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VIEWS and OPINIONS

The New Counter-Reformation

By F. A. RIDLEY

IN an eloquent passage in his celebrated review of the German historian Leopold von Ranke's *History of the Popes* Lord Macaulay drew a rhetorical picture of the undying glories of the Roman Catholic Church and of its leader, the Papacy. "Every schoolboy," as Macaulay himself used to express it, knows his famous conclusion, when the future "New Zealander" will sit "upon the arch of London Bridge amid the ruins of St. Paul's"—and, presumably, of Anglicanism—contemplating the majestic fortunes of the Vatican and its occupants. One can add that whilst Macaulay is not, nowadays, taken very seriously as a scientific historian, yet, in this instance, his glowing rhetoric had a solid basis in sober fact. For there can be few institutions which have undergone, and survived, more chequered fortunes than has the Church of Rome.

A century has elapsed since Macaulay wrote and much water has flowed under "the arch of London Bridge" since Macaulay wrote his panegyric of the Papacy. During this period we have seen repeated the familiar phenomena of universal history: empires have crashed, wars have been waged to decisive conclusions, revolutions have played upon immemorially stagnant societies, science has continued its transformation of human life and has largely succeeded in obliterating the old limitations of space and time. But the sequel to the revolutionary age through which we are passing, as it affects the Roman Catholic Church, might well seem to have added fresh substance to the thesis of her indestructibility propounded in Macaulay's brilliant pages. For the Vatican still remains a World Power and, to-day, is not only full of vigour, but is, in the contemporary world, actually living up to her self-chosen title of "Catholic"—that is to say, "Universal." For never before has the Catholic Church operated upon such a world-wide scale as at present.

What we are, in fact, witnessing to-day is a world-wide "come-back" on the part of the Vatican: in more appropriate language, a new "counter-reformation," the "counter-reformation" of the 20th century. The Church is to-day, reacting against the political and scientific revolutions of the rationalistic 19th century as, four centuries ago, it reacted, equally energetically, under the leadership of the Jesuits, against the Protestant Reformation of Luther and Calvin. For example, in the 16th century Rome "brought in the New World to redress the balance of the Old": in the Americas, discovered by the pious Catholic, Columbus, and forthwith partitioned amongst Catholic powers, the Papacy brought into being a new empire in order to compensate her for her losses in contemporary Protestant Europe. To-day, intense activity in the Protestant U.S.A., and the simultaneous creation of Chinese and Indian Cardinals, and Japanese and African Bishops, conclusively indicate that Rome is advancing confidently on all fronts and is seeking hopefully for new worlds to conquer, again to compensate Rome for her recent losses, to-day chiefly in Communist-controlled Eastern Europe.

Not only is the "Black International" operating in full vigour on a world-wide scale: it also meets with but little resistance from its traditional foes. Neither Protestantism nor Rationalism oppose "the Vatican menace" with their old vigour. The old-time Protestantism, characterised by such works as *The Two Babylons*, which regarded ecclesiastical Rome as "The Scarlet Woman" and the Pope as anti-Christ, seems to have virtually disappeared — at any rate, outside Belfast and, perhaps, the American "Middle West." In point of fact, in the present century, the Reformed Churches seem more anxious to form a "United Front" with Rome rather than to imitate their predecessors and search the lurid pages of the Apocalyse for Divine intimations of Rome's approaching fiery doom. Incidentally, these short-sighted prospective allies of the Vatican might learn from the sad fate of the fabled young lady "who went for a ride with a tiger" what their ultimate destiny is likely to be!

Nor, unfortunately, is the International Rationalist Movement much better situated in face of the current Catholic counter-attack: deprived arbitrarily of access to the mass techniques of propaganda in the modern State, and ostracised by vote-catching political machines, organised Rationalism, to-day, wages a mainly defensive battle, as M. Michaud pointed out in his recent illuminating article on contemporary French Freethought. In the land of Voltaire, in the allegedly secular Fourth Republic, the Church is advancing all along the line and is wringing concession after concession from the politicians; whilst in most European lands a political regime largely, or entirely, Catholic is already installed. We have, before this, indicated in this column how closely political Catholicism is bound up with the current proposals for a Western European Federation, from which, indeed, the Vatican would be the chief beneficiary.

In the present-day world Rome's only serious rival is Communism—and well does the Catholic world know it! Marx and Lenin, to-day, represent—in their own language—the dialectical negation to St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Ignatius Loyola, whilst the "Red International" confront the "Black" in mortal world-rivalry. If Rome still possessed temporal power, the Inquisition would have a busy time! The remarkable, if inverted, resemblance between the two Internationals, the "Black" and the "Red," has often been indicated, here as elsewhere. One can say, in fact, that the Vatican fears the Kremlin precisely because it sees in its mirror the picture of its own robust youth! For "The Church of Moscow" has one great advantage over the Church of Rome: it was founded in the 19th century, not in the first; consequently, it is not weighed down with all the medieval lumber which

the Vatican would, no doubt, like to discard, but to which it finds itself tied by long tradition.

The current "Counter-Reformation" of the 20th century has often been described, and from many angles. In the English language what we may, perhaps, term its present anti-Communist era has been most fully described on the International scale by Mr. Avro Manhattan, the European author of that encyclopædic survey, *The Catholic Church Against the Twentieth Century*. In this comprehensive survey, first published in 1947 and subsequently translated into most European languages, Mr. Manhattan exhaustively analysed the machinations of political Catholicism on a world-wide scale during the period which Signor Nitti once described as *The Decline of Europe* subsequent to the First World War (1914-18).

Now the learned author has given us the long-awaited successor to his magnum opus. In *Catholic Imperialism and World Freedom* (Watts, 30s.) Mr. Manhattan has continued and brought up to date his earlier monumental survey. Here the machinations of *Catholic Imperialism* and its ever-present danger to *World Freedom* are analysed and presented with similar comprehension and power. Like that of its predecessor, the documentation of Mr. Manhattan's new work is vast and varied, and his analysis eloquent in exposition and rich in denunciation—though the author displays a tendency to rhetoric, sometimes more suitable to a Latin language rather than to the more prosaic English tongue. Also, there is, inevitably, some repetition of themes familiar to the numerous readers of his earlier book.

Mr. Manhattan has no doubt where the leading adversary of human progress and freedom is still to be found: the address is still Rome! Numerous examples in the book before us indicate that, in 1953 as formerly, "the leopard does not change his spots." As in the days of Torquemada, the Church is as ruthless as ever: the grim account of the massacre of the "orthodox" Serbs by Cardinal Stepinac and his Catholic "Crusaders" equals the extermination of the Albigenses in horror and casts a curious light on current Catholic criticisms of the "persecutor," Marshal Tito!

Mr. Manhattan's two volumes should be read together. They constitute an indictment of "Catholic Imperialism" hitherto unsurpassed and what is, to date, probably the best and the most exhaustive history of the contemporary Catholic "counter-Reformation" of the 20th century.

The Genius of Charles Dickens

By VILLENEUVE

CHARLES DICKENS has often been accused of sentimentality by those who have failed to probe into the depths of his writings. But there is little of that quality, that vice, in his life's work. Sentiment there certainly is. Yet, what is the truth about the genius of Dickens? His private life held shadows. The private lives of all men contain dark patches.

The mind that conceived the brilliant social stricture, "Oliver Twist," is not the mind of a sentimentalist, a sigher after applause. That novel is biting, caustic and unforgettable in its indictment of false piety, social corruption, and persecution of the poor.

On every side, various titles are tagged to this great novelist. Charles Dickens was—like Bernard Shaw and Thomas Paine—primarily an artist, a creator of concentrated images, composites of real-life people.

Oliver Twist is the composite of thousands of unwanted, lonely and oppressed children in the time of Dickens and since it. For, there are just as many Oliver Twists to-day, in the back streets of every large city of the world. You may find the counterpart of Oliver in New York's Harlem, or in the coloured quarters of Liverpool.

Christians have accused Charles Dickens of being an atheist, an unbeliever in their benign and compassionate God. That God remarkable for His absence in every national and universal disaster this world has ever known. Remarkable for his absence from the Devon floods. Pitifully unbelievable by His disinterest in the tragedy of the *Affray*.

If then, to be an atheist is to rank ourselves, as thoughtful people, with men like Dickens, H. G. Wells, and women like George Eliot, then we can only be proud of being unbelievers in this divine God, this bad business man, who, for the acquisition of a human mind, holds out, through His Papal and episcopal agents, the promise of immortality.

Charles Dickens was not concerned with what the world might think of him as man. The artist must ever stand apart from the man. Writers in these columns in recent months have denied that Dickens characters are to be met in any modern street. They have slept then, during the sittings of every county court, where the characters of Dickens walk through the minutes of every session hour!

The genius will always be attacked and reviled by lesser minds, envious or openly jealous. Had he never written any other work, the fame of Dickens would have been assured by "Oliver Twist." The scenes he depicts there are no more unreal to-day than they were then. There are thieves' kitchens to-day, Fagins and Nancies, as every social worker knows. Charles Dickens did more in his lifetime with his pen for the cause of the poor than a thousand voluble M.P.s. He was a literary Shaftesbury. If then, genius is indeed akin to madness, this world needs more literary maniacs! For, the sober, respectable and intolerably dull novelists of to-day would shrink in the magnetic presence of Charles Dickens. The Victorian age was never dull. Diseased, dark—yes. But where are the Dickens, the Elizabeth Frys, the Ingersolls of this century? They have been made respectable by bureaucracy. Convention was ever the muzzle of creative art. In recent articles in the Press, journalist Beverley Nichols has attacked the memory of Shaw, which is an amusing affair, for the dead cannot answer back.

But, it would be interesting to jump, with H. G. Wells' Time Machine, into the future, and see who is remembered and read one thousand years from now: Shaw, Dickens, or Beverley Nichols?

Reading again "Our Mutual Friend" one is struck by the topicality of certain passages. The poor still, like Betty Higden, sew their burial savings in their garments! Was Dickens a sentimentalist? If he was, as no one has ever proved—they skilfully avoid his humanism and his acid ironies—then Thomas Hardy must have been the Pope's uncle!

Dickens has assured his own immortality as long as books survive the restrictive practises of bureaucratic governments. And those who throw pebbles at this literary Vesuvius merely prove their own mortality. His detractors are loud, but few. His novels, written over a lifetime of struggle and early poverty, speak for themselves. He set out to alter the pious minds of his time. He did that and more. He proved himself to be one of the greatest of the English classic school. That school which died with H. G. Wells and Shaw. Such meteorites flash only once through this life. Mark them well. For the sky is the darker for their extinction.

Reformers in the Age of Reason

By T. F. PALMER

During the period 1740-48 Continental Europe was devastated and disgraced by armed conflict. But by the latter year, most of the contending countries were war-weary and peace was temporarily restored. Optimistic thinkers now opined that Western States had now reached a time of unimpeded progress and from the death of Louis XIV, until the accession of Frederick the Great, the era was one of attempted religious reunion, agricultural improvement, legal codification and the exploration of our globe.

But even during hostilities, physical science had made substantial advances in mathematics and mechanics. The quadrant, thermometer, sextant, the circulation of the blood, the beginnings of electrical science and the genesis of modern chemistry and astronomical progress all illumined the age.

Moreover, from 1740 to 1748, despite the warfare, with its inevitable evils, literary activity greatly increased men's knowledge and the spirit of inquiry. As Mr. W. F. Reddaway avers in his instructive *History of Europe*: 1715-1814 (Methuen, 1951): "While Belleisle disposed of the lot of empires and kingdoms, and Saxe, a dying man, rivalled Marlborough's career, Swedenborg was recording his visions of heaven and hell, Linnæus creating botany and Richardson the novel, D'Alembert impressing his genius upon dynamics and Bakewell upon the breed of sheep." Religious toleration increased in England and Prussia, but intolerance had been intensified in France.

Still, a school of philosophical sceptics appeared in that country who utilised the weapons of irony and epigram to disguise their convictions and thus avoid the persecuting proclivities of the minions of Church and State. By these methods they modified the minds of their readers and thus made them realise the importance of matters alien to dogmas constantly stressed as pre-eminent by the Jesuits and their confederates in the royalist and clerical camps. With the Crown alone, the philosophers had no quarrel, but however covert the attack on the ecclesiastics, their close connection with the king made the secular and religious powers practically one. Even educational works composed by independent reformers were treated as offensive to the priests who controlled every form of instruction. Some of the reformers were Atheists, but most professed deism or what would be regarded as agnosticism to-day; while anti-clericalism in any aspect was precarious, for any suspicion of heterodoxy conveyed by the King's confessor, might bring a *lettre de cachet* which sent the suspect without trial to a long imprisonment in the Bastille. Also, the slightest irreverence towards a religious procession was deemed a capital crime.

It was only in the Salon, where intellectuals were fairly free from danger and there their convictions could be openly avowed. But to write books was to invite trouble, for the censor and the priest could suppress both the author and his publications.

As Reddaway observes: "The cautious Philosopher would write so that only the astute could read between the lines, or court some high placed protector, or attach himself to some religious order, or station himself near the frontier or abroad. His books perhaps found entry into France as so-called translations from the English published in Holland, and therefore passed the censor. Disguise heightened their charms, while the contrast between French fetters and foreign liberty could not but impress their readers."

The Philosophers despised mere metaphysics and theology. They concerned themselves with the sciences and matters of moment to mankind. Montesquieu led the way with his *Spirit of the Laws* and proved a worthy successor of Aristotle and Machiavelli. This and other works occupied the minds of the Philosophers long before their publication. As our historian notes: "Helvetius' slender treatise *De l'esprit* taxed his best energies for two dozen years, while Montesquieu's masterpiece demanded thirty."

Voltaire's achievements were amazing and his pre-eminence as an author, correspondent and reformer was stupendous. Lord Morley deemed the author of *Candide* and Frederick the Great as the two greatest personalities of the Age of Enlightenment. Reddaway's estimate of Voltaire is also a high one. He observes that: "In some fifteen million words, written between 1710 and 1778, he proved himself an unrivalled correspondent, a verse writer whom a good judge might place first, second and third among those of contemporary France, a careful, original and brilliant historian, a consummate arbiter of taste, and a satirist who penetrated away the wax mask with which tradition had disguised the lineaments of reason."

Voltaire's influence in France ultimately became supreme, but the sovereigns of other States were his adherents before his teachings were generally accepted in his native land. Still, he exposed the iniquities of the French tribunals and vindicated Calas, Sirven and La Barre from the charges urged against them, while under his influence Frederick of Prussia, Joseph II of Austria and Catherine of Russia humanised the penal codes of their respective realms. Voltaire rejected all theologies as injurious to mankind. And as Lecky testifies, his campaign against sacerdotal persecution rendered it not only criminal but loathsome, and even now, in our degenerate days, it disguises its malevolence under other names.

The sage of Ferney's Freethought was therefore of a practical character and as Reddaway cogently declares, his "rationalism contained a programme—mild government, even-handed justice, freedom of thought, religious toleration, the fraternity of liberal thinkers of all nations, and fraternal kindness of the rich towards the poor." But, to the priestly advisers of the king, such opinions were abhorrent, yet they ultimately in large measure triumphed but Rousseau's ideas proved more destructive to traditional beliefs than those of the comparatively conservative Voltaire, in later years.

Cold and Hot

Cold, indeed, is the Cold War;
Colder the corpses when this Frigid War
In due course passes on to Hot Hostilities,
With atom bomb and mass-produced facilities
For human butchery, in burning rage;
A brutal play, and poor,
Produced by governments on world-wide stage.
I cannot write about the War that's Torrid;
Of that most wicked, brainless thing
I really have no heart to sing:
Hot and hopeless, bestial, horrid.

BAYARD SIMMONS.

This Believing World

That fine Christian institution, the B.B.C., broadcast the other week the impressions three young earnest Christians received at the World Conference of Christian Youth held in Travancore, South India; and it is not altogether surprising that they found the "Asiatics" there ready to find their Saviour in Communism and not at all in Christ. In the ordinary way, this should have proved disconcerting, but Christians never give up. The three young people will strive bravely for Jesus, the Asiatics for Communism, and everybody will be happy. Still, to let millions of listeners learn that Communism is preferred to Christ won't do Christianity much good. Or will it?

With the full backing of the *Daily Express*, the revivalist, Dr. Sangster, is courageously asking Manchester two vital questions—"Can God live in a big city?" and "If so, Why is He so often crowded out?" The answer should be easy. One is obliged to work all day, and in the evening or during whatever spare time one has, there are the radio, T.V., the cinema, the theatre, concerts and hobbies, to say nothing of going out with one's wife and kiddies, or with one's girl. If all this doesn't crowd out God, you can add, reading the *Daily Express* and dozens of journals, magazines and books, taking up various courses at a night school, filling football pools and playing cards. Will Dr. Sangster or the *Daily Express* tell us how the heck God can possibly come into all this? It would require a miracle —and God knows that's impossible.

In a little pamphlet entitled, *Buddhism and Christianity*, the author, Dr. B. B. Jayaram, takes great care to show how the Bible has been disproved by science, and how it is full of myths and fables. All this is very true, but the author then goes on to show that the Bible is full of Buddhist teachings, that King Asoka sent missionaries "far beyond the borders of his own dominions," that the Jews "adapted" Buddhism "suited to their practice," and that "the teachings of the Buddha influenced Christianity."

Well, Dr. Jayaram can't have it both ways. He cannot in one breath attack the Bible as being disproved by science and full of myths and fables, and then show that it is packed with Buddhism to prove how very superior Buddhism is to all other religions—in fact, the only religion worth following. If the Bible is disproved by science then, as it is a Buddhist work, Buddhism is also disproved by science. The truth is, of course, that all religions are disproved by science. All religions are packed with myths and fables, and it is doubtful whether there is another religion in existence which has so many myths and fables as Buddhism, and certainly not one sillier.

The "Church of England Newspaper" recently reviewed—rather late in the day—the book criticised in these columns a year or so back *In Search of the Hereafter* by R. M. Lester, a book in which the author did not so much search for the Hereafter as search for a lot of spooks. Naturally, with the aid of "mediums," he found them. The reviewer poked a good deal of fun at "spirit guides," especially as most of them were Red Indians, all speaking perfect English—or at least as good English as the medium could speak.

The author gave the reviewer a crushing reply. Does it not say in Holy Writ (or God's Precious Word, or the Bible), "He hath given His angels charge concerning thee," and did not the Founder of the Christian religion say "Seek and ye shall find"? These two texts prove incontestably that mediums have Red Indian guides speaking from the Spirit World or Summerland or whatever the Holy Place we go to after death is called. We should add that several clergymen enthusiastically supported Mr. Lester's marvellous argument. We are not surprised.

Historic Court Exposure

For ever interesting to rationalists must be Clarence Darrow's historic cross-examination of William Jennings Bryan in the prosecution of John T. Scopes, the 24-years-old school teacher who was charged in 1925 with teaching "the heresy of evolution, contrary to the statutes of Tennessee" (U.S.A.). The famous American lawyer sprang a surprise by calling Bryan as the first witness for the defence. Added importance was imparted to what was virtually an examination and cross-examination through Bryan just previously having made a very serious bid to become the President of the U.S.A. A recent re-reading of the case has prompted me to give a few extracts from the questions and replies, as follows:—

DARROW: When you read that the whale swallowed Jonah—do you interpret that literally?

BRYAN: When I read that a big fish swallowed Jonah, I believe it. I believe that everything in the Bible should be accepted as it is written.

DARROW: Now the fish swallowed Jonah, and in three days spewed him upon dry land. Are you prepared to say that a fish was made especially to swallow Jonah?

BRYAN: The Bible doesn't say, so I am not prepared to say. Let me add that one miracle is just as easy to believe as another.

DARROW: Would it be easy for you to believe that Jonah swallowed the whale?

BRYAN: If the Bible said so.

After other questions had brought forth similar replies regarding Joshua commanding the earth to stand still, the Tower of Babel, the story of the flood, and the age of the earth, the gruelling of the witness continued:—

DARROW: Do you believe Eve was the first woman?

BRYAN: Yes.

DARROW: Do you literally believe that she was made out of Adam's rib?

BRYAN: I do.

DARROW: Did you ever discover where Cain got his wife?

BRYAN: No; I'll leave you agnostics to hunt for her.

DARROW: Adam and his family were the only people on earth. But Cain got a wife. You don't know where she came from?

BRYAN: No.

DARROW: Do you believe the story of the temptation of Eve by the serpent?

BRYAN: That is what the Bible says, and that is what I believe.

DARROW: And you believe that God punished the serpent by condemning snakes for ever to crawl upon their bellies?

BRYAN: I believe that.

DARROW: Well, just how do you suppose snakes got around prior to that time?

Bryan here complained that the purpose of the inquiries was to hold him up to ridicule. "The purpose," retorted Darrow, "is to prevent bigots and ignoramuses from controlling education in the United States. That is all, and you know it."

Four days after the trial, Bryan—a broken man—was dead.

Sydney, N.S.W., Australia.

FRANK HILL.

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.

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Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Bomb Site).—Every weekday, 1 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK and BARNES.

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

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.: G. ALEXANDER HARP, "Hypnosis." Lecture with demonstration. Questions answered.

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Tuesday, February 10, 7 p.m.: J. P. HODIN, "Art and the Spiritual Crisis of Our Time."

Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: DONALD CHAPMAN, M.P., "American Journey."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Large Lecture Theatre, Technical College, Shakespeare Street). — Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: J. M. ALEXANDER, "Freemasonry."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: Dr. W. E. SWINTON, Ph.D., F.R.S.E., "Mountains and Men."

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.). — Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: Annual General Meeting.

NOTES AND NEWS

As was, unfortunately, only to be expected in view of the notorious timidity of politicians to handle progressive ideas in the religious domain, the Bill sponsored by Mr. John Parker, which aimed at getting rid of the "English" Sunday, was heavily defeated and failed to pass its first reading in the House of Commons. Though its sponsors took care to assert their fundamental adherence to Christianity, the Bill itself was of a definitely progressive character and was actively supported by Secularists all over the country. The N.S.S. has, of course, been advocating similar legislation since its inception in 1866, and will support all similar attempts in the future to break the dead hand of *The Lord's Day Observance Society* and of similar reactionary bodies.

Knowing politicians as we do, however, we are afraid that there is still much educational work to be done before any such measure for reforming the Puritan Sunday has any serious chance of becoming law.

We must congratulate our Oriental contemporary, *The Indian Rationalist*, on the gallant fight that it is putting up against the powerful forces of priestcraft and obscurantism in what has been termed "The most religious country in the world." Number six issue contains excellent articles on *Humanism and Rationalism*, on the, for India especially, burning question of Family Limitation, and on *The Secular State and Religious Rituals*. The last-named contains a most amusing account of the recent reinterment of the bones of early Buddhist saints, at which the Prime Minister of the alleged "Secular" State of India was present. Apparently St. Peter is not the only saint to leave relics! We wish our heroic Indian comrades every possible good fortune in their uphill fight.

Mr. P. Turner and other correspondents seem to have misunderstood our recent editorial on *The Jewish Question—1953*. We did *not* state there that Russian Communism was *racially* anti-semitic. That would, indeed, be a peculiar role for the professed disciples of Karl Marx! What we *did* say was that Communism is politically "anti-Zionist." As "Zionism," that is, support for the State of Israel, specifically featured amongst the charges brought both against Slansky and Co. at the recent Prague trial and, we understand, in the present Russian trials, we do not know on what grounds our correspondents object to our description. If they are not more careful, they may find themselves out of step and even be dubbed as "American warmongers"!

"The Freethinker" Fund

Previously acknowledged, £54 2s. 6d.; A. Hancock, 1s. (8th don.); J. Potter, 5s.; P. Shawe, 16s.; Miss E. A. Ross, 2s. 6d. Total, £55 7s. 0d.

Ask at your Library

By F. A. HORNIBROOK

"Arnold Bennett," a biography by Reginald Pound. Published by William Heinemann Ltd., London. Price 21s.

THE fact that this book has been so extensively and favourably reviewed is not surprising, for it is one of the most interesting and familiar biographies ever written, and one of an unusual type, for in it Arnold Bennett talks of himself through the medium of his diary and thereby gives us the most revealing story of the man himself.

Bennett's greatness and his weakness are equally discussed, and the letters which he wrote to H. G. Wells, Hugh Walpole, Sir J. M. Barrie, Frank Swinnerton and other men of letters, together with their replies, are full of interest and of candour on both sides.

Like Wells, Shaw and Hardy, Bennett was denied the "advantage" of a University education: he gained his knowledge in the university of life. His dealings with people of all classes and his wonderful powers of observation, which he used on all subjects, big and little, gave him endless material for his writings.

His early life was set amongst the grim background of the five towns of the Potteries with all the deadly monotony of the Victorian industrial age. No wonder that those very powers of observation which he possessed as a boy and used to such advantage as a man, made him reject and despise the religion that formed such an important part of that period.

In dealing with Bennett's boyhood, the author writes:

" He spoke of himself as being doctrinally irreligious and instinctively opposed to the dogmas of the Churches. Intellectually he had long been in revolt against the faith of his fathers and of his upbringing, and had taken his place with the Victorian agnostics. Dogmatically unanchored, his view was that only right living could make life worth living. . . .

He lay bare the ' pietistic posturings ' of his remembered ancestors ' to me utterly exasperating.' He recalled the boredom of his chapel going, filing in behind his parents and sisters to the family pew; all that continuously enervating religious experience of his adolescence from which in ' Anna of the Five Towns ' especially, he had pressed and squeezed and extracted with the smooth ruthlessness of a manufacturing process what there was in it of human passion and human truth."

Once Bennett had freed his mind from all the unscientific worrying about a future life, he realised that no hell could be worse than the sordid lives lived by so many of the workers in the Potteries.

Arnold Bennett was a many-sided man and his diaries touched on many subjects. He was never luke-warm. When he liked people he rather idealised them, and when he disliked them he did it thoroughly. His enemies, for every successful man has enemies, criticised him for his vanity, his clothes and his dogmatism. But who or where are those critics to-day? Forgotten.

It was G. W. Foote who once said that there was only one perfect man and if they ever found another he would turn out to be a perfect nuisance.

In Bennett's novels he wrote about imaginary people, often taken from the lives of real people he had met, but in his diaries he wrote of Arnold Bennett, the man—his fears, his hopes, his ambitions, his successes and his failures; his attempts to cure his speech defect which made him unduly shy, and in trying to counteract this, he developed an almost aggressive personality at times.

This is a great book which holds the reader's attention from start to finish. In addition it is lavishly illustrated with photographs.

When next you visit your library, don't forget to ask for it and, if it is not in stock, keep on asking for it.

Freethought and Our Encyclopædias—II

By H. CUTNER

(Concluded from page 19)

NOTHING could, of course, be more contemptible than the Rev. A. Gordon's notice of Robert Taylor in the Dictionary of National Biography—but one could hardly expect a Christian priest to point out for inquiring students that a clergyman of the Church of England was compelled, by reason and scholarship, not only to reject Christianity but also to insist that Jesus Christ never had any historical existence. Even now, we have numbers of reverent Rationalists who only with the greatest reluctance allow that the " Babe of Bethlehem " was not God Almighty, and who would much have preferred to admit at least one weeny miracle at his birth. To put people off reading the *Diegesis*, Mr. Gordon cleverly pointed out that it was " a curious medley of random judgments and secondhand learning," taking good care to suppress the fact that it is quite impossible to write on Christianity without being " secondhand " and that the " random judgments " were based on extensive research and scholarship. Moreover, Taylor was *right*. Many of Bishop Barnes' " conclusions " in his work on Christian origins will be found anticipated by Taylor over one hundred years ago.

However, let us have a look at the very latest edition of Chambers' Encyclopædia, published in 1950. Chambers' always had a great reputation, and this edition is, no doubt whatever, much better than any preceding one. As far as I have been able to consult it on other subjects than Freethought, its standard is quite as high as that of the Encyclopædia Britannica.

But take the article on Charles Bradlaugh. That he was one of the great men of the nineteenth century is just a commonplace these days—in spite of his openly avowed atheism; and one would have thought that the Editor would choose an eminent Freethinker to write the notice as being at least in sympathy with his views. Nothing of the kind. The gentleman selected was Prof. G. D. H. Cole who has made his reputation as a writer on Socialism, and who has never (I think I am right in saying) had any connection with the Freethought Party in England. I do not know in fact if he is, or is not, religious.

Now, as a writer on Socialism, Prof. Cole is ideal—but why was he selected to write on an atheist who was always thoroughly hostile to Socialism? It was no more possible for Prof. Cole to write with sympathy on Bradlaugh than it was for the Rev. A. Gordon to write with sympathy on Robert Taylor. No one, for example, reading this article on Bradlaugh would ever imagine that the great Iconoclast " trumpeted his atheism from the house tops." The word atheism is discreetly omitted altogether. There is some vague reference to his "free-thinking " activities, but not a line about his wonderful debates with some of the best clergymen Christians could put forward. Not a line about Bradlaugh's splendid series of pamphlets against Bible heroes, or any reference whatever to his book *The Bible: What it is*, or to his *Genesis*, or to that fine exposition, *A Plea for Atheism*.

No student consulting this article would be able to get anything from it but that Bradlaugh, though elected to Parliament several times was not allowed to take his seat at first because of some difficulties with regard to the oath. Prof. Cole says nothing about the way the House of Commons literally kicked out a man who was the properly elected representative of Northampton—one of the most disgraceful incidents in Parliamentary history; or that Parliament was so ashamed of it that it deleted the account from its records.

In addition, Prof. Cole is quite wrong in some of his statements—due either to ignorance, or to the fact that he could not take the trouble to find out the truth. He says that Bradlaugh and Mrs. Besant parted company over the question of Socialism in 1885. In actual fact, Mrs. Besant continued to write for the *National Reformer* for years afterwards and, in addition, was allowed to advertise her Socialist lectures in the same journal, even to sub-edit it, and to speak on Socialism from the platform of the National Secular Society. In truth, G. W. Foote bitterly complained that she did this but took good care not to allow her Secularism to be propagated on Socialist platforms. Bradlaugh, who always had a high opinion of Mrs. Besant, never complained, and he was too great a Freethinker to stop her. It was only when Mrs. Besant finally went over to that hotch-potch of esotericism, Theosophy, that he sadly realised the time had come for parting—and that was after 1889.

Prof. Cole mentions that Bradlaugh wrote his *Auto-*

biography in 1873 which, of course, may be true, though there is no mention of it either in Mrs. Bradlaugh Bonner's life of her father, or in the Biography by A. S. Headingley, published in 1880. I very much doubt therefore that such an *Autobiography* was ever published. Prof. Cole also says that Bradlaugh wrote "countless articles" in other radical journals—that is, apart from the *National Reformer*. It would prove very interesting—and no doubt entertaining—to be able to read these "countless articles." I do not for a moment believe this fairy-story. And the erudite professor also tells us that he wrote pamphlets on "religious" subjects. That is true, but an inquiring student might be inclined to take the word literally. What Bradlaugh wrote was on "anti-religious" subjects, a distinction with a big difference.

I consider the whole article a disgrace to such a fine encyclopædia as Chambers' and there are the others dealing with Freethought hardly any better. For instance, the article on Atheism is by the Rt. Rev. A. E. J. Rawlinson; he is good enough to tell us that the majority who are regarded as Atheists are "either Agnostics or Sceptics." Fancy giving an article on Atheism to a priest! And how these people hate the word Atheism—how anxious they are to tell us that we are not really Atheists but Agnostics!

The article on Agnosticism is by the Rev. E. L. Mascall and no doubt is no better than that spineless belief (or unbelief) deserves; but again, why give it to a clergyman to write up? The article on Rationalism is by J. Laird, LL.D., and it is about the best of the bunch.

The article on Bradlaugh in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* is only a little better and, naturally, it carefully hides the fact that he was an Atheist. Indeed, the word Atheism does not once occur in it. And that is how our good Christians who have charge of all, or nearly all, books of reference, manage to have their revenge on Freethought. They cannot meet us in argument, and they can no longer burn us at the stake, but they can and do so belittle our famous leaders that one would imagine Freethought and Freethinkers were just negligible nuisances.

I often wonder what we can do about it?

Mr. Joseph McCabe at Glasgow

The R.P.A. (Glasgow District) and the Glasgow Secular Society joined forces on Saturday, January 17, at a reception given in honour of Mr. Joseph McCabe. It was held in the Caledore Restaurant, where high tea was provided, followed by concert items and short speeches. Former members of the famous Orpheus Choir sang some delightful songs, and a few members of our associations displayed gifts of fun and music much appreciated by the company.

Mr. Harrison Maxwell, M.A., paid a fine tribute to the guest of the evening in a description of the great fight he had carried on for so many years, all over the world, in the cause of truth and reason. The courage, the patience, the vitality and the intellectual force he had shown in his fight against superstition had inspired thousands of people in many countries; his histories and writings not only served to guide the present generation but were also a valuable heritage for the men and women of the future.

On Sunday, January 18, there was a splendid meeting in the Central Halls, and notwithstanding the ripe age of Mr. McCabe, many of the old members felt the thrill of the propaganda days of many years ago. The hall was filled to capacity to hear Mr. McCabe lecture on "Science and Religion To-day." Question-time evoked a stream of questions and discussion. The sale of literature was the highest for years.

Members of both associations appreciated the kindly advice and wise counsel of Mr. McCabe on the present passing phase of apathy which is apparent in so many progressive movements; and many were inspired with confidence for the future. His love of facts and truth and his undisguised contempt for effusiveness or compliments make him impatient at any expressions of thanks, but these characteristics do not cancel our feelings, not only of gratitude but of sincere admiration.

J. Barrowman,
Hon. Secretary, Glasgow Secular Society.

Correspondence

The following letter from an Irish Protestant will be of interest to our readers:—

OSTRACISM

Manchester Guardian (December 20, 1952).

To the Editor of the Manchester Guardian.

Sir,—I only saw to-day your Irish Correspondent's account (on November 29) of the attempt to ostracise Dr. Sheehy-Skeffington because of some remarks I made as his guest at a meeting of the International Affairs Association in Dublin. As the incident still has its repercussions, perhaps you will allow me to add a few comments.

I do not think that my remarks about Mgr. Stepinac, which were respectful—I said that he was kind and gentle but had been "used by" Pavelic; I did not say he was "a dupe,"—were the cause of the abrupt closure of the meeting by the chairman after the departure of the Apostolic Nuncio. I was permitted only a few sentences, but I think resentment was felt at my statement that the Orthodox Christian view of the 1941 campaign of compulsory conversion to Catholicism could not be ignored in any discussion on the "Pattern of Persecution in Yugoslavia," the title of Mr. O'Curry's address. I was about to quote from "The Martyrdom of the Serbs" (published in the United States by the Orthodox Church in 1943), which I held in my hand.

The Orthodox view of the campaign has been expressed in many other books and periodicals, but as I once held a scholarship from the School of Slavonic Studies in Yugoslavia I decided to investigate for myself and returned twice after the war to Zagreb. I studied closely all the relevant documents, including the many Church papers issued during the Pavelic regime, and I translated for the first time and published in Ireland Mgr. Stepinac's long letter to Pavelic on the conversions. Admittedly the Church papers were published under Fascist duress, but there is abundant evidence to corroborate the Orthodox charges, though the estimate of 250,000 forced converts is probably exaggerated. Though the Catholic hierarchy expressed their horror at the violence of the campaign they were too complacent in regard to its objects, the conversion of three million Serbs. Even the kindliest of the bishops, Mgr. Misic of Mostar, appeared to consider that the Nazi occupation had offered a wonderful opportunity for the proselytism of a defeated and helpless people. A more vigorous version of what in Ireland during the famine years was damned as "souperism," was enthusiastically envisaged.

These facts were surely relevant to a discussion of persecution in Yugoslavia. But there appears to be an iron determination to treat as Communist-inspired any reminder of the Orthodox Christian charges. And the machinery for enforcing this works with automatic ruthlessness. Dr. Sheehy-Skeffington, like myself, has got caught up in this machinery.

May I describe my own experiences? When I reached my home in Kilkenny from Dublin I was in rapid succession, with great formality and detail, denounced by the Kilkenny Corporation, the County Council, the vocational education committee, and several other public bodies, including a co-operative creamery. There were articles against me in the local press. I was forced to resign from a committee of the County Council, on which I have been active, and from the honorary secretaryship of the Kilkenny Archaeological Society, a flourishing interdenominational body, which I have guided harmoniously for seven years.

My neighbours are by nature tolerant and friendly, and I have never up to this discovered a trace of bigotry in them. I believe that this crushing ostracism was wholly mechanical and controlled, like the Soviet purges, from some central switchboard. No one considers me a Communist and few can believe that I wished to insult the Nuncio. If in the local press there was a hint of personal vindictiveness it came from the Left rather than from the Right. My family has been associated with Kilkenny for many centuries and I was taunted a little in the press as a member of a once-privileged and insolent minority. But, of course, we Irish Protestants have no privileges left now, except a tradition of free speech, which we mostly only exercise with discretion.

In England there is no similar reason for being discreet. I hope that, if the Roman Catholic demand (a very legitimate one) for an inquiry into the religious persecution in Yugoslavia is to be granted, it will be coupled with a demand for a free and unbiased investigation into the tragic events of 1941 in Croatia.—Yours, etc.,

Hubert Butler.

Maidenhall, Bennettsbridge, Co. Kilkenny.
December 9.

THE TRIBUNE

Sir,—The statement by a Catholic Socialist that the present Pope had never condemned the Labour Party, but had condemned Socialism, may be true. But it has not always been so.

An old Freethinker has just informed me that about forty years ago he attended a huge meeting (of mostly coal miners) at Aberdare in South Wales when the speaker, the late Mr. G. W. Foote, warned them of a certain bull issued by the then Pope stating that the ban on all Roman Catholics from joining the Labour Party or a Trade Union had now been raised, and it advised all Roman Catholics, that way inclined, to join up with a view of gaining executive positions.

An examination of the controlling power of to-day's Trade Unions will prove that the Pope of that day was not a bad judge of the future.

One Trade Union leader of great influence has had no less than four audiences recently with the present Pope. What for, we do not know exactly, but we can make a good guess.

The lesson to be learned by Freethinkers is that the Roman Catholic Church is wonderfully adaptable and, internationally, is the most powerfully political party on earth, and if Socialism or Communism is the next stage in social evolution, as per quotation from Herbert Spencer, thus: "Socialism is inevitable. Thank goodness, I shall not live to see it."

If Spencer's prediction is scientifically true, then Freethinkers must not be surprised if, in another century, effigies of Lenin and Stalin will be decorating church windows.—Yours, etc.,

Cardiff. PAUL VARNEY.

SUPERSTITIONS

SIR,—Re A. R. Williams' article entitled "The Book of Superstitions," I enclose an article just published in the *Bolton Evening News* about a superstition. You will notice that the name of a French collector of superstitions is mentioned, so I suppose there must already be a "book of superstitions." In fact, I remember having already read about superstitions in a few different books at different times, although they must not have dealt with the numerous superstitious beliefs contained in the Christian religion.—Yours, etc.,

JEAN TOUDIC.

MEDICAL RATIONALISTS

SIR,—I would like to give my warm support to Mr. Harold Hillman's suggestion. I think it is high time we Rationalists showed some willingness to do practical work instead of leaving the Christians to do it all and get the credit for so doing while we merely talk.

Money is going to be our main difficulty, and it seems that we could only do voluntary work at first. Eighteen months ago I did some work for the International Voluntary Service for Peace, an organisation which exists for the practical doing of necessary jobs that otherwise would not be done. The object, apart from that of helping the needy, is to demonstrate how voluntary workers can be got together (internationally) for peaceful, constructive work as well as for war purposes. They do road-building, forestry, interior decoration, garden-making, looking after children, helping with old people—any and every type of urgently necessary job. They work hard and cheerfully, for nothing but the simplest of board and lodging, and the gesture is a convincing one to those among whom they work. The organisation is non-party and non-sectarian, no one being barred from participation; but in practice the great majority of the volunteers and almost all of those who run the organisation are Christians of some sort. For the vigorous-minded Rationalist this does constitute a mental barrier, and I have often had the idea of a similar welfare organisation run entirely by non-believers. If we could convince people that we loved humanity and wished to serve it *for humanity's sake*, quite regardless of what Jesus Christ or any other worthy person may have said, the effect would be tremendous compared with the very small result that we seem to get from our endless writing and lecturing from our armchairs. If we could begin in a modest way the thing might gradually grow and funds might accumulate for the purpose of carrying out Mr. Hillman's excellent suggestion of "getting in first" in countries like India.—Yours, etc.,

EVELYN BELCHAMBERS.

IS CHRISTIANITY DECLINING?

SIR,—At first sight the view of Mr. Jim Flanders that the power of the Churches has been increasing over the past 50 years or so, seems irreconcilable with Mr. Rowland's contention that the power of the Churches has been declining. Yet, in a sense, both are right, although Mr. Rowland confuses power with prestige. The reason for this apparent paradox is as follows: Mr. Rowland admits that millions the world over have no longer any faith in the Church. At the same time, however, the Church has not been taking its losses lying down. To-day the Church is making ever-increasing use of new and powerful mediums, of propaganda that never existed for the Church of 50 years ago. Can Mr. Rowland doubt that as a result of the constant reiteration of Christian teaching and the exposition of Christian views on life in general, in the Press, the radio, and now even in the films and television, a far greater public is open to Christian influence than ever before?

Again, as Mr. Ridley pointed out only two weeks ago, many people and several political parties at home and abroad are rallying to support the Church, *not*, be it noticed, on account of genuine religious conviction, but for all sorts of secular and political reasons. The Church is seen as a bulwark against Communism, and the fear of a common enemy creates strange bedfellows.

We thus have the paradox of the Church, intellectually bankrupt and discredited in the eyes of millions, yet enjoying a social prestige and exerting an influence out of all proportion to its standing because of the peculiarly complex political and economic situation of the mid-20th century which, amongst other things, has resulted in the Church having more than its fair share of those mediums of mass persuasion with which it ceaselessly propagates its teaching.

The Freethought pioneers of 50 years ago correctly forecast the intellectual and moral dismissal of the Church, but they can never have foreseen that their victory would be only half a victory, as to-day the Church rises phœnix-like from the ashes of defeat to a position of social power and influence which bears not the slightest relation to its moral or intellectual worth!

Mr. Rowland appears to believe that the world is in its present war-like state because it heeds not the Church. It is difficult to see how he holds this view, as he omits to state the exact causal connection involved in such a claim. One may merely remark in passing that it is childish "reasoning" at its simplest to infer that, because two long-term processes (growing disbelief and a continuous war-like state) are going on simultaneously, therefore one is the cause of the other! We might as well attribute the cause of world unrest to the changing climate, or even the cumulative effects of our diet.

Rationality would appear to be the last phase of Mr. Rowland's development.—Yours, etc.,

JACK GORDON.

Obituary

HERBERT ELLIS

On Saturday, January 24, at the Cottingley Hall Crematorium, Leeds, we paid our last respects to one who, in his own quiet way, strove constantly to forward the cause of social justice and intellectual liberty.

Mr. Ellis was a keen Secularist, for many years a reader of *The Freethinker*, and the impressive numbers attending the final leave-taking bore testimony to the feelings of affection and respect which he had earned during his fifty-one years.

Death, in his case, must have come as a merciful relief from a long and distressingly painful illness.

At the request of his relatives a Secular service was arranged by the N.S.S., the Bradford Branch Secretary reading the final address.

W. B.

PETER SHAW

Mr. Peter Shaw, whose death at 20 we announced last week, was cremated at the South London Crematorium, Streatham, last Saturday, at 11-40 a.m. Despite the inclement weather a large number of relatives and friends were present. Mr. F. A. Ridley, Mr. W. Griffiths and Mr. F. A. Hornibrook represented the Executive Committee, N.S.S. Mr. P. Victor Morris conducted the service and paid an eloquent tribute to the deceased.—F. A. R.

JAMES PABLO

By the death of James Pablo, aged 80, Blackpool loses one of its most worthy citizens. Described in the press as "The Ice Cream King," he was widely respected for his integrity and benevolence. For his *Freethinker* he had a warm regard and his interest in the wide cause of human betterment was sustained to the end.

In accordance with his wishes, a Secular service was held and on Wednesday, at Carlton Crematorium, Mr. J. Clayton officiated. A personal tribute was delivered by the undersigned.

J. G. BURDON.

Those who were not saved

The recent flood disasters on both sides of the North Sea have produced a spate of Christian commentary and "apologetics," mostly of the crudest type. We are reminded of a humorous and, at present, very relevant story told by those pioneers of Freethought, the classical Greeks. An inquiring visitor to a certain island inquired in whose honour the temple overlooking the seashore had been erected. He was told that it was in honour of Neptune and had been built by shipwrecked mariners who had prayed to the god in their hour of peril and he had saved them. "And where then," he asked, "is the temple erected by the shipwrecked mariners who prayed to the god in their hour of peril and he did *not* save them?"

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