

The Freethinker

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Editor: F. A. RIDLEY

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THE recent disasters that have overwhelmed the low-lying coastlines on both sides of the North Sea have, as was only to be expected, produced a spate of Christian commentary and "apologetics," often of the very crudest type to which emotionalism masquerading as reason is capable of descending. For the horror of the death amid darkness which came so suddenly and unexpectedly upon the coastal districts along-side of the North Sea was further heightened by the wholly unexpected nature of the calamity. Death by flooding and the wholesale eviction of long-settled populations from their ancestral homes by the inroads of the sea, were calamities long regarded as accessory only to the most primitive communities, which the organisation of civilised nations had long relegated to the domain of fairy tales, to the dismal unreal category of "old far-off unhappy things and battles long ago." On which account their sudden and dramatic reappearance in the middle of the twentieth century rudely disturbed ways of thought that, by now, have long since become traditional.

This sudden reminder that Nature is entirely indifferent to human life and to human happiness brought religious people in general, and the churches, organised religion, in particular, up against the age-old problem: granting God's existence as the almighty Creator of the Universe, how is it possible to reconcile his alleged attributes of power and mercy with the obviously complete and ruthless indifference of Nature to human life and to human suffering? The recent spectacle, likely to be renewed at any time, of (what a recent novelist described as) "the cruel sea" advancing blindly and pitilessly on its work of indiscriminate destruction, and blindly annihilating life and happiness before its destructive path, confronted the Churches suddenly, dramatically and without warning or time for fresh reflection, with what is, perhaps, the oldest and most unanswerable problem which, from time immemorial, has confronted theology and the theologians.

The nature of that problem, as and when stripped of theological verbiage and reduced to its stark essentials, was stated, some three centuries prior to the origin of the Christian Church and era, by one of the foremost thinkers of classical antiquity. "Either," stated Epicurus, "the gods are evidently all good but not all powerful; or they are all powerful and not all good; or else they are neither all good nor all powerful." Only under one of these alternative hypotheses, argued our Greek Rationalist, could the existence and benevolence of the gods be reconciled with the grim and ruthless procedure of a normally amoral Nature.

Epicurus himself "solved"—or avoided?—the theological impasse by obligingly deifying his gods of all active functions. The Epicurean Deities had nothing else to do but admire their own ineffable perfection: the Epicurean gods were the first "leisured class" in recorded history!

But Christian theology, at any rate in its traditionally orthodox forms, whether Catholic or Protestant, cannot take this easy way out. For the Christian Trinity, like all gods who attract any large or permanent following, is a god who *does* things; who hears and periodically *answers* prayer. The English and Dutch Christians of to-day who see their homes flooded and their relatives suddenly swept away into oblivion by the sudden inrush of swirling torrents, naturally expected a *living* god to hear and to *answer* their prayers. And what did he actually *do*? Nothing! Absolutely nothing at all!

Why did a supposedly all-powerful and all-merciful god do nothing to relieve such obviously unexpected and undeserved distress? The simple atheistic answer, "There ain't no such person," is, obviously, not admissible to a theologian who, by definition, must have some god or gods somewhere in the Universe. Actually the theologians have no uniform answer to the question as to why a God of Mercy proves so merciless in practice. The more intelligent take refuge in a "spiritual" universe far removed from this mundane world with its floods, earthquakes and other physical trials. It is only in the Spirit-land that the writ of God actually runs. However, apart from its inherent improbability, this form of theological escapism is open to one fatal objection: the man-in-the-street, upon whom all religions depend for their continued existence, and who is by no means a philosopher, will never accept and *worship* a god who actually *does* nothing in the only world with which his worshippers have any visible contact.

The less intelligent theologians, who are, of course, in the great majority, can only fall back on two hoary fallacies which were long ago exploded. Either a plain "Ignoramus" ("We don't know"), "God moves in mysterious ways his wonders to perform," an "answer" which begs the question and which leaves us exactly where we were before: an answer which, incidentally, was long ago demolished by the great Spinoza when he reminded us that "God is the asylum of ignorance"; alternatively, our theological pundits drag in a hypothetical Future Life to redress the balance of this one. To which one must reply that, apart from the improbability of the existence of such an undemonstrated world, the injustice we experience is here and now. Injustice in *this* world is in no way recompensed by justice in another. It is for salvation *here and now* that drowning people pray, not in some hypothetical heaven where, in any case, the Scriptures relate that there is no sea in which to drown!

For the most part, hard-pressed "apologists" took refuge in sloppy floods of emotion at the spectacle of floating babies and ruined homes, and went on to celebrate as an "act of God" the social organisation and remedial measures which were so promptly taken to relieve

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

God blew with His Winds

—By F. A. RIDLEY—

the distress of the sufferers. But such reasoning is wholly inadmissible. Social solidarity, with its resulting ethical outlook, is a product, not of a hypothetical deity, but of actual human society. Indeed, it is altogether probable that the earliest forms of a social ethic first originated in primitive human societies when they found themselves confronted by precisely such manifestations of a hostile and, to them, inexplicable nature as those which have just devastated our shores. Human solidarity in the presence of the blind forces of Nature proves, not the existence of God and his mercy, but the existence of human society and its elemental need for survival.

"God blew with his winds and they were scattered." So wrote Queen Elizabeth on the morrow of the defeat of the Spanish Armada (1588). The description, if a trifle hard on Drake and his sea-dogs, who had done the actual fighting, had some justification in that the weather had been in a Protestant mood and had hampered the Catholic Armada at every turn. The whole Protestant world rejoiced at this happy deliverance. If, however, the wind

had blown the armada *towards* England instead of *away* from it the Catholic world would, no doubt, have ascribed the purely natural coincidence to the inscrutable wisdom of the Catholic God. God gets the praise either way. In actual fact, of course, Nature is entirely unconscious of, and indifferent to, human needs. To refer again to the first Freethinkers, the ancient Greeks: "Nothing is made for our use; but many things which are made are useful to us." Thus went on record the great Epicurus who, twenty-two centuries ago, was far ahead of our present-day "defenders of the Faith."

That rationalistic Christian, Oliver Cromwell, issued the historic advice to his "Ironsides" to "trust in God and keep their powder dry." The first piece of advice was problematical; the second, of incontestable value. Our advice to the stricken dwellers by the North Sea is to save their breath from futile prayers, and use it for strengthening their coastal defences. In the event of further inundations, they will find this decidedly the more useful procedure.

Lord Acton's Early Historical Studies

By T. F. PALMER

ACTON'S *Essays on Church and State* (Hollis and Carter, 1952) have been edited by Mr. Douglas Woodruff who has rescued them from long defunct periodicals. As a Catholic, he naturally defends his faith, yet he candidly confesses the errors into which the Church has fallen and never favours any form of intolerance, while his immense erudition entitles his conclusions to impartial consideration.

A scion of an old Shropshire family, John Acton was born at Naples in 1834, where his grandfather had been the Neopolitan ruler's prime minister during the French Revolution and the period of Napoleon Bonaparte. Acton's mother was a German of Romanist persuasion, while Dr. Dollinger became the boy's tutor, and this priest's modernist ideas doubtless influenced his pupil who retained Dollinger's friendship to the last, even after his teacher had completely broken with Rome.

When Acton arrived in England an attempt was made to enter him as a student at Cambridge, but this effort failed. He entered Parliament, but his youthful aspirations were more literary than political. Thus he became a contributor successively to *The Rambler*, *The Home and Foreign Review* and other periodicals conducted by recent converts to Catholicism through the Oxford Movement who were anxious to establish periodicals of a serious religious character.

Acton was then in his twenties and he was born in the faith, but all his literary colleagues were converts from Anglicanism, Newman among them. As married men, most of them were excluded from the clergy and as they favoured the cause of free inquiry, especially in science, they exhibited a critical spirit alien to the Catholic tradition which their newly-made co-religionists deeply resented.

Pius IX began his pontificate with a tendency towards liberal views, but Italian aspirations made him a reactionary. The Romanist hierarchy had recently been established in England with Wiseman as its first Archbishop of Westminster. He was a man of moderate tendencies, but he was succeeded by Manning who was bigoted and narrow-minded and his influence proved fatal to modernism also there was rivalry between *The Rambler* and the *Dublin Review* and Simpson, the editor of the former periodical, was compelled to resign and for a brief period Newman became editor. But he was soon in trouble, and the Bishops' antagonism led to his resignation.

Newman was wounded and apparently shared Acton's indignation of the clerical intolerance displayed. For in a letter to Newman Acton declared: "I beg of you, remembering the difficulties you encountered, to consider my position in the midst of a hostile and illiterate episcopate, an ignorant clergy, a prejudiced and divided laity with the cliques at Brompton, York Place, Ushaw always on the watch, obliged to sit in judgment on the theology of the men you selected to be your patrons, deserted by the assistant you obtained for me, with no auxiliary and adviser but Simpson." All these and other anomalies induced Newman to mournfully admit that he would have been grieved "had not the experiences of many years made me tire of indignation and complaint."

These are striking examples of the despotism exercised in the Catholic community by the Cardinals and Bishops. Still, the marvel remains that Acton never renounced Catholicism, even when, at a later period, he feared excommunication, and would die, like Dr. Dollinger, outside the Roman fold.

Acton's devotion to truth and freedom of expression was his main offence to an obscurantist hierarchy. Indeed, all his other efforts to enlighten the Catholics in England ended in failure. Yet, at first rejected at Cambridge, he ultimately became its celebrated Professor of History and planned its historical volumes and abandoned his youthful attempts to broaden and enlighten his co-religionists. As Woodruff avers: "To the end of his life a devout Catholic, he had concluded that there was little for him to do for the Church in his own unpropitious time, when so much that he disliked and disapproved was in the ascendant."

Certainly Acton's hold criticism of what he deemed wrong in his cult was almost unique with Catholic historians and apologists. For instance, his strictures on the Spanish Inquisition are noteworthy. He declares that when literature and learning were making great strides in England, France and Italy, they became virtually extinct in Spain. He states that "After the beginning of the seventeenth century no great works appeared on ecclesiastical or pagan antiquities, or metaphysics or natural science. Even those branches of divinity which had most flourished in Spain, flourished but a short time. No history was cultivated but their own. In philosophy-

antiquities and natural science, Spain has the lowest place among the great nations of Europe. All this destruction the Inquisition wrought in a very short space."

Yet, as Acton observes, Catholic apologetic writers have declared that the Inquisition was not adverse to culture and have virtually maintained "that a scholar is not interrupted in his studies until he is burnt at an *auto da fé*."

And Those My Enemies

By MICHAEL J. BARNES

AN issue of *The Freethinker* last year contained, in reply to an editorial by Mr. Ridley, an article by one Fr. Mizzi, in which I was very interested.

I would not encroach upon the prerogative of our worthy Editor by venturing to reply to the Reverend gentleman, even supposing I was capable of doing so; it is merely with a side issue that I wish to deal.

In the course of his learned diatribe, Fr. Mizzi states that "it is impossible to find a single example of a defined dogma officially or in any way contradicted by the official Church," and amongst the defined dogmas to which he refers are those enunciated by the various general councils which exercise a supposed infallibility. That Roman Catholics are supposed to believe in these things, the Creed of Pius IV leaves no doubt, containing as it does "I promise and swear true obedience to the Roman Pontiff . . . also all other things delivered, defined and declared by the sacred canons and oecumenical councils and particularly by the Holy Synod of Trent." Yet that the immutability of these pronouncements should please Fr. Mizzi as he states they do, can only, in my most humble opinion, emanate either from his own ignorance of the infallible utterances of the aforementioned general councils, or his conviction of ours.

Out of the putrefying mass of dogmas pronounced by the various councils, we find six major "blots," six dogmas that have brought untold misery to mankind, that have made hate, murder and fear the foundation of faith; namely, the dogmas infallibly pronounced by the Holy Synod of Trent, the council of Toledo and the third and fourth Lateran councils, which briefly amount to this:—

1. That Protestants of all denominations are accounted heretics by the Church of Rome.
2. That all persons having once suffered baptism are placed under the power of the Church of Rome.
3. That so far from granting tolerance, the Church of Rome considers it her duty to exterminate the rites of other religions.
4. That the Church of Rome considers it her duty to compel all baptised persons, by corporal punishment to submit to her faith.
5. That the punishments she decrees are confiscation of property, exile, imprisonment and death.
6. That the only restraint on the application of these her doctrines is a mere question of expediency when it may suit the convenience of the Papal power.

That persecution was rife during the Middle Ages is a well known fact, and it is interesting to note that Canon Law, the ecclesiastical law of medieval Europe, which provided for these persecutions, is still the law of the Roman Catholic Church.

Unfortunately, to-day the average Roman Catholic knows as little about the doctrines of his Church as the

average non-Catholic, and it is common to hear ill-mannered and ill-learned youths portraying the Roman Church, on behalf of the Catholic Evidence, as a veritable paragon of all virtues that fairly oozes tolerance from every pore; the pronouncements of the various Popes and the dictates of the numerous encyclicals they dismiss as heretic inspired lies, into which category falls everything of which they are not personally aware, that their sincerity is as profound as their ignorance is undoubtable, and it is in order to lighten their, and Fr. Mizzi's, darkness that I intend to wax voluble on the unpleasant subject of the oecumenical councils.

I have never yet heard, or heard of, a Catholic apologist bothering to deny the fact that his Church regards Protestants *en masse* as heretics, but should there be any doubt on the subject a glance at the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, p. 360, vol. 13, 11th Ed., "Theologia moralis et dogmatica" by Petri Dens, vol. II, p. 114, or the canons of the Councils of Trent in general should suffice to prove the contention: with the other five dogmas I will deal more fully.

That all baptised persons are placed under the power of the Church of Rome and can be compelled to return to that faith is made abundantly clear by these extracts from the Council of Trent: "if any shall say that the baptism, which is even given to heretics, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, with the intention of doing what the Church does, is not true baptism—let him be damned" Session 7, Canon 4, and also: "if any shall say that baptised persons are free from all the commands of the Holy Church, which have been either written or handed down, unless they choose to submit to them of their own accord—let him be damned" Session 7, Canon 8.

Justification for compelling heretics to submit to the will of the Church of Rome was found by St. Augustine in the "compel them to come in" of Luke xiv, 23, and was later ratified by the Council of Trent Session 7, Canon 14, and the fourth council of Toledo, Canon 55. As Fr. Mizzi has stated in his article, "the content of a defined dogma must ultimately be traceable, and is infallibly contained, either explicitly or implicitly, in the sources of revelation (i.e., Scripture and divine tradition)" and according to the Church of Rome, Luke xiv, 23, implies this "the vehement persuasion that God useth, both externally, by force of his word and miracles and internally, by his grace, to bring us unto him is called compelling. St. Augustine also referreth this compelling to the penal laws which Catholic princes do justly use against heretics and schismatics, proving that they who are by their former profession in baptism, subject to the Catholic Church and therefore are to be reached not only by gentle means but by just punishments also." (Note on Luke xiv, 23, contained in authorised edition of "The Holy Catholic Bible" printed in Cork, A.D. 1818).

(To be concluded)

This Believing World

One of those all-believing parsons—there are still some—the Rev. G. W. Underwood, in one of his most “slushy” religious articles, quotes an Atheist as saying, “I am an Atheist, thank God,” and thus “gives the game away.” This means, of course, that when an Atheist says “Thank God,” in this way, he really isn’t an Atheist, but a believer like the Rev. gentleman. It is astonishing how these people love to delude themselves. If he were to read this column regularly he would find we often say “Thank God,” but how many of our modern parsons have a sense of humour? Do they ever smile? Or even understand what they read?

Our—more or less—pious contemporary, *Sunday Graphic*, publishes a letter from a very religious lady who has discovered how to bring England back to Christ. Let us close all churches and make theatre and cinema-going compulsory, and at once “there will be such a religious revival as this country has never seen.” We expect this lady would have us up for criminal libel if we printed what we thought of her intelligence. Compel people to go to a cinema on a Sunday and they would immediately believe in Miracles, in Hell, in Heaven, in Devils, Demons, Spooks, Witches and, of course, Angels! Is it any wonder that we oppose religion when this kind of silliness is seriously proposed?

The Archbishop of York recently claimed that he had “never known the Church so active.” He is quite right—the Church, Roman, Anglo, and the rest, is making every effort to bring in the backsliders, the indifferentists, the half-believers and, no doubt, even the reverent Rationalists. But what does it really mean? That the Church is roping in and making converts? Why, there has never been so many cosh-thugs and so many attempts at murder, and so many murderers in the history of this country as there are now. And it cannot be too strongly urged that the criminals—whatever the cause of their crimes—are and were religious. If not, why are gaol chaplains provided for them? Why does the Home Office complain that there are so few unbelievers in prison that it will not provide even one Freethought visitor?

The great and wonderful news that has flashed around the world and makes front page headings is that a Roman Catholic film star has decided to become a nun. It is far more exciting and necessary for the public to know this than the tragic details of the East Coast and Holland floods. For some reason we cannot grasp, the doings of these film stars are considered world-shattering events though the truth is surely that, apart from good looks and a little acting ability, few of them have any more intelligence than is generally associated with the back row of chorus girls. And no doubt Miss Haver will be better employed in counting her beads and looking after children than acting the fortunate or unfortunate heroine in films. That is all there is in it.

One of our provincial newspapers, the *Cheadle Times*, like so many others, appears to be staggered at “spiritual” healing—at least, there have been some “amazing” cures in Cheadle, and, strangely enough, “some of them denied.” Well, it’s good to find that even “some” are denied. The healer is a Pastor Harris, and he tells everybody, “It is Jesus that saves and Jesus that heals.” And naturally, “If you want to be saved you must believe in Jesus Christ.”

Armed in this way with Divine Power, Pastor Harris has been curing the sick, the paralysed, and the cripples, including the inevitable un-named Atheist who forthwith became a Christian again, and lustily joined in the prayers and the hymn singing. Is there anything in it? asks the *Cheadle Times*. A straight answer could be given if Pastor Harris went to the local hospital and cleared out a ward of surgical cases, all cured in an hour or so with the help of Christ Jesus, prayers, and plenty of hymns. But the one place all faith healers shirk is the ward of a hospital. And the *Cheadle Times* could answer why.

The Old Cock Sparrow

By LESLIE HANGER

THE Pilgrim wandered round Assisi in search of someone who could remember the blessed and holy St. Francis, but the Saint had been dead rather a long time and they all shook their heads. Then the Pilgrim remembered the Saint’s fondness for preaching to the birds, so he questioned them until he came upon an Old Cock Sparrow, who answered, “Francesco Bernadone? Sure, I remember him—Frankie boy we used to call him, and what a lad he was: never did things by halves.”

The Pilgrim leaned against the wall on which the bird was perched, and the Old Cock Sparrow, after a moment’s pause to refresh his memory, continued: “When I knew him first, Frankie was up to every devilment you could think of, and couldn’t have kept his hands off the girls to save his life. Then, as usually happens, someone had to start a war. Off he went with confidence enough to conquer Europe, but he soon found it takes more than courage to win a battle. Wonderful what a difference a really good fight can make to one, when Frankie came back it was obvious he had been scared to death, he was what they call ‘a changed man.’ Only he wasn’t changed at all really, he was still the same old Frankie who never did anything by halves, and he went from one extreme to the other. All his old life was stripped off, even to the clothes he stood up in. As I told you, Frankie never did things by halves. We had a good laugh at his expense, but he didn’t mind, he took it all in good part and stuck to his new ways.

“We thought he would soon tire of it, but we were wrong, and soon he had a band of followers as crazy as himself. And to crown it all—what do you think? One of his girl friends runs away from home to join him. The poor girl was really in love with him there’s no doubt. If only he had married her, settled down and raised a family, he could have been a useful member of society like you or I, instead of going about the countryside preaching all kinds of queer things. He even tried preaching to us birds, but we told him to save his breath. We birds have no souls and so our lives aren’t troubled with hopes of heaven and fears of hell. I suppose that is why you humans can never be quite so happy as us. Not but what he didn’t have some sensible things to say at times, for he would tell his followers not to carry arms, take oaths, or engage in law-suits. And very sensible too. But did they take his advice? Not one in a thousand. He’s a saint now, and people all over the world worship him. Yet how many of them attempt to carry out that simple bit of advice?”

“It is not so simple as it sounds,” objected the Pilgrim, “it would mean altering the whole structure of society.”

“I think that is what Frankie wanted to do in his own queer way.” And with that the Old Cock Sparrow flew away.

THE FREETHINKER

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To Correspondents

Mr. and Mrs. E. W. Shaw and family thank all those members of the Secular Society and readers of *The Freethinker* who have sent such kind letters and have expressed their sympathy at the sad death of their eldest son Peter. Particular thanks is extended to those Freethinkers who attended the cremation, as well as to Mr. P. Victor Morris for his excellent address at the Secular service.

THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, £1 4s. (in U.S.A., \$3.50); half-year, 12s.; three months, 6s.

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

Lecture Notices should reach the Secretary of the N.S.S. at this Office by Friday morning.

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

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Bomb Site).—Every week-day, 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

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Satis Café, 40, Cannan Street, off New Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Brains Trust.

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m.: C. W. KEARMAN, "The Romance and Tragedy of Oil."

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1). — Tuesday, February 24, 7 p.m.: Miss M. SAMUELS, S.R.N., S.C.M., "Family Planning: an Essential Social Service."

Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: Dr. STARK MURRAY (President, Socialist Medical Association), "The Cost in Health."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Large Lecture Theatre, Technical College, Shakespeare Street). — Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: W. PAUL (55th Anniversary), "How Free is Free?"

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: D. G. MACRAE, M.A., "Voltaire and Pascal."

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Street, Edgware Road, W. 2).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: P. VICTOR MORRIS, "The Consolations of Irreligion."

NOTES AND NEWS

The Freethinker has for some time past criticised the B.B.C. for the shameless partisanship which it displays for religion, in general, and for Christianity in particular. We are now pleased to report that an exception has been made to this practice: at 10 p.m. on Tuesday, on the "Home" programme, a new feature has now been incorporated, *Encounters of Belief*. In this "encounter" two non-Christians dispute with two Christians. In the two "encounters" held so far, the Christian champions were an Oxford Jesuit, Fr. Vincent Turner, and Prof. Basil Willey, of Cambridge University, whilst the two non-Christian champions of "Humanism" were Mr. H. J. Blackham, of the "Ethical Union," and Mr. Philip Toynbee, of *The Observer*.

Whilst we welcome any concession, on the part of Broadcasting House, towards a more liberal policy in religious matters, we must record our criticism of the inadequacy of the programme as actually presented over the air. One "Humanist," Mr. Philip Toynbee, actually went on record on both occasions with the truly astonish-

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Previously acknowledged, £58 16s.; A. Hancock, 1s. (11th donation); Mr. Clowes, 4s. 9d.; V. B. Adams, 16s. Total, £59 17s. 9d.

ing remark that he hoped that Christianity would not disappear! But, surely, a thing is either true or false; if false, as our Humanist presumably regards it, the sooner it disappears the better! If a Rationalist, Mr. Toynbee evidently is one of the most "reverent" kind. Mr. Blackham, as those who know him would expect, made some most able criticisms on the philosophical side and demonstrated no mean skill as a debater. But the whole discussion remained unreal and academic, since it implicitly recognised the claim of Christianity to be regarded as, fundamentally, a philosophy and not a collection of more or less rationalised superstitions. The Christians, the astute Fr. Turner in particular, were evidently very well satisfied to keep the debate on this, for them, convenient level. But, we rather fancy, had the defenders of Christianity had to encounter Rationalists of the calibre of, say, John M. Robertson and Chapman Cohen, they would not have escaped so easily. Christian dogma was hardly discussed at all.

A correspondent, Mr. J. R. Howes, sends us a very interesting letter which he received from the secretary of "Pax," a Catholic pacifist (sic) body. This letter appears to indicate a somewhat startling change in the attitude of Catholics to atheists and other unbelievers, for the writer, Mr. A. Allison, states *inter alia*:—

"I quite agree that the phrase 'atheistic materialism' has unfortunate associations, and I would like to scrap it. It takes its origin, of course, from the old conviction among Christians that 'faith' is essential to salvation and that the atheist is, of his very nature, an evil man. *Most of us realise how ludicrous this is.*" (Our italics.) Shade of Torquemada! At this rate, atheists will soon have as much chance of salvation as believers! We are rather afraid that "Pax" will be hearing soon from the Vatican!

Since the floods referred to elsewhere in this issue, a veritable cloud of prayer has ascended to the Throne of Grace. And what has been the result of it all? More rain, more floods, more snow, more deaths, more misery all round in the worst disaster of its kind for centuries. Is it not high time that their dupes prosecuted the clergy for taking money under false pretences: for the pretence that the Lord is able and willing to answer prayer?

THE CASE FOR

"SUNDAY FREEDOM"

Public Meeting organised by the National Secular Society at 7-30 p.m., Wednesday, February 25.

Conway Small Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C. 1. Doors open 7 p.m.

Speakers:

L. EBURY F. A. RIDLEY G. H. TAYLOR

Chairman: P. VICTOR MORRIS

Questions and Discussion

Admission Free

The Sunday Question

By H. CUTNER

ALTHOUGH the question of a "Sabbath" day has been discussed in this country for many centuries, most Christian sects are very chary of admitting that the Sabbath Day of the Bible is *not* our English Sunday.

The Sabbath Day is the seventh day of the week and is kept as such by Jews and those Christians, like the Seventh Day Adventists, who follow the Bible. Any day can be a "Sabbath" day, of course, and there are some festivals mentioned in the Bible which have their "Sabbaths"; though here is not meant the day God commanded the Jews to keep holy because it was the day when he rested after the arduous task of creating the Universe out of nothing—including the stars.

Nobody has any idea when the first day occurred in history except Bible Fundamentalists; and unless we can locate that day it is impossible to say when the seventh day first occurred. Nobody knows when and how the ancient Jews created a chronology which enabled them to count the first seven days, and thus fix the seventh day.

In ancient civilisations, special days were singled out by astrologers as favourable days, and others as unlucky days. Who first fixed a week of seven days nobody knows; though we do know why and how some numbers were regarded as lucky numbers, like the number seven which is used more than any other right through the Bible. In my little book, *What is the Sabbath Day?* this is discussed in detail.

But for our present purpose, it really matters little that we do not know how the seventh day was arrived at. All we need insist is that, if the Bible is called upon to bolster up the claim that Sunday is a "Sabbath" day, there is not a line anywhere in God's Word about Sunday as a Sabbath. When Jesus Christ talked about the Sabbath, he meant the seventh day Sabbath and no other. Sunday supporters can call in the Roman Catholic Church to prove their case, but *not* the Bible. It was the Church which switched the day from the seventh to the first day of the week, and Christian apologists have had a pious time trying to justify the switch. Given a brilliant theologian, and he can muddle any of his Christian followers into almost believing anything; and so strong have been some of their arguments and so ferocious their hatred of everything Jewish, particularly the Commandment to keep the Sabbath Day holy, that Sunday is almost everywhere kept as the Sabbath Day and—this is the joke—the Bible is dragged in as the final authority to prove it *is* the Sabbath Day when it is nothing of the kind.

The promoters of the Lord's Day Observance Society knew this quite well, and knew also what mugs they had for followers. Sunday is quite rightly the "Lord's" day, that is, the day on which occurred the supposed Resurrection of Jesus Christ; and, in fighting for its retention as the *Lord's* Day, they are within their rights. But when asked for some "real" authority to support their case, they invariably fall back upon the Bible and God's command in the Ten Commandments—the mugs imagining that God made Sunday the Sabbath when he did nothing of the kind. It was a very wily move to call their Society, the "Lord's" Day Observance Society.

Not only in the House of Commons, but in the discussion staged by the B.B.C. on February 5 last, one could see how the supporters of the Bill to humanise our Puritan Sunday were hopelessly confused over the issue—the Sabbath Day, or the Lord's Day? There were four speakers and a chairman before the microphone, and it was very

amusing to see how cleverly the secretary of the Lord's Day Observance Society fooled the secretary of the Sunday Freedom Association on this very issue. As an example, pious Mr. Legerton was constantly reiterating that the people, that is, the general public, *ought* to understand this or that, *ought* to do something or other, or *ought* to refrain from making Sunday a "continental" Sunday. When he was sharply asked, who was responsible for the "ought," Mr. Legerton completely hedged. He should have said that it was the Lord's Day Observance Society which was ready to make the public do what it wanted; but sensing this would not exactly do, he fell back upon God Almighty and the Bible and God's precious Commandment to keep the Sabbath Day holy. We must do what God commands, he pleaded—and his opponent, Mr. Sensier, hadn't the wit to see how cleverly he was tricked. God did not command Sunday to be kept as the Sabbath Day, but *Saturday*, and the Bible cannot be brought in to support the case for Sunday.

Whether Sunday should or should not be kept as our Puritan Sabbatarian want, is quite another problem. From the simple command in the Bible to keep the Sabbath Day holy—without properly defining what the word "holy" really means—the Jews have evolved a long code of rules and prohibitions most of which are too silly to discuss. (One of these rules is, I believe, that it is a sin to carry a handkerchief on a Saturday.) If people wish to make themselves miserable with insane prohibitions is their own affair. We Freethinkers concede their every right to do so. What we object to is their right to force other people to do what they do.

The Puritans and the dismal Sabbatarian have taken some of the worst features of the Jewish Sabbath, and these are precisely the features which the British people appear on the whole to be only too glad to have forced upon them. The Welsh Labour M.P. who regaled the House of Commons in the debate on Mr. Parker's Bill with an extremely pious sermon was enthusiastically received; and the Methodist parson who spoke on the radio in "Taking Stock," with great glee boasted how in Wales they stopped Sunday cinemas. What the National Secular Society stands for in these things is the freedom of the individual. We do not force people to go to a Sunday cinema, but we object very strongly to a gang of misery-mongers forcing us, by law, to be as miserable as themselves.

On the TV, it is to the credit of the ex-Independent M.P., W. J. Brown, that he stigmatised the House of Commons as a bunch of cowards which, in truth, they were. The M.P.'s who opposed Mr. Parker were possibly afraid of losing votes. How many of them had the magnificent courage of Charles Bradlaugh who was voted into Parliament by the electors of Northampton, time after time, though they knew he was an Atheist? What a contrast to the spineless attitude of some modern M.P.'s!

Well, the fight is not over by a very long way. It will not cease, in fact—to quote Blake a little inexactly—

"Till we've built a jolly Sunday,
In England's green and pleasant land."

WHAT IS THE SABBATH DAY? By H. Cutner. Price 1s. 3d.; postage 2d.

THE HISTORICAL JESUS AND THE MYTHICAL CHRIST. By Gerald Massey. What Christianity owes to Ancient Egypt. Price 1s.; postage 2d.

The Press Is Not So Smart

By P. VICTOR MORRIS

THE circulation boosters of the *Sunday Pictorial*, with its weekly sale of well over five million copies, are doubtless very astute business men, and the idea of publishing a collection of opinions on the value of prayer, following the Queen's "Pray for me" appeal in her Christmas broadcast, might have proved quite a good one. But, after a pressing invitation in the issue of January 4 to readers of all views to send in their experiences and opinions, how deplorably the idea was mismanaged!

The next week the line to be taken was all too clear, and I gave up hope that my contribution would be honoured by inclusion in the "Pic's" pages. Readers were informed that the great majority of over 1,500 letters received showed belief in prayer; so, while a couple of not particularly effective statements of disbelief were quoted, the rest of the letters published were variants of stories we have all heard so often. "My sick child was given up by the doctors, but when the family, friends and neighbours all joined in prayer, a cure resulted." "Lying between the German and Allied lines, I asked the Virgin Mary to spread her cloak around me, and came out of that day's firing without a scratch." And so on, advertising God's poor judgment when choosing supplicants to favour.

What a contemptible lot they are, flaunting their successes in the faces of millions who at some time or other have prayed in vain for *their* loved ones to be spared or for delivery from trials that seemed beyond human aid! That minority who say their prayers have been answered always seem devoid of sympathy for their less-favoured fellows, and I do not believe that the *Pictorial* has gained readers by printing such poor stuff.

Indeed, there is reason to think that readers may have been lost. One letter published was from an excommunicated Roman Catholic priest. After eighteen years in holy orders he lost his faith in the Church. He prayed in agony,

and God answered him thus: "The only thing for an honest man to do was to leave the Church." Did the editor realise that in giving this as a reliable instance of answered prayer he was claiming that God Almighty had condemned and disowned the oldest and most influential Christian body in existence? I have a feeling that those responsible for this series of articles, which has now fizzled out, are suffering some discomfiture, for the R.C. Church does not sit down when inconvenienced by disclosures of the nature quoted.

Perhaps I may be allowed to give my own contribution which the *Sunday Pictorial* did not print? "Prayer is part of a system of primitive superstition inherited by this age from the pre-scientific past. The growth of science has undermined the belief in prayer, but so powerful are custom and the fear of social disapproval that a pretence of believing is very general. Real belief in prayer only survives in the modern world because parents and teachers instill it into the impressionable minds of young children, thereby creating a bias towards prayer and against practical proposals for dealing with life's problems. The Queen's appeal for prayers is understandable because she has probably been more sheltered from contact with unorthodox points of view than has the average listener to her Christmas broadcast; which I think is a great pity."

All things considered, I am seriously of the opinion that it would have been good business for the *Sunday Pictorial* to have published this letter. It might have annoyed a minority of religious bigots, but it would have given the majority something different to get their teeth into, and my experience of the man and woman in the street tells me that they would have appreciated the opportunity. Religion is bad "copy" in the modern irreligious world; the truth about religion is another matter, but the Press is afraid to touch it. Perhaps soon a paper with a big circulation will venture to display greater boldness and enterprise. Which will be first, I wonder?

Man Answers Death

By J. O'HARE

An Anthology of Poetry. Edited by Corliss Lamont. Introduction by L. Untermeyer. Watts & Co. 15s.

DEATH, the inescapable lover of all men, and man's proud answer to his advances is the theme of this anthology. To criticise an anthology is to enumerate sins of omission and inclusion, for no anthology can be perfect, least of all an anthology of poetry; but *Man Answers Death* is a collection of poems superbly chosen. Perhaps there is a little too much Masfield, and perhaps it is an error to put Wilde's *Requiescat* in the same book with Arnold's *Requiescat*, and perhaps Isaac Watt's *Heaven* and Carpenter's *Little Heart* should be taken out. But against these perhapses are the splendid certainties, sovereigns ringing truly on the counter of the years. *Fear no more the heat o' the sun*, that noblest of all lyrics against death's assailing, is the keynote of the whole book.

"My organising principle has been the philosophical doctrine known as Humanism, which interprets death as the absolute end of the individual conscious personality and which sets up the progress and well-being of men on this earth as the supreme goal of life." So says Mr. Lamont in his preface, and very successfully does he carry out his purpose.

As this is an American anthology it is perhaps natural

that there is more American poetry in it than is usually to be found in British productions, some of which may not be familiar to the English reader. It should be. Poe, Whitman, Dickinson, Edna St. Vincent Millay are there, of course, and there is a curiously effective dirge by Melville, the first truly American man of letters; but there are six or seven Americans herein who should send the English reader enquiring for more news of them. Harry Kemp, for instance:—

Tell them, O Sky-born, when I die
With high romance to wife,
That I went out as I had lived,
Drunk with the joy of life.
Yea, say that I went down to death
Serene and unafraid,
Still loving Song, but loving more
Life, of which Song is made!

and Ezra Pound's splendid fragment *Erat Hora*, and the unpredictable Dorothy Parker with her *Of A Woman, Dead Young*,

Whose days were a pattering of peas
From the pod to the bowl in her lap.
and Alan Seeger with his sublime remark,

I have a rendezvous with Death
At some disputed barricade.

Not the least excellence of this book is also by an American, Mr. Louis Untermeyer's introduction; for Mr. Untermeyer has, for over thirty years, done more for poets than perhaps any man on either side of the Atlantic. But only to a registrar of births and the War Office has a poet a nationality: within the covers of a book poets have all the same citizenship. And here is the voice of all the civilised ages—"the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome," the radiance that was England lighted by Shakespeare, and the glow in all lands where poets have spoken—in a word, the only immortality. For it is conceivable that when the earth is mangled again by man's foolish toys, and the nations go down, and the cities crumble, and the jungle swarms back to its old possession, still in some cave will lean a man over a tattered book, still in some mind will the great sanity of the poets keep madness from absolute conquest. Gone, all gone, the great nations that builded for all time, except for a few scattered stones and the words their poets spoke. In *Man Answers Death* is the real wisdom of man, uttered more compellingly than any ponderosity of pedants or damnation of dons could utter in a thousand annotated volumes.

Mr. Lamont has not only compiled a beautiful book, but he has shown us that America is not wholly given over to the worship of the adolescent and to witch-hunting, and that aristocracy of mind and nobility of utterance have their place in the transatlantic civilisation.

Men must endure their going hence
Even as their coming hither.
Ripeness is all.

Beyond that, what man can speak?

Atheism in India

Religion is a luxury which India in its present condition cannot possibly afford. India will never be free until the Hindus and the Moslems are as tepidly enthusiastic about their religion as we are about the Church of England. If I were an Indian millionaire, I would leave all my money for the endowment of an Atheist Mission.

ALDOUS HUXLEY.

Correspondence

INFALLIBILITY AND CATHOLIC DOGMA

SIR.—In your editorial of December 14, which purports to be a reply to my letter published in *The Freethinker* on August 10, four long months ago, you have declined, I am sorry to say, for the second time to pick up my challenge. You have again wandered away from the point at issue. For the crucial point of the whole question—I beg leave to repeat—is not whether there ever has been difference of opinion among some Catholic Theologians, but whether there has been any change in official, defined Catholic doctrine. It is here that the matter hinges. (*The Freethinker*, August 10.) This gauntlet, however, you have not taken up.

To adduce, as you do, instances of private individuals who have deviated from Catholic Orthodoxy, or of theologians, however eminent, as Bossuet undoubtedly was, who held views different from, or in opposition to, the teaching of the Catholic Church does not in any way impugn my thesis. Nay, the case of the Gallican theory on Papal Infallibility, upon which you seem to lay so much stress, confirms it in a remarkable manner.

The Gallican doctrine drawn up in 1680 by a number of French bishops succeeded in mustering only a scanty following outside France, and even there, though enforced by royal decree upon universities, seminaries and colleges, it was far from universally accepted. Condemned as early as 1690 by Alexander VIIIth and

by later Pontiffs, it rapidly lost ground even in the home of its birth, until it was definitely wiped out by the Vatican Council (fr. C. Butler, *The Vatican Council*, Vol. 1, ch. *Gallicanism*).

It is hardly possible, I think, to find a clearer and stronger example than this of the consistent, unchanging character of the official teaching of the Catholic Church. And it is exactly with the official teaching of the Church, as expressed in the dogmatic utterances of Popes or General Councils, that we are concerned, not with the private, human, fallible opinion of the theologians.

Private theologians have deviated time and again from Catholic Orthodoxy, but the official teaching Church (*Ecclesia docens*) in her *ex cathedra* pronouncements has never done so. That is the point.

With reference to that figment of your imagination—sorry, but what else can I call it?—of two Infallibilities within the Catholic Church, which your dilemma implies, I wish to point out that within the framework of Catholic Dogma there is no place for such an absurdity. There are no two Infallibilities, but *one* only, the Church together with the visible Head, the Pope, forming *one* inseparable body, i.e., the Mystical Body of Christ. This is brought out very forcibly in the Vatican decree: "We teach and define that it is a dogma divinely revealed: that the *Roman Pontiff*, when he speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, when in discharge of the office of Pastor and Doctors of all Christians . . . is possessed of that Infallibility with which the Divine Redeemer willed that His Church should be endowed for defining doctrine regarding Faith or Morals." (*Const. Dogm. I De Ecclesia Christi* cap. 4.)

As there is but one Infallibility, your dilemma falls to the ground, *telum imbelles sine ictu*.

Regarding your last point, (c), I do not think you have brought forward any fresh evidence in support of your original contention. To avoid, then, any further inroads on your valuable space, I refer you and your readers to my previous letter published in your paper on August 10.—Yours, etc.,

(Rev.) JOSEPH MIZZI.

SUPPORT FOR MR. YATES

SIR.—May I say how much I agree with most of Mr. Yates's criticism of *The Freethinker* contained in his letter published in the issue dated February 1, 1953. I especially support his suggestion that the feature on "The Theatre" be dropped without delay and the space made available for some Freethought writing.

To Mr. Yates's I will add a little more criticism of my own. Why are so many books reviewed which have no particular interest to Freethinkers at all, to the exclusion of reviews of books of particular Rationalist import. A few immediately come to mind which have not been reviewed in *The Freethinker* yet more than deserve the attention of its contributors. They are: Lamont's "Man Answers Death," Hawton's "Feast of Unreason," and Manhattan's "Catholic Imperialism and World Freedom," all published by Watts.

To sum up, my criticism is not enough Freethought, let's have more of it.

Best wishes to *The Freethinker*.—Yours, etc.,

ALAN E. WOODFORD.

Obituary

The sudden death occurred on Monday, February 9, on board the boat "Seasalter," on which he was working at his occupation of oyster dredgerman, of one who had been a loyal reader of *The Freethinker* for the past 43 years. A native of Burnham-on-Crouch, where he lived all his life except for a time when he worked in London and served in the Merchant Navy, Spencer Herbert Cohen earned the respect of his local community by his voluntary services to trade unionism and the honesty and ability with which he voiced the freethought views at which he arrived as a result of his wide reading. While a member of the Salvation Army as a boy, his diligent reading of the Bible aroused his early doubts. Coming under the influence of G. W. Foote and Chapman Cohen, his complete emancipation from superstition was inevitable, and his example led the whole of his family of five sons and three daughters to similar views, unhesitatingly avowed. His death at the age of seventy, while still active in body and mind, is a severe trial to them, and readers will echo the sympathy expressed by the undersigned at the secular burial service held last Friday in the presence of relatives, fellow-workers and friends.

P. V. M.

As we go to press we learn of the death at the age of 93 of Mr. Ambrose G. Barker, whose pen was at the service of Freethought for many years. We are informed that the cremation will take place at Golders Green Crematorium at 10 a.m. on Friday, February 20.