With verse Wilde was a skilled artificer, but rarely a poet: he was too clever. Everything of his in verse is elaborately contrived, artificial, without passion; and poetry is a passion. *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* is a forceful achievement, but one can sense the scene-shifters behind the imagery; his other poems are recollections of his extensive readings. As a story-teller Wilde is florid, over-laden. *Dorian Gray*, his one novel, reads suspiciously like Ouida throughout many of its pages. *Intentions*, his essays, hold the attention, although the repetition of the word "Art" implies artfulness rather than itself. Yet there is beyond a peradventure a fascination about Wilde's work that cannot be shrugged off. Wilde cannot be dismissed, no matter what skilled dissector reveals the stitches and the sawdust.

For Oscar Wilde was that extremely rare being—a Great Personality. He belongs to the exclusive brotherhood that includes Sam Johnson, Coleridge and Sidney Smith (all physically gross men, by the way, like their blood brother Falstaff)—articulates in the grand manner, who enriched any gathering by their presence, who enhanced any meeting by their vibrancy, who intoxicated their auditors by the splendour of their talk. There are very few splendid talkers. There is a malignancy of preachers and declaimers, as widespread as the pall over the Potteries, the inspirers of the yawn, the nod, and the furtive groping for a hat. At every moment the world is being lacerated by the speechifiers. But talk—ah, that's another thing. There is more in a wood than timber, there may even be a nightingale; there is more in speech than sound, there may even be words and music.

It has been said (Ervine says it again) that Wilde spent hours coining and rehearsing *bon mots* in private before releasing them in the drawing-room. The idiocy of this supposition is obvious if thought about. As Wilde rarely spoke without saying something memorable (and he was always speaking), he must have spent most of each twenty-four hours in his private mint. It is difficult for craggy Carlylean characters, who themselves are always groping for the "right" word, to realise that wit is spontaneous—or it is not wit, merely a heavy, patched-up affair, like a *nouveau riche* in an ancestral hall, as fake as a baby-kissing politician. Contrived epigrams may last for the flush of an evening, but they drain away with the lees: they do not survive the hoofmarks of generations. Shaw, himself a man not ineloquent, admitted that Oscar was incomparable as a talker.

Nor should it be forgotten that Wilde's talk captivated all kinds of people, not just a clique. Men who detested him across the street yielded to his spell across a table. Women, who sensed his abnormality, experienced that repulsion which becomes the most potent of attractions. Not only the aesthetes, but also the hearties, succumbed when Oscar Wilde, crimped, gross, voluptuous, bloated, benign, cigaretted, brought magic to the dinner-table, destroyed the rigid judgment of the clock, and drove the stars unheeded from the sky. His the rarest of gifts, in some ways the greatest, and not altogether a happy possession. It makes creation so fatally easy. Had Wilde had a speech impediment the chances are he would have left us a finer legacy of writings. All Wilde's works are but

promises, promises of the greatness that was in him, but a greatness that was only adumbrated in print, and almost wholly dissipated in talk. Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde had his racial curse *in excelsis*.

His sexual aberration, repellent as it may be to a nation whose most successful journalism is devoted to reports of sexual aberrations, is hardly worth commenting on now. A sick and sorry thing that compelled many well-known figures to be called abroad at the time of Wilde's trial, it brought Wilde to two years of hard labour in a Victorian gaol. In the same prison were hungry little children, complete with shiny bibles, expiating their sins against society. Criminals all.

## N.S.S. Executive Committee Meeting, 2nd December, 1952

Present: Mr. Ridley (in the Chair), Mrs. Venton, Messrs. Griffiths, Johnson, Hornibrook, Tiley, Cleaver, Corstorphine, Gibbins, Taylor and the Secretary. It being the anniversary of the death of the late President, R. H. Rosetti, all present stood in silence for a few moments as a tribute to his memory.

Seven new members were admitted to the Parent Branch. Letters were read from Fyzabad Branch acknowledging help from headquarters, from Edinburgh giving details of local activities towards re-forming the Branch there, and from the Jewish Central Information Office thanking the Society for help in exposing anti-Jewish propaganda. Reports were given of Mr. Ridley's debate at Queen Mary College, the Secretary's visit to the Putney Discussion Group, and Mr. Turner's visit to the Wanstead Toc H. A debate to be held at University House, Bethnal Green, between Mr. Ridley and a leader-writer of *The Times* (Mr. T. E. Utley) was announced. The suggestions of the Annual Dinner Sub-Committee were considered and approved. The New Branches Sub-Committee had not yet met, but would be doing so on December 11. The Vienna "People's Congress for Peace" was discussed, and it was decided to submit a message in keeping with N.S.S. principles to that gathering. The next meeting was fixed for Tuesday, January 6, 1953.

P. VICTOR MORRIS, Secretary.

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