

The Freethinker

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Editor: F. A. RIDLEY

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THE news of the recent death of Dr. E. W. Barnes following so soon after his retirement in May from the Bishopric of Birmingham, was, we imagine, received with mixed feelings by the late Bishop's former colleagues on the Anglican episcopal bench. For Dr. Barnes, throughout his clerical career and, in particular, since he had been appointed Bishop of Birmingham by the first Labour Government of Mr. Ramsay Macdonald, had always been something of a problem to the Church of England to which he belonged. The efforts of Dr. Barnes to "restate" Christianity in terms more acceptable to modern scientific knowledge and historical criticism than the traditional theology based on the Thirty-nine Articles, must have given the leaders of the Church of England a whole series of headaches. This was the more so since the utterances of Dr. Barnes received widespread publicity, and his undeniable scholarship and literary ability were in striking contrast to the painful mediocrity which characterises the hierarchy of contemporary Anglicanism.

The "Enfant Terrible" of the Church

With only the possible exception of his elder fellow-churchman, Dr. W. R. Inge, who still survives at the vast age of ninety-three, Dr. Barnes was the best known of modernists in the Anglican Church. A Cambridge mathematician with a scientific background, and himself a Fellow of the Royal Society, Dr. Barnes recognised that, in the words of a French Modernist of the last century, "traditional theology is played out," and that the traditional Christian account of Christian origins has to be rewritten in the light of modern historical and literary criticism. This task the Bishop set himself to accomplish in his major theological work, *The Rise of Christianity*, a brilliant and, in part, quite rationalistic account of Christian origins from the Modernist standpoint (1946). The uproar which this work excited, despite the fact that it said little that was new, not only to professed Rationalists, but even to any scholar moderately acquainted with modern researches into Biblical criticism indicates how wide is still the gulf between organised Christianity and modern Biblical scholarship.

"The Rise of Christianity"

Whilst not particularly original in its conclusions, the masterpiece of the heretical bishop was a work of fine intellectual quality; well-informed as to the results of modern critical scholarship, and written throughout with an exceptional lucidity. Unfortunately, such intellectual qualities are, usually, "caviare to the Man-in-the-Street," and neither learning, reasoning power, an excess of the critical faculty, nor even lucidity, are invariably hallmarks of the average "best-sellers": perhaps, indeed, what we have just said is even an understatement? What raised Dr. Barnes's work to the status almost of a public event, and its publication to a landmark in the history of theology, was the fact that here was an officiating Bishop of the

Established Church throwing overboard the official theology of his Church and of traditional Christianity; a member of the Episcopal Bench, a "Successor of the Apostles," giving up the traditional interpretation of Christianity which, incidentally, he had sworn, when appointed a Bishop, to defend. It was, one could say, the Bishop who made the book famous and not vice versa.

What, in brief, was the Modernist thesis, propounded by Dr. Barnes? We imagine that what follows would be an accurate summary.

Religion corresponds with reality (one could hardly expect a Bishop to deny this!). But, like everything else in an evolving world,

Man's spiritual faculty, which originates from the same lowly pre-human sources as the rest of the human make-up, is also, and like its mental and physical counterparts, liable to growth and to consequent change. Hence, just as astrology evolved into astronomy, or alchemy into chemistry, so primitive religion gradually shed its aboriginal superstitions and advanced to a purely spiritual conception of the Nature and Destiny of Mankind. This evolutionary process reached its culmination via the teaching of the Jewish prophets in the original Christian message and in the character and mission of Jesus Christ. Christian theology, despite its frequent errors and reversions to earlier mental and moral stages, represents a continuous and, on the whole, a successful attempt to reveal to the world what it is capable of understanding in the Christian message. Such was our Bishop's conception of an evolutionist Christianity.

Without impugning the Bishop's sincerity we can, we think, assert that no one would have been more surprised at this interpretation of Christianity than would have been the early Christians or, if there was such a person, Jesus Christ! Certainly, Dr. Fisher, the present Archbishop of Canterbury was, at least, historically correct when he remarked that, "This is not the teaching of the New Testament or of the Church."

Modernism in the Church of England

Modernism, as such, is not confined to the English Church, but is found in a more or less open form in all Christian Churches with any pretensions to culture. In the Roman Church the Modernist Movement sponsored in the early years of the present century by the famous Abbe, Alfred Loisy, achieved a sensational notoriety and, though officially condemned by the Vatican, is still, we are credibly informed, "everywhere" in the Church of Rome. In the Protestant Churches where the repressive machinery of orthodoxy is less efficient, modernism, in one form or another, is strongly represented. In the Church of England the "Modern Churchman's Union" represents a minority of scholarly clerics, the intellectual standpoint of whom is represented by a monthly journal, *The Modern Churchman*. Apart from its best-known representatives, the late Dr. Barnes himself, and Dean Inge, a number of able writers

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

Our Heretical Bishop

— By F. A. RIDLEY —

such as Dr. Major, and the Reverends J. C. Hardwicke and Gamaliel Milner, have expressed the Modernist point of view in contemporary theology. One may relevantly add that Modernism owes its existence to the Establishment and to the consequent control of the Anglican Church by laymen. If Establishment were to end and the now dominant Anglo-Catholic Party in the Church of England, represented in the Press by the *Church Times*, were to get control, the Anglican Modernists would soon follow their Roman brethren into the wilderness or into enforced submission to traditional orthodoxy!

A Critique of Modernism

Such an elementary critique will readily occur to the readers of *The Freethinker*. One cannot mix oil and water; supernatural theology with a rationalist critique? It is obvious that any form of Christianity including Modernism, must accept at least the premises of supernaturalism and of the Historicity and substantial accuracy of the Gospel

narratives and of the personality of Jesus as there portrayed. If these essentials to which human immortality may be added, go by the board all forms of Christianity, including Modernism, necessarily go with them. One can, we think, add that orthodox Christianity is easier to defend than the Modernist variety which tries to pour the wine of new knowledge into the old theological bottles. We leave aside the moral question as to how far it is morally honest for the clergy to draw money from a Church which rejects their interpretation of the doctrines which they are paid to preach.

A Landmark of Decline

For which reasons we do not think that, despite its apparent sincerity and obvious ability, Dr. Barnes's Modernist reinterpretation of Christian origins is likely to prove more than a sensational landmark in the current decline and ultimate collapse of Christian Theology and of the Christian Churches.

Royalty, Religion, and Superiority

By P. TURNER

SOME years ago I pointed out that all people are in various states and degrees of knowledge, and in the light of this far too many people proceed to give voice to immature opinions, not realising that many opinions are due to insufficient knowledge. Of course it must be recognised that complete freedom of opinion, however stupid, should exist, although governments generally speaking do not allow anything like complete freedom of expression.

Probably it is difficult for most people to realise that much that appears true, is merely a smoke screen hiding a very large vista which would expose the fallacies of many opinions, in fact an opinion that is not founded upon well considered knowledge is worthless.

Sincerity is not enough, for sincerity in itself may be just a cover for lack of understanding. Unfortunately there are many who, claiming to be sincere are for various reasons, such as desire for money, power, or to support religion, prepared to go into every form of trickery to accomplish their wishes.

The scoundrels who worm their way into every intellectual movement, using all the craft they can, often talk glibly of free speech, freedom of the Press, which they say exists, though they know it is not true. In any case the Government does not allow free expression, either oral or printed, and would, should the opportunity occur, completely destroy the last remaining freedom that exists.

This brings me to writers like Mr. W. E. Nicholson whose sincerity we have no reason to doubt, but who apparently seems to think that for reasons of birth, one person should be exalted and called superior, while others are put in an inferior position.

It is childishly silly to take such a state of mind and whilst it can be conceded that Mr. Nicholson is entitled to think himself inferior, it does not confer the right upon him to force others into that position. The evil that these people do who consider themselves of inferior status is that they are not willing just to hold that view and take up that position, but they set to work to persuade others by the sword to suffer the same indignities, using the power they have to uplift a few whom they call superior and forcing the other by law and gun to be inferior—it is absurd.

Before proceeding further on this subject let me say that I am not advocating a precedent, nor have I any axe to grind, neither do I hate those who have wealth and power by reason of the willingness of others to be inferior.

No one asks me if I am willing to contribute towards the upkeep of royalty, and the supporting armies, navies and air forces; I am compelled to support them whether I agree or not; there is no choice, it is paid by taxes on nearly everything one buys, on customs, stamp duties and income tax, especially by P.A.Y.E. One can only avoid payment by not working.

It's useless talking to me about the country, I am the country, and surely have as much right to be considered as any other person. The attitude of mind that agrees with Superiors and Inferiors is the special doctrine of the Catholic Church. It assumes that one man is more important than another, and proceeds to build a fantastic array of powers and decrees by a crazy training of infantile minds, persuading them to accept this extraordinary fantasy as a reality.

But it is more natural for the mind to see the truth when available and free from restrictions and propaganda: to prevent the truth becoming evident, a lot of vile and horrible punishments are imposed by the so-called Church Superiors upon the Inferiors should they show the least signs of awakening, for should the so-called Inferiors realise how they are tricked the hierarchy would collapse.

Royalty like religion can only exist where the masses of people are mind-blinded and kidded that they are inferior. Of course many people have keener minds than others, which is Nature's gift, but it does not entitle them to take a mean advantage of those who are slower on the uptake.

The so-called great man is similar to all other men, was born the same way, has one mouth, one body, and performs more or less like all others. Why train one to be superior and another to be inferior? It remains a mystery to me how any man can willingly think himself inferior.

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Plea for the Dead

By C. G. L. Du CANN

HORRIBLE indeed is many a Christian churchyard with its air of dolorous neglect, its broken tombstones, weather-erased inscriptions, and uncared-for graves. The municipal cemeteries with their wilderness of imported Italian marble from Carrara, Scottish granite from Aberdeen, are hardly a degree less melancholy, even if they are tidier.

To a superficial mind, "God's Acre" turned into a garden and recreation-ground with its tombstones removed, or stuck in droves against the wall, may seem some improvement. But to the thoughtful, it speaks harshly of the living, who in their utilitarian greed, will not leave the dead their inch of land.

The dead have no votes. They can write no letters to *The Times* for the ruling oligarchy to read. They are forgotten—except in so far as they leave something—their ideals, their histories, their books, pictures, music, money, land, goods or chattels—to the living.

The dead do not matter a damn. In a word: the play is the tragedy *Man*, and its hero, the conqueror "Worm," to borrow an idea of Edgar Allan Poe.

Our generation being a gradgrind generation, obsessed by its imperfectly thought-out economics of herd life, we even make a virtue of our vice, as Christians not uncommonly do. The dead need nothing, we say. It is sheer reprehensible waste, therefore, to spend on funerals, graves and the like; better to sell the oil of spikenard for a pence than to pour it out upon Jesus as Mary, in her criticised folly, did. This is all most true; and perhaps the worse and more heart-breaking for that. Why waste a tear? Why waste a thought? Why visit a grave? It can do the dead no good. Or those fools who weep and mourn: be comforted like Rachel.

How clamant and greedy are the living! How uncomplaining and undesirous are the dead! But there is a nobility in living hearts which says, "Even because you have no need, I give. I pour myself out because I must." Does the bird cease its song, or the flower refuse its perfume, because their sweetness is wasted on the desert air?

It used to be fashionable for contemporary Judas fasciots and others to criticise contemptuously the amount spent by the poor upon funerals to the enrichment of undertakers. No doubt funeral pomp and parade is silly, vulnerable and better eschewed. But at least let us recognise another side to it. Economy here may be due not to the conscious practice of thoughtful virtue, but to the prompting of blind greed and self-regard. Extravagance may speak of genuine emotion, and not only a pitiful effort to impress the neighbours. Nowadays as little as possible seems to be sacrificed to the dead—by rich and poor alike.

There is a theory, which I incline to accept, that Shakespeare, seeing the charnel-house of jangled bones and skulls in Stratford-on-Avon churchyard, and knowing of the Stratford girl suicide refused Christian burial, was moved with to write of the English coroners' law over Ophelia in the grave-digging scene in *Hamlet*, and his own tomb inscription. Certainly nothing but the superstitious dread of this last curse has saved his grave from violation and desecration by the most respectable of people in the most reasonable and plausible of pretexts.

Vicars and curates never perform the humble work of caring for the buried dead. Too menial is the task—as menial as the washing of a disciple's feet. No respectable clergyman will do the work of replacing broken stones, of restoring names, of removing weeds, of bringing order,

tidiness and care into country churchyards. It is not expected of the clergy, except by an eccentric like myself. And where so much is expected in other directions, the clergy can plead other tasks as an excuse.

But the great gulf fixed between Christian theory and Christian practice in the matter of the dead is as startling as it is in other matters relating to the living. In Christian theory, the dead are not dead at all. They are the Church Triumphant, the Saints who rest from labour. They have fought their good fight. They have finished only their earthly course and await in the realm of shades the triumph of heaven to come. We, the Church Militant, beg their prayers and pray for them ultra-Protestant. For "all are one in Thee, for all are Thine," and "I believe in the Communion of Saints, and the Resurrection of the Body." What unity or communion, however, is there between the neglected and the neglecter?

We smile over the care bestowed by Ancient Egypt over her embalmed corpses. But we had better weep over our own wickedness to our dead. Egypt attested at any rate a whole and not a half-belief in the Resurrection of the Body, which the modern Christian Churches teach and yet doubt! And in Ancient Rome the soldier would die "facing fearful odds for the ashes of his fathers and the temples of his gods." No modern English soldier, sailor or airman would die "for the ashes of his fathers"—even if he had the slightest idea of who and where they were!

Modern neglect of the dead (who require so pitifully little and ask for nothing) might be justified (but never is) by certain words of Jesus: "Let the dead bury their dead." It is worth noting that Jesus himself was the reverse of neglected in his rich man's tomb.

Decency is the least that the dead deserve, for the sake of the living as well as the dead.

What then should be done? The Church of England seems unable to rise higher in this respect than such acts as are illustrated by the recent refusal of a Chancellor of a Diocese to permit the erection of a sculptured angel over a child's grave. Nor are the other Christian sects any nobler. In such an irreligious state of affairs amongst the so-called religions, atheists, agnostics and pagans may well come to the rescue of the dignity and decency of the dead by making suggestions.

Reform may well begin with State entailment leading to abolition of earth-burial. Cremation should be substituted. Only convention based on superstition, which accepts the literal Resurrection of the Body as a fact of the future, keeps earth-burial alive. Though the immediate swift fire may be as appalling as the ultimate worm to man's imagination, it is the lesser of the two evils in its relation to the health of the living, to economy in the immobilisation of land, to decency and decorum.

Then indeed the ugliness and disorder of our Church and Secular wilderness of stones and bad sculpture may go for ever. A Garden of Rest where the ashes of the multitudinous obscure may be scattered to merciful oblivion, or reverently interred beneath a small recording tablet, will then fitly replace the present and "implore the passing tribute of a sigh." We may still have for the less obscure "the stoned urn or animated bust" commemorating "the boast of heraldry, the pomp of power and all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave."

The dead in general are like Jesus Christ in Charles Dickens' anecdote of the charity boy who, in imperfect remembrance of the Nicene Creed, called the Saviour

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This Believing World

The discovery that the "Piltdown" skull may be a fake—it has some supporters—has caused a chortle of joy from Jehovah's Witnesses and parsons like the Rev. E. Victor Pearce. Hell, the Devil, Miracles and, of course, everything about Jesus, now must be true. The Evolutionists are confounded. The Bible, that is God's Holy Word, is now vindicated. And what about the "Java" man? What about all those huge frauds on the public in the sacred name of Evolution?

Are not the anti-Evolutionists a little too previous? Naturally, in this baffling quest for the remains of early Man, mistakes must occur. In the very nature of the case such remains are bound to be scarce, so scarce, indeed, that any possible remains whatever are received with the utmost caution at first, and only after prolonged discussion by experts is a result announced. Scientists are not infallible like our men of God. And if mistakes occur nobody is more ready to admit them than the scientists.

But take the case of the supernatural element in Christianity. It has been fought for tooth and nail by all good Christians. The Bible is packed with errors of the silliest kinds, but one can always find Christians ready to defend them, ready to "reconcile" the most flagrant contradictions—and, for that matter, ready to go to war if necessary for the retention of a Greek letter in the sacred text. Whether Mr. Pearce and his followers among the Jehovah's Witnesses like it or not, Evolution is a scientific fact which no Bible defender can controvert, no matter what mistakes may occur in describing fossils.

The Bill proposing that engaged couples should submit to some medical examination before marriage has been hotly condemned in many quarters because it is an infringement of "the liberty of the subject." What objectors prefer, for example, is the way our Holy Church will join in Holy Matrimony, without any protest, two blind-from-birth people for, with God's Blessing, they can then proceed to bring forth more blind people. Or, if one (or both) of the parties has had contact with syphilis, what matters if any of their children suffer from "inherited" syphilis? And so on. So long as people get married and in Church, nothing else really matters. And this is the true Christian attitude.

A large number of parsons appear to think that, if they say that England "for the most part is a pagan country" (like the Rev. H. T. Trapp of Paddington), they are uttering the most awful condemnation possible. Why? What is wrong with a good, healthy pagan spirit? We doubt whether Paganism at its worst equalled the horrors of the Christian Inquisition and the Christian Wars of only a very few centuries back. Has Paganism such an awful record as has Christianity on "witchcraft", the burning, torturing, and mutilating, of hundreds of thousands of men, women and children for an imaginary "crime"? With our advanced civilisation and a merry pagan spirit, mankind would be immeasurably happier than under the stupid, supernatural nonsense of Christianity.

But we feel a little sympathy for Fr. Trapp. He finds that it is not Jesus Christ who is the Saviour "but the film star of the moment." The people in Paddington prefer a cinema to a church; and now there are actually "26 priests in Paddington to give Holy Communion to some 500 people every Sunday." And nothing can be done about it. Or rather, he wants some of the churches closed, the number

of priests reduced to ten, and the others packed off to a mission field. And what good would these last do? Perpetuate in another country the same apathy we have in England?

Although Catholics will point with the greatest pride to the number of Catholic authors whose novels are "best sellers," Catholic priests are not quite so certain that the Faith is presented in the best way possible. Cardinal Griffin, for instance, is by no means satisfied. "The framework of fiction may be an admirable project," he said recently, "but it can never justify as a means to that end the inclusion of indecent or harmful material." Fancy Catholic authors, many of them honest-to-goodness converts, writing on "indecent" subjects! But surely the Church could compel the indecent authors to write under the strictest censorship? Every novel by a Catholic author could even be sent to Eire for a more thorough censorship!

Theatre

The Orchard Walls, at the St. Martin's Theatre, is a courageous effort by R. F. Delderfield to deal with a serious problem. Unfortunately, the play falls short of the mark but it nearly succeeds in convincing us that the capable headmistress of a girls' school is the best judge of whether a 17-year-old under her charge should be allowed an "innocent" courtship.

Briefly it is the old problem of whether adolescents still at school should be allowed to make attachments with the other sex. Within the limitations of his play, the author shows a certain amount of free thought on the subject, but the problem has issues that can reach far.

Valerie White, as the headmistress, is excellently cast and gives a most worthy performance. The play is also well served by Cyril Raymond, Gillian Lind, John Charlesworth and Colin Douglas.

The Boy Friend, at Swiss Cottage (Embassy Theatre), by Sandy Wilson, is a musical play which, oddly enough, bears some relation to *The Orchard Walls*, for here we have a finishing school near Nice in 1926 where every girl has her boy friend. So it seems that if we were to take this play seriously it would be the answer to Mr. Delderfield's problem.

The versatile author has very cleverly reintroduced us into the period when girls still approached their men rather coyly, and the Charleston was danced under straight-line dresses and pudding-basin hats. This is a clever skit which should draw full houses. Vida Hope has produced with great discernment and imagination.

The Ballets de Paris, under Roland Petit, has returned to the Stoll Theatre bringing a new turn called "La Croqueuse de Diamants" (The Diamond Cruncher) in which Liliane Montevicchi has come to the fore, supported by Roland Petit. It is an attractive ballet, but the interceptions of crooning and singing tend to give it at times a musical-comedy effect.

Freethinkers might find "Le Loup" more interesting for its folklore. It is about a girl who runs off with a wolf believing it to be her fiancé who has, in fact, deserted her on the wedding day. When she discovers the truth she stays with the animal who is incapable of weakness or lying. Violette Verdy is the girl and Jean Babilée is the wolf, and both dance beautifully.

RAYMOND DOUGLAS

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

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

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Every Sunday, 7 p.m.: FRANK ROTHWELL.

Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Every Sunday, 8 p.m.: Messrs. BARKER and MILLS.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Bomb Site).—Every weekday, 1 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK and BARNES. Every Sunday, 3 p.m., at Platt Fields, a Lecture.

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

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Every Thursday, 1-15 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, December 20, 6-45 p.m.: J. THORNTON (Leeds), "Thomas Hardy, Novelist and Poet."

Glasgow R.P.A. (Central Halls, 25, Bath Street).—Sunday, December 20, 3 p.m.: Miss M. W. TAYLOR, M.A.: "Religion and Religions."

Junior Discussion Group (Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq., W.C.1).—Friday, December 18: General Discussion, "Flying Saucers have landed."

Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, December 20, 6-30 p.m.: G. H. TAYLOR, "Materialism To-day."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, December 20, 2-30 p.m.: A Lecture.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, December 20, 11 a.m.: A. ROBERTSON, M.A., "What is a Rationalist?"

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.).—Sunday, December 20: R. S. W. POLLARD, J.P.: "The Case for Humanism"; 7-15 p.m.

Notes and News

The winter propaganda activities of the National Secular Society continue uninterrupted. On Sunday, December 6, the president of the N.S.S., Mr. F. A. Ridley, addressed the Bradford Branch, N.S.S., on "Rome and World Politics." Speaking before a crowded room at "The Mechanics' Institute," Mr. Ridley remarked that the first time he had ever spoken at Bradford he had been assured that the Bradford Wool Exchange was virtually monopolised by Catholics; the lecturer added that this was, after all, not very surprising, since the Church had had a vast experience in shearing sheep throughout the ages! Mr. Ridley then went on to indicate the relations which existed between Catholic totalitarianism and contemporary world politics. The Church of Rome, he declared, never tied itself too closely to any political creed: the Vatican was, to-day, sometimes Fascist, and sometimes democratic; but it was always Catholic! In recent years the Papacy had backed the Fascist dictatorships of Franco, Mussolini, and Peron; whilst in America it proclaimed its allegiance to democracy at the top of its voice; besides,

simultaneously, supporting the largely Irish Labour Parties in Australia and in Great Britain. The fundamental objective behind all these varied alliances being to promote the power of the "Universal" Church. To-day, for the first time in its long history, Rome was seeking to be really "universal" and was active in pagan lands such as Japan, China, India and Africa. The lecturer declared Roman Catholicism to be the primary enemy of Freethought everywhere, and that, under the cloak of resisting Communism, it was staging a 20th century counter-reformation and a bid for world power. A lively discussion followed the lecture, and Mr. Ridley replied by summarising his arguments. The branch chairman, Mr. H. Day, presided and indicated that they in Bradford were only too well aware of the danger represented by political Catholicism, both in the local Labour Party and in the City Council. A vote of thanks to the speaker was carried with acclamation.

On November 26, Mr. Len Ebury, vice-president of the N.S.S., descended, like Daniel, into the lions' den! Or, in other words, invaded the classical stronghold of theological orthodoxy, Oxford University, where he addressed the "Heretics' Club" on Atheism. We understand that the lecture was followed by a heated discussion, in which some champions of orthodoxy managed to take part. One such, indeed, rather astonished the speaker by remarking that, if Christianity were to be proved false, there would be nothing left to live for! We have always understood that Oxford is "the home of lost causes," and this incident would appear to indicate that this is still the case! However, we are glad to learn that Mr. Ebury received the applause which he, no doubt, deserved. We scarcely think, however, that the university will confer a theological degree upon our vice-president!

Some little time back we recorded the 85th birthday of our former editor, Chapman Cohen, adding, in this column, a brief tribute to this great man. We are very glad to note that our American Freethought contemporary, *The Age of Reason*, reproduces our eulogy verbatim, and that the editor adds a footnote recording his full association with the tribute paid to this eminent Freethinker. We sincerely trust that, next year, when Mr. Cohen will be 86, we shall be able to record a similar tribute.

Plea for the Dead

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"the only forgotten son of God, forgotten of His Father before all worlds." Yet there is one ironic exception. Warriors of land, sea and air who "die for their country" (which means slaughtering and being slaughtered for her politicians' ineptitude) are flattered by special memorials in a fashion no life-saver ever is. A strange disposition in followers of the Prince of Peace, who bade them "Resist no evil," to exalt the dealers of death, wounds and resistance. If honour's voice could provoke the silent dust, their war-dead might be provoked to cry, "You lie to say I gave my life for my country: my life was stolen from me, and not by my country either, but by the impenitent scoundrels who misgoverned us all setting nation against nation."

Fortunately the dead are dead indeed, too dead to utter reproaches. And yet it was rightly said of one of them: "He, being dead, yet speaketh." To those who have ears to hear, not one, but all of the dead speak with the powerful eloquence of silence, a silence beside which speech itself is dumb. And in that silence sounds an echo in our own hearts which carry their own death within them like a woman labouring with child.

Freethinkers and Christmas

By H. CUTNER

FOR over a hundred years Freethought writers have been showing their readers the Pagan origins of Christmas, and proving in this way that the *Christian* story can be demonstrably proved as untrue. There are, of course, always a number of "reverent" Rationalists who will not under any circumstances give up "the Babe of Bethlehem", and who, in consequence, perpetuate the myth of Jesus.

That other things go to the making of the story of Jesus Christ is true, but its base is the old Sun-worship. The long nights have come to an end at the close of December, and primitive man realised that the days were beginning to get longer—that is, the Sun, dying during Autumn, had been "born" again. He was bound to have a rough time during winter, he was even threatened with death in his childhood, and did die somewhere at the end of March, but was "re-born" to give us life and light for spring and summer. We must not look for logic, coherence or consistency in these pagan stories for they have been told over countless ages in different countries and in different languages. And, of course, the Christian hierarchy—as well as many Rationalists—contemptuously reject them. Jesus was born exactly as described in the Gospels; he was the Son of God or, if he wasn't, he was the greatest of the sons of men as Renan exultingly sang.

But that Christmas was kept and enjoyed by pagan peoples who had never heard of Jesus is an historical fact. The name was different, but the feast was the same. All that Christians did was to take it over from the God-less-old nations as they did so many other things. Even in Chambers's *Book of Days*, after a very pious reference to the wonderful birth of Jesus, we are sadly informed that "it is well known that many, and, indeed, the greater number of the popular festive observances by which Christmas is characterised, are referable to a much more ancient origin. Amid all the pagan nations of antiquity there seems to have been a universal tendency to worship the sun as the giver of life and light, and the visible manifestations of the Deity." And when Jesus said, "I am the Light of the World", he was actually telling us that he was the Sun.

The point I wish to make is that Christmas is the time when, for probably thousands of years, people danced and feasted and played games—in other words, had a good time; and there is not the slightest reason why we Freethinkers should not enter into the spirit of the current festivities if they want to—as, for example, I do. Leaving aside the mythical birth of the Babe of Bethlehem and some of the more pious carol-singing, Christmas is generally celebrated as the pagans celebrated it. We have, it is true, in our towns a coal fire, or even a gas or electric one, but the result is much like the burning of the old Yule logs. We enjoy, as our ancestors did, good food and plenty of it—where possible. We have jolly games and plenty of music—or the B.B.C. and TV. will give us all we want. And we remember old friends and relatives and give, when we can, happy or useful presents. I am all for as jolly a time as possible, and why other Freethinkers are not is a complete puzzle to me.

Perhaps the real reason is that those Freethinkers who have come from very religious homes can never get away from a streak of the worst kind of Puritanism. They are shocked beyond measure at card-playing, or horse-racing, or even football. They look upon a big Christmas dinner as "guzzling" of the most animal kind. The sending of Christmas cards is the kind of "pleasure" which fills them with disgust. And so they implore those of us who profoundly disagree with them—please, please don't do these

things. A few shredded, raw vegetables, unseasoned, should suffice for your Christmas dinner. And what is more healthy than a glass of icy cold water—the beverage God sent you. Eschew wine or beer as you would cyanide of potassium. Never play such a naughty game as "hunt the slipper", and fly away from cards as you would from the Devil himself. As for giving your children a stockingful of good things—that is merely encouraging begging.

Most of us have met this kind of thing from Puritan friends—or even, in these columns, from otherwise excellent contributors. They have a right to say so and, of course, to eat their raw vegetables and drink their icy water. And I have the right thoroughly to disagree with them.

There is no need to "guzzle" so as to make yourself ill. Nor to drink so much as to get as "well drunk" as the guests at the famous marriage feast of Cana. But there is every need for Freethinkers to have a good time if they wish, to laugh and sing and be merry; to enjoy, if they can get it, the best of Christmas cheer. There is nothing whatever wrong in sending cards to one's friends or in giving away a little spare cash as Christmas boxes. What is altogether wrong is to "mortify the flesh", to proclaim Christian Puritanism as Freethought.

There is one other point to remember. We Freethinkers are—I hope—bitterly opposed to the Puritan Sunday—the typical English day of rest, the most miserable day of the week. If we oppose the festivities Christmas brings us, we are perpetuating more Puritan gloom—just like Sunday, and even more so.

We Freethinkers can leave out the Holy Babe and the religious twaddle from parsons which accompany him. And we can then join the merry pagan festivities with as good a heart as the merriest Christian believers.

N.S.S. Lecture Report

Another well-attended meeting organised by the West London Branch, in continuance of its weekly programme at the Laurie Arms, was last Sunday addressed by the General Secretary of the National Secular Society, Mr. P. V. Morris.

In a lecture which was both informative and propagandist he dealt with the three main channels in which the Freethought Movement is manifest; namely, Secularism, Rationalism and Humanism, their respective vehicles being the N.S.S., the R.P.A. and the Ethical Societies. He outlined their history and showed the part each had played, indicating the reasons for his own preference for Secularism. Humanism was really Secularism in a semi-religious dressing and, like Unitarianism, could play its part as a sort of feather bed for falling Christians. Mr. Morris paid tribute to the magnificent work of issuing cheap reprints which had been done by Rationalism in its heyday, and deplored that changes in reading fashions and the coming of television bringing changes of habits, meant that support gained through books could not be counted on as continuous indefinitely. The N.S.S. offered no such inducements, nor did it offer to compromise with Christianity. It was composed mainly of Atheists who were not afraid to say so. And in the last two years, at a time when other progressive bodies had suffered a decline in support, the N.S.S. membership had risen by nearly fifty per cent.

Persuasive without being overbearing, the lecturer did something to crystallise the support of members and to enlist that of non-members.

An excellent way in which members could ease the Secretary's work would be by the prompt renewal of N.S.S. subscriptions for 1954.

G.H.T.

The Tower of Babel and a Universal Language

By H. T. DERRETT

ESPERANTO, particularly on the Continent, is taught in many schools, and has 100 or more periodicals circulating in all parts of the world. Cook's Travel Agency publishes in Esperanto a brochure of useful information for intending travellers. It is now possible to tour the world and find one's way about by means of Esperanto alone. Many commercial firms advertise their goods, and a number of British and foreign seaside resorts similarly describe their various attractions in the international language of Esperanto. The G.P.O., London, when testing long distance telephones, employs Esperanto. The Customs Officials of all countries use it. The police are encouraged to learn and employ it. Glasgow police sent five delegates to attend the Paris Congress in 1950. London taxi drivers have a paper devoted to it and many of the drivers speak it fluently. It was supported by the League of Nations and used at its conferences. It is used by the International Labour Office, approved by the British Association; has been adopted by the International Telegraphic Union, and recognised by the International Broadcasting Union and many other important bodies. The Bible and the works of Shakespeare have been fully translated. It has some 4,000,000 adherents throughout the world. Over a million individuals, and delegates representing 15 million more people have petitioned the United Nations to make Esperanto an official language of UNESCO. Radio stations in France, Austria, Sweden, Switzerland, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia broadcast in Esperanto, and Brazil publishes its statistics in the language. China has an Esperanto monthly pictorial journal, *El Popola China*, dealing with scientific and various other subjects, which circulates throughout the world.

There is a Chair of Esperanto at Liverpool University. Pius XI and Benedict XV have given it their Apostolic blessing. It has been supported by the British Chambers of Commerce. Tolstói spoke well of it. At the Esperanto Congress of 1907 in Cambridge, the Lord Mayor there said: "We are witnessing a new Pentecost." Two years later, the King of Spain awarded Dr. Zamenhof, its author, the Order of Isabela la Catolica.

Zamenhof was féted in Paris and made a Chevalier of the Legion of Honour. Officialdom seems always to be in favour of Esperanto, though it seldom does much about it, unless we count the latter days of the first World War, when both the French and the Germans took to bombarding each other with propaganda in Esperanto.

Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt has stated that she would sponsor the teaching of an auxiliary language among the United Nations as an aid to world peace. Quoting her, Lee McCabe gives several phrases taken from the American Army's guides for soldiers stationed overseas, and the same phrases as they would appear in Esperanto. The London Library for the Blind has some 1,130 Esperanto volumes in Braille. Available from Esperanto bookshelves in Britain are a mixed bag which, among others, includes Long, Rilke, Gregg, Pitman, Edgar Allan Poe, Wodehouse, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Edna Ferber, Upton Sinclair, Agatha Christie, Arnold Bennett, and Jack London.

J. Effel, in *The Freethinker*, has written that: "The French have a saying that a man who knows two languages is two men. It would follow that one who knew all the languages would be 'Everyman.' But that is impossible, and it is here that Esperanto comes in. Universally adopted as a secondary tongue, 'Everyman' emerges from the realm of myth to that of reality."

The first International Esperanto Congress was held at Boulogne in 1905, and, excepting breaks due to war, others have been held annually ever since. The following are some of the cities in which these have taken place: Geneva, Cambridge, Dresden, Barcelona, Washington, Antwerp, Cracow, Berne, Paris, San Francisco, The Hague, Prague, Helsingfors, Oxford, Bournemouth. Hundreds of books on all sorts of subjects in all parts of the world have been translated into Esperanto, and a considerable literature in the language has already grown up on a variety of technical subjects, including chemistry, pharmacy, medicine and the nomenclature of diseases, physics, mathematics, radiophony and text books on shorthand. Esperanto offers facilities to the scientific world which are unobtainable without its help. A conference of educationists was held in 1922 at the Secretariat of the League of Nations in Geneva, at which 28 countries and 16 governments were represented, and the Third Assembly of the L. of N. of the same year unanimously adopted an exhaustive report favourable to Esperanto. In 1923 a Commercial Conference was held at Venice, to which over 200 commercial and touring associations from 23 countries sent delegates. At both of these conferences, Esperanto was the only language used. The Universala Esperanto Associo (U.E.A.) with headquarters at Geneva, has a world-wide organisation with delegates, or consuls in over 1,000 towns in 39 countries who render important international services. In 1923, throughout the British Isles and Ireland there were over 100 societies, groups and clubs affiliated to the British Esperanto Association. There is also now an American Esperanto Association with a large number of energetic groups. There are also similar associations in the British Colonies. During the Congress held at Oxford, which was attended by postal Esperantists from a dozen different countries, including Belgium, Finland, Germany, Holland and Switzerland, a performance of "Charlie's Aunt" was given in Esperanto by nine different nationalities. The actors learned their parts in their own countries and then met to play together at Oxford, the humour of the play being thoroughly appreciated by men and women representing 30 different nationalities, including Chinese and Japanese. A book list containing titles of translations and original works in Esperanto may be had from the British Esperanto Association, Inc., 140, Holland Park Avenue, London, W. 11.

All this does not by any means exhaust the record of achievement; indeed, it but touches the fringe of it. Wherever it may operate, let the illusion be dropped, that Esperanto is to-day still battling for recognition and acceptance. Beyond all dispute, it efficiently fulfils its mission and has arrived to stay. It works! That is the measure of its brilliant and triumphant success.

Social Occasions to Note

"The more we are together", says the song, "the merrier we shall be", but when the people concerned belong to a movement they get something in addition to mere high spirits out of social gatherings. After an evening spent with fellow-enthusiasts for a cause, everyone has a feeling of solid satisfaction and a renewed determination to play a better part in working for its advance. Two London events in the early part of 1954, therefore, merit the interest and support of all our readers who can possibly attend them.

On Friday, January 22, at 7 p.m., there will be a Social at the Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, organised by the

Humanist Council for the four organisations (N.S.S., R.P.A., South Place Ethical Society and the Ethical Union) co-operating in this joint body. After brief welcoming speeches by one representative of each of the Societies concerned, there will be a concert. Refreshments will be provided, and there will be ample opportunities for making acquaintance with others present and for interesting conversation. It is hoped that N.S.S. members will turn up in force to meet each other and make friends with allies in different societies. Applications for the limited share of tickets allotted to the N.S.S. should be made to the Secretary by members, the charge (including refreshments) being 1s. 6d. each.

Five weeks and a day later the N.S.S. offers its own special occasion, and invites *all* friends to participate. The 48th Annual Dinner will take place at the Hanway Room, Lyons Oxford Corner House, Tottenham Court Road, on Saturday, February 27. The reception will be at 6-30, and Mr. F. A. Ridley will preside over the festivities. The Guest of Honour will be Mr. C. G. L. Du Cann, brilliant writer of many stimulating articles, pamphlets and books published by this journal. Attractive menus for all (including vegetarians) are offered, and the sparkle of the wine will be matched by the speeches, the conversation and the concert that make this annual gathering so memorable year after year. Tickets (including gratuities) are again 16s. each, and, bearing in mind the steady growth of the Society's membership, early application to avoid disappointment would appear to be more necessary than ever.

P.V.M.

Correspondence

ROYALTY OR PRESIDENT?

SIR,—Whilst it is foolish to indulge in extravagant language on this subject, it is a fact that the royal family occupy many castles and mansions, and there are a great many acres of land reserved for their personal use and enjoyment. How useful would these buildings and land be for schools and housing estates.

It is also a fact that the succession to the throne is specially reserved for one particular family. Is the royal family so vastly superior to the rest of mankind that the head of the state should be automatically chosen from their ranks? In these democratic days the practice is wrong in principle. It is also wrong that the nation should have to finance the relatives of the king or queen. In no other high office of state does this remarkable and expensive custom prevail.

All this unfair rigmarole, which is a residue of the past, could be changed by altering the law to provide that upon a vacancy occurring Parliament must choose the ceremonial head of the state, to exercise the neutral and peaceful duties assigned to the office. If our Parliament can alter the regency succession overnight, so could they be relied upon to appoint quickly the next king, queen or president (or whatever title is adopted), as is done now in other ceremonial and official appointments.

The National Secular Society advocates the abolition of all hereditary and racial distinctions and privileges, and our Society should, therefore, support the principle of the Parliamentary appointment of our ceremonial head of state, who should be granted appropriate remuneration and place of residence, but not for his or her family relations.—Yours, etc.,

ALFRED D. CORRICK.

THE TRUTH ABOUT ISLAM

SIR,—I have read with great interest your article on the Revival of Islam, published in *The Freethinker* of November 20, 1953. Would you please let me know what are your sources for stating that—

1. "The predominant party which was responsible for the constitution of the State of Pakistan was that of the Muslim Mullahs, the Islamic Clerical party." (It is news to me!)
2. Something like a thousand members of the Ahmadiyya sect were recently massacred in Lahore. (I never heard of that!)
3. Apostates in Islam should be punished with death. (Nothing

like that is mentioned in the Qur'an or the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad.)

4. The creed of Islam derives ultimately from the ancient Jews. (This is an exploded theory now.)

In this article you have also mentioned something about the Woking Mosque and the *Islamic Review*. For your information may I tell you that the Woking Mosque is being controlled by a Trust which is represented by the members of all the important schools of thought in Islam. I do not use the word sect, for in its strict sense this does not apply to the followers of the Muslim faith who all agree on the fundamentals of Islam, i.e. they all believe in the Unity of God, the Prophet Muhammad, the Qur'an, Life Hereafter, etc.—Yours, etc.,

S. M. TUFAIL, M.A.,
Asst. Imam, The Mosque, Woking.

DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM

SIR,—It is disappointing to find that Mr. Cutner's long-promised article on dialectical materialism consists of nothing but silly jibes. That some Christians—who claim all manner of fantastic things—consider themselves dialectical materialists is no argument against dialectics. And though I cannot find the remarks attributed to Mr. McCabe in my copy of the "Rational Encyclopedia" I wouldn't accept them as gospel if I did—if Cutner wants us to accept them he should attempt to substantiate them. But personally I hope that Mr. Cutner, who conceitedly tells us he is quite used to explaining the difference between dialectic and mechanistic materialism, saves his energy.

I will admit, as his last paragraph hints, that some writers on dialectics show no understanding of the philosophy of mechanism and still criticise it as it was centuries ago. Some, confusing the word *mechanistic* with *mechanical*, seem to think it deals only with mechanical forces, whereas it obviously accepts the modern scientific concept of electricity, magnetism, gravity. Maurice Cornforth, in a recent book, even asserts that if mechanists believe nature is a machine they must accept the existence of a God who made it! Mechanists will greet this sort of remark with the utmost contempt, or even derision, it deserves, but the important point is not what Cornforth says about mechanism, but what Engels said about dialectics. Since mechanism is essentially the belief that the phenomena of life do not require the postulation of a life force and are potentially as explicable as, say, the digestive processes in the stomach, or the working of a clock, belief in any form of God is excluded as unnecessary.

Mechanism is effectively equivalent to materialism and to the dialectical materialism adds the laws of dialectics, which are derived from Hegel. Whereas Hegel would have considered them as laws of thought, Engels considered them as descriptive of nature. That is the normal difference between the idealist and scientific viewpoints, and lies at the root of Jim Graham's remark "Hegel's system was standing on its head. Marx set it right side up," which Mr. Cutner pretends not to understand.

It is untrue to say that Graham gave no definition of dialectics since he stated that dialectics views nature as "a complex of processes" and described it as "The theory of knowledge which regards all matter in the universe as in motion. . . ."—Yours, etc.,

EDWIN G. H. CROUCH.

EVOLUTION

SIR,—It is not a little disconcerting to find posed in the columns of *The Freethinker* such a facile question as "If evolution is merely a blind, unorganised process, why do species always evolve towards a higher intelligence and not devolve back to the state from which we crawled?" And though Mr. A. Yates disposed of this objection, one would hope for something more than a parochial reference to the backslidings and cul de sacs of the upward way.

I find difficulty in imagining a modern Rationalist who has not imbibed at least the essence of Darwin's "Origin"; whose world-view does not bear prominently in its foreground the laws of evolutionary theory, and who consequently does not regard nature as a kind of vast grandstand in which every seat corresponds to a set of conditions, and where, because the occupants are ever increasing in numbers, every seat must eventually be filled.

If one will conceive a continent which is possessed by vegetable life alone and then introduce a species of animal life able to live solely on plant food, one may legitimately envisage both evolution and devolution from the one species into the manifold tenancies of nature's system. The general trend of evolution is upward simply because it started at the bottom.—Yours, etc.,

D. G. HOLLIDAY.

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