

The Freethinker

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Editor: F. A. RIDLEY

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AS the melancholy year 1953 gives way to what we hope will be the less melancholy year 1954, one may conveniently survey the contemporary scene in Great Britain, and ask what is the actual state of the Christian religion in this allegedly Christian land? At the close of the First World War we recall a popular song, the refrain of which reiterated: "Old Soldiers Never Die, They Simply Fade Away!" Is a similar lugubrious fate overtaking Christianity in these islands at the present date?

That such is the actual position of present-day Christianity is forcibly indicated in a very interesting article in our contemporary, *Picture Post* (December 19, 1953), which sets out to survey this precise problem under what we regard as the misleading title, *But we cannot be bothered with God*. The Editor of *Picture Post* kindly asked the present writer to comment on this article, which we accordingly did. What we could not comment in a short letter we propose to add here.

Some Christian Statistics

Our contemporary quotes some instructive and, from the point of view of the Christian Churches, alarming figures to indicate the contemporary decline of organised Christianity in this country. In a recent R.A.F. camp, only ten out of forty cadets could recite the Lord's Prayer, and only ten had any idea as to how Christmas got its name! "In a London suburb," and here we quote verbatim, "it was found that only three persons in 20 were at all closely linked to any Christian Church; every other one was indifferent to religion, although more or less friendly disposed towards it; and one in five was positively hostile. According to a well-known Catholic priest, fifty per cent. of those baptised as Roman Catholics lapse by the time they are 15 years old, *although Catholic membership is increasing through their high birthrate* (our italics), and 12,000 conversions every year." In a Bedfordshire town, described by the writer, with about 10,000 inhabitants, only a few hundred of them go to Church at all regularly.

"They Don't Need a Lot of Hellfire"

The article in *Picture Post* goes on to cite a number of replies, critical or indifferent, given by representative men-in-the-street to its correspondent on the subject of religion. All indicated either open hostility to, or sharp criticism of current Church teaching. Perhaps the most interesting was the comment of a doorman at a bank: "Now people are educated they don't need a lot of hellfire to keep them on the right road." But all the replies quoted indicated that present-day religion as taught in the Churches is irrelevant to the modern world and to the urgent problems which confront modern man. The somewhat irrelevant conventional appeal for a "spiritual revival" with which the article concluded, bore no relation to the facts and figures quoted in the article and, in fact, represented somewhat of an anti-climax.

How Real is this Picture?

How real is the picture presented above? Does it really correspond with the current facts? Is England still a Christian country in any recognisable sense? Or are the more pessimistic clergy correct in describing it as "a Pagan land," and the present generation as "heathen"? In approaching such involved problems, "it all depends," as that once-famous Christian convert, the late Dr. Joad, used to phrase it, on—a good many things! For example, what is "Christianity"? Is it belief and, if so, how much? Or Church-going and regular reception of the Sacraments of the Church? Also, how must we define a "Pagan"?

Is he one who is merely indifferent to the supernatural and to the organisations which claim to embody it? Or, to qualify as a bona fide Pagan, must one hold some positive *alternative* belief to Christianity; whether of a Rationalist kind, or in the positive dogmas of some rival non-Christian cult? All the above queries would seem to be relevant to this discussion, and to require a positive answer before any satisfactory conclusion can be reached.

What is a Christian Country?

The answer to this "leading question" would seem to be at least logically simple: a Christian land is one in which all, or nearly all its inhabitants believe in, and practise Christianity. For example, mediaeval England was a Christian country in this exclusive sense: a mediaeval English unbeliever usually had a short life and a not particularly pleasant end at the stake. Similarly, though not, so far as we are aware, enforced by such drastic penalties, the Pacific Utopia of Her Christian (Wesleyan) Majesty, Queen Salote of Tonga, is a fully Christian land, if we are to believe the facts related in another most informative article in the issue of *Picture Post* from which we quoted above. In Tonga, belief in Christianity appears to be universal and Church-going virtually compulsory. It is, however, obvious that contemporary England is not a Christian country in the sense of which this could or can be said of mediaeval England and modern Tonga. Though Christianity is still established by law, it is no longer practised, nor its rites attended by the majority of men and women in these islands. Moreover, though the organised anti-Christian Movement is small, it seems indisputable that a substantial and steadily increasing minority of the current population definitely disbelieves in all forms of religious dogma, including those of Christianity; and, further, that this minority is strongest amongst the educated classes; that is, amongst those best qualified to judge the truth of such matters.

The Actual Situation

The actual situation in England—in Scotland and Wales Christianity is, perhaps, somewhat stronger—would appear to be something on these lines: the great majority—say, 85 per cent. approximately?—are neither Christian nor

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

Religion "Fades Away"

—By F. A. RIDLEY—

anti-Christian in any positive sense. They are just simply indifferent; or, in current slang, "they couldn't care less." They never read anything serious; if they have ever read the Bible at school they have never opened it since, and are never likely to do so again. Whilst as for the Rationalist critique of religion, they have never heard of it. In relation to contemporary religious controversies, they are merely uninterested outsiders. If, in, say, a compulsory census return, they call themselves "Christians" of one denomination or another, that is solely because Christianity is still established and, as such, still "respectable"; not because they take, or are ever likely to take the faintest interest in it. If the official cult was that of Vishnu or Mumbo-Jumbo, they would give an equally formal and equally meaningless adhesion to it! The existence of this vast amorphous mass, the vast majority of the inhabitants of these islands, represents, certainly a defeat for Christianity. Equally obviously, it does *not* represent a victory for Freethought—nor, indeed, for thought of any kind!

Minority Views

It is in the minorities, religious and anti-religious, that we must look for *positive* beliefs—of any kind. We would say at a rough guess that some ten per cent. of English men and women are Christian in any *positive* sense, to be measured by belief in dogma, or regular attendance at

worship. Conversely, about five per cent. are *positive* disbelievers in Christianity in an articulate sense, thanks to study and reflection, Rationalists in the wider sense of the term. We would, we think, be justified in assuming that the Christian ten per cent. is declining, whilst the anti-Christian five per cent. is, as steadily, increasing in numbers. For the trend of modern knowledge is increasingly unfavourable to dogmatic beliefs.

Is Christianity True?

Behind, and beyond these current controversies, there looms the larger and more ultimate question: Is Christianity true? Our contemporary does not broach this ultimate question though, logically, in our opinion, it ought to have done so, for this, surely, is *the* decisive question. For if Christianity is untrue, no spiritual revival, such as *Picture Post* apparently anticipates, can be anything else but a sham. We cannot go into that vast question here, and we fear that public opinion has still a long way to go before even so outspoken a periodical as *Picture Post* dares to publish an out-spoken statement of the Freethinking case against Christianity. Such an article, even to-day, whilst it would certainly displease the Churches, might provoke repercussions which would surprise the Editor! For the Christian Churches are, to-day, giants with "feet of clay," and one resolute push could send them flying from their sacrosanct pedestals!

A Seventeenth Century Humanist

By EVELYN BELCHAMBERS

"... He had the most sincere and the most candid soul that I have ever known; there was no deceit in him, and I do not know that he ever lied in his life. He had a rare spirit, and was capable of doing anything that he cared to attempt." Thus was Jean de la Fontaine described at his death by his lifelong friend Maucroix. The words quoted are enough to show that here was an early humanist, a gentle soul unduly scorned by the pedants who disapprove of his frank simplicity and his fondness of plain, homely language instead of the artificial idiom that characterised his age.

Monica Sutherland's short biography is timely in bringing to life this delightful personality who reminds us of Rabelais and Montaigne, for he, equally with them, was an honest life-worshipper with an immense zest for natural pleasures not bought at the expense of his fellows. For La Fontaine was nothing if not compassionate, as his fables show. His natural history is notoriously incorrect, but this does not matter at all, nor does it interfere with his exquisite character delineation. La Fontaine was never rich, but he was lucky enough to find one sympathetic patron after another under whose wing he could live unharrassed and write unhindered. It was an age of patronage, and therefore he had to be cautious in his fables when he described the shortcomings of the aristocracy, and, of course, of royalty. Even so, he succeeded very well in hinting more than once at his private contempt for the arrogant and his pity for the oppressed. His complete hatred of war is made plain over and over again in the course of his writings.

La Fontaine was a simple person, but fundamentally honest and kindly, ever loyal to his friends and helpers. His impulsive and somewhat emotional nature made him fancy that he had a call to the priesthood, but he was more interested in filling his biretta with breadcrumbs and lowering it from his cell so that he could watch the birds feeding. His theological studies were short-lived, and it was not until the end of his life, when he was ill and, like so many life-lovers, in dread of approaching death, that he

again fell under the sway of the Church, this time going to the point of allowing himself a full-scale reconversion and an official repentance for his supposedly "immoral" *Contes*. His naïveté may be judged from his suggestion that a hundred copies of these *Contes*, in a new edition, might be sold and the proceeds given to the poor—this when he had nominally repudiated them as "infamous" works!

But naïveté sometimes goes with extreme subtlety, and this was so in the case of La Fontaine, whose charming and varied fables will be a source of delight as long as humanity remains on this earth. It is a pity that, like all poetry they defy translation and are thus but little read, except by students of French. Mrs. Sutherland's book will at least be something towards reawakening interest in one of the most natural, down-to-earth figures in the long and honoured succession of French writers.

LA FONTAINE by Monica Sutherland. (Jonathan Cape): 12s. 6d.

Asleep in the Afternoon

Half past three . . .

I stretch my weary body on a couch;
The world no longer troubles me,
Against the Government I bear no grouch.
No thoughts can me annoy,
I might be in a swoon,
For I am old, and it is afternoon,
And sleep—a joy.

I am half past the best of life;
All that remains
Are memories of struggles, fruitful strife,
When youthful blood flowed in my veins.
The little wisdom old-age gains
Must be, and is, life's guerdon
For age, decrepit age,
My present burden:
Sleep, and contentment, and reflections sage.

—BAYARD SIMMONS.

The Life of Abraham

By A. R. HILL

HIS full life story is given in Genesis 12, 27, to 24, 10, also 25, 1-10.

All references being in Genesis, it is only necessary to refer to chapters and verses.

Abraham is claimed to be the greatest of the Hebrew patriarchs. The Bible says he was a prophet of the Lord, 20, 7. The orthodox theologian and the preacher in the pulpit confine themselves to a particular incident, knowing that none of their readers or congregations study and compare one part of the Bible with another, consequently from the story of his willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac as a burnt offering, the general impression of his character is brightness, nobility and trustfulness in God, whereas by studying his whole life story we find him a coward, hypocrite and one who lacked faith in God. We also find remarkable coincidences and absurdities.

By reference to two incidents some interesting facts are revealed:—

First incident was when they went into Egypt, 12, 11-13.

Second incident was when they went into Gerar, 20, 1-2.

In both incidents Abraham told his wife to say she was his sister because he was afraid they might kill him if she said she was his wife, but if she said she was his sister they would take her and leave him alone. As we have stated, Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son Isaac as a burnt offering at the request of God, chapter 22, but when his own life was in jeopardy he stooped to ask his wife to risk her honour to save him, but the Lord saved her from Pharaoh, 12, 11-20, Abimelech, 20, 1-18.

If he had had faith in the Lord's word, there was no need to be afraid for his life. Before the first incident "The Lord appeared unto Abram and said, 'unto thy seed will I give this land'" 12, 7, and he had no seed in chap. 5, 2.

He can be forgiven for being apprehensive over the first incident, but having had the experience of the Lord's protection in the first incident, he must have been in a funk to repeat it, especially when the Lord further reassured him of his protection. Before the second incident, "The Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, 'Fear not, Abram, I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward,'" 15, 1, and also before the second incident, the Lord said "I will bless her (Sarah) and give thee a son also of her . . . and she shall be a mother of nations," 17, 16, see 17, 21. Sarah's son Isaac was born after the second incident, 21, 1-3.

To ascertain Sarah's age it is necessary to know she was ten years younger than Abraham, 17, 17, so before the first incident Sarah was 65 years of age, 12, 4, she must have been a handsome and well-preserved woman for Abraham to think that Pharaoh would prefer an old woman to a younger one, but what must we think of the second incident when Sarah was between 89 and 90 years of age, 17, 24, and 21, 5, we know she was an old woman in the second incident, for we read in 18, 12, "Therefore, Sarah laughed within herself, saying, 'After I am waxed old, shall I have pleasure, by lord (Abraham), being old also'" and Abraham said, "They will slay me for my wife's sake," 20, 11.

Abraham and 318 of his servants defeated four kings and their armies, chap. 14, but he refused to take his legitimate war booty, 14, 23, yet he accepted riches from Pharaoh and Abimelech as the price of his wife's threatened dishonour, 12, 16, and 20, 14 and 16.

If we believe these two incidents, what can we say of such hypocrisy?

THE GENERATIONS FROM ADAM TO JACOB

	1	2	3	4	5
Adam		130	930	0	930
Seth	105	912	130	1042	
Ends	90	905	235	1140	
Cainan	70	910	325	1235	
Mahalaleel ...	65	895	395	1290	
Jared	162	962	460	1422	
Enoch	65	365	622	987	
Methuselah ...	187	969	687	1656	
Lamech	182	777	874	1651	
Noah	500	950	1056	2006	
Shem	100	600	1556	2156	
Arphaxad	35	438	1656	2094	
Salah	30	433	1691	2124	
Eber	34	464	1721	2185	
Peleg	30	239	1755	1994	
Reu	32	239	1785	2024	
Serug	30	230	1817	2047	
Nahor	29	148	1847	1995	
Terah	70	205	1876	2081	
Abraham	100	175	1946	2121	
Isaac	60	180	2046	2226	
Jacob			2106		

References not given in chapters 5 and 11: Noah's death, Genesis 9, 29; Abraham's death, Genesis 25, 7; Isaac's death, Genesis 35, 28; Isaac's birth, Genesis 21, 5; Jacob's birth, Genesis 25, 26.

Column 1 gives the names of father and son in the descending order; column 2 gives the age of the father when his son was born; column 3 gives the age of each man at his death.

The names and ages are taken from Genesis 5, 3-52, and Genesis 11, 10-32.

The names are also given in I Chronicles, 1, 1-4, 24-28, and in Luke 3, 34-38.

As the ages are read from the Bible they do not convey much. But when the dates, after the creation, are derived from them, columns 4 and 5, then we get some useful information.

Column 4 gives the date, A.C., when each man was born. Column 5 gives the date, A.C., when each man died.

The dates in column 4 are obtained by adding all the ages, in column 2, from the father upwards.

The dates in column 5 are obtained by adding the date at birth, column 4, to the age at death, column 3.

Methuselah, the oldest man that ever lived, and his age, 969, are fairly well known. But it is little known that Adam was only 39, and Noah 19, years short of that age.

But what can be thought of the longevity of the following:—

Adam died when Lamech was 56 years of age; Adam died 126 years before the birth of Noah. Noah died when Abraham was 60 years of age. Shem died when Jacob was 50 years of age. Shem died 80 years before the children of Israel went into Egypt, Genesis 47, 9. Shem, Salah, and Eber outlived Abraham.

If we could bring these lives to modern times we should appreciate their ages more fully.

If Adam had been created 70 years before the first Crusade, 1096 A.D., he would be living to-day.

If Adam had been created at the time of Jesus Christ, Noah would be alive to-day.

(To be concluded)

This Believing World

Although Spiritualism can always be news in the hands of a capable journalist, the public often require a change—so we are not surprised that the *Sunday Dispatch* has commenced a series of articles on that wondrous question, Reincarnation. One example it gives is of a lady who appears to be pretty certain that she used to be the wife of Pontius Pilate, though she does not press the claim. How does she know? Why, she is constantly dreaming that the noble lady (who looks exactly like her) comes out of a house, and tells a man so clearly that she can be heard, "Have thou nothing to do with that just man, for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of Him." This will be found in Matt. 27, 19. Can anything be stronger proof of Reincarnation? We have Mr. Pilate and Mrs. Pilate, and Mrs. Pilate was so ahead of her time that she was able to speak in the English of the Authorised Version! And Mr. Pilate understood her!

The wonderful thing about Reincarnation is that the people who consider that they are Reincarnations are always certain that they were Princes or Kings or High Priests or some very notable person. Mrs. Besant, when she swallowed the Gnostic nonsense of Theosophy, was even certain that one of the many distinguished lives she had had in the past was that of Jesus Christ himself. Never were these people humble slaves or illiterate nobodies. And the *Sunday Dispatch* has the word of a child of four who distinctly remembers when she had been a wife and a mother.

An excellent article on Evolution by Dr. Wolverson Cope in the *Hanley Evening Sentinel* pulverises the Fundamentalist rubbish of the Rev. E. Victor Pearce and his Jehovah's Witnesses followers. These people appear to think every time scientists correct an error that this proves the literal truth of Miracles, Hell, Devils, and Angels, as described in Holy Writ. For Dr. Cope, this is immeasurably sad because even our elementary education upon which hundreds of millions of pounds are spent should at least be good enough to give people a fair idea of what is going on in the scientific world. Dr. Cope, who is Professor of Geology at University College, Keele, is to be congratulated on his splendid article, and the Editor for publishing it.

Dr. Leslie Weatherhead, who is a convinced believer in spooks, is extremely puzzled why, at one seance he attended, he found the medium in the name of the dead husband telling the widow about a gold-filled tooth she had, and not a word about the wonderful time he was having in Summerland or the Etheric (different vibration) World he was now living in. One would have thought such an eminent man of God would have consulted the 10,931 works which have been published describing in detail exactly the kind of life dead people will be forced to enjoy. And even Dr. Weatherhead is now convinced that there will be no "golden streets, waving palms and endless anthems"—and he might have added not even endless parables from Jesus.

Successive Home Secretaries have told us that the only way to deal with juvenile delinquency is by pumping more and more religion into juveniles. A delightful example of its success was shown the other day by two Roman Catholic boys of Glamorgan Farm school. After having said their prayers in St. Joseph's Church, Neath, they stole a valuable ecclesiastical cloth, and then the collection box worth £10 which contained £3 in cash. They were not struck dead by an angry God—a fate which would have

happened to them in the famous Ages of Faith—but the magistrate did not, as he should have done, tell us why religion is so necessary for juvenile delinquency.

The Lion and the Chimpanzee

By W. H. WOOD

ALTHOUGH nearly six months have elapsed since the spot of bother over the Coronation TV presentation in America, there is still a strong suspicion that something is wrong in the state of Anglo-American relations. When the performing chimpanzee, Mr. Muggs, decided to make mugs out of us, our Prime Minister appeared to be desperately anxious to hush-up the unfortunate incident. The Bull-dog bark degenerated into the snuffling whimper of an asthmatical Peke. When insult, bad-taste and bad-manners are shown towards the British Crown we are not usually slow to slap the offender down—the lion does not like having its tail pulled, even in jest. Does America believe that the old gentleman has grown old and tired, too weary to growl and too weak to bite, thus becoming fair game for any precocious youngster to prod—just to see what would happen? Well, we all know now that *nothing* happens!

While on the subject of performing monkeys, what about all this McCarthy nonsense? Apparently this blustering showman with a Red bee in his bonnet does not confine his act to the American Senate House, but was allowed to send his comic troupe snooping all over Europe. When Messrs. Cohn and Schine poked their long noses into this country they should have been thrown out; the explanation that they were inspecting American libraries and information offices was a poor excuse for the practice of political snoopering and cannot be reconciled with America's loud boast of Liberty and Freedom. If this sort of thing is allowed to continue we can force the Statue of Liberty being replaced by the effigy of Senator McCarthy quizzing through a spy-glass and holding aloft a thumb-screw for extorting confessions of un-American activity!

One might have thought the Senator's delight in creating bad-feeling between our two countries would have been discredited by all decent Americans, yet we find the State Department in Washington actually supporting this comic in his un-funny act. Perhaps McCarthy's greatest piece of buffoonery was to ban and burn all publications to which he chose to take exception. The works of any author suspected of remote Left sympathies were considered too dangerous for the simple-minded Americans to read and had to be destroyed wholesale. Surely it is the limit of venomous absurdity when that great champion of freedom, Thomas Paine, world-famous for his books "The Rights of Man" and "The Age of Reason" which have established him for all time as the enemy of oppression, was condemned by McCarthy as an enemy of liberty!

If this Senator's peculiar paranoia is allowed to spread unchecked Liberty and Freedom will soon be as non-existent in the United States as they are in the totalitarian countries of Europe—or does America aim to be the greatest dictatorship of them all? Perhaps Uncle Sam is too busily engaged sneering at Britain and kicking us in the pants to notice that he is being rapidly de-bagged himself. It is time we made it clear that we are not yet a decadent nation even if we did have to bankrupt ourselves fighting alone for the freedom of the world before America descended to lend a hand; and the sooner we make it known that we will not tolerate interference, dictation or insult from *any* foreign power the better. We have licked Uncle Sam's boots quite long enough and the taste is turning sour. We don't much like the *smell*, either!

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To Correspondents

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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.

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: F. A. RIDLEY.

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, January 3, 6-45 p.m.: H. L. SEARLE, "Have We Freewill?"

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq., W.C.1).—Sunday, January 3, 11 a.m.: S. K. RATCLIFFE, "Hopes and Fears for 1954."

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq., W.C.1).—Tuesday, January 5, 7 p.m.: NOEL THOMSON, "What Modern Music Means," with illustrations.

Junior Discussion Group (Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq., W.C.1).—Friday, January 8, 7-15 p.m., "Liberalism and International Affairs."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare St., 2-30 p.m.).—Mr. W. L. MIRON (N.C.B.). Subject: "Nationalised Coal Industry."

lightweight, in respect not only of their physical contrast but also of their debating skill, the "great little Armstrong" proves an able and courteous opponent on *Is it Reasonable to Worship God?* Foote is also debating frequently.

1879. The *Secular Chronicle* dies. Foote attempts a monthly, *Liberal*, containing anti-religious matter, but the venture fails. Mrs. Besant is deprived of the custody of her child because of her heretical views. Her current work includes a plea for India and Afghanistan. Standing attacks royalism. Foote writes his *Philosophy of Secularism*.

1880. At the fourth attempt Bradlaugh is elected for Northampton. His request to affirm, instead of taking the religious oath, is refused by Commons: his offer to take the oath is also refused, and a committee recommendation that he affirm at his legal peril is rejected by the House. He then presents himself to be sworn and is faced with fierce hostility: refusing to withdraw he is removed to the Clock Tower and there detained. N.S.S. membership reaches 6,000 and there is an untold increase in outside support: Aveling becomes a Vice-President of the N.S.S. The new Hall of Failsworth Secular Sunday School is opened. Secular funerals are legalised. *Republican* appears. Watts takes W. S. Ross (Saladin), who had been prepared for the ministry at Glasgow University, as co-editor of his *Secular Review*. An International Federation of Freethinkers is formed; Watts and Holyoake express themselves on secularism in Britain. Mrs. Besant attacks barbaric forms of punishment. Symes exposes the attitude of Christians towards slavery, Foote defines atheist morality and Aveling continues to adduce the support of science for secularism.

1881. This is an eventful year. There is a nation-wide controversy over Bradlaugh, who on one occasion is forcibly ejected from the House by ten policemen and others in a brutal struggle, as a result of which Mrs. Besant has to restrain Bradlaugh's assembled supporters from violence against his persecutors. Gladstone moves that he shall affirm at legal peril, so that when Bradlaugh votes it is taken to court: the Northampton seat is then declared vacant. There is naturally a strengthening of the secularist campaign for affirmation rights, though Holyoake maintains a strangely hostile attitude towards Bradlaugh. The N.S.S. acquires the support of a new organ, *The Freethinker*, which, edited by G. W. Foote, is identified with N.S.S. aims. It is militantly anti-Christian and employs the weapon of ridicule. The first number is mainly the work of Foote but there is an article by Symes. The list of outdoor speakers includes the names of Foote, Ramsey and Moss. On the staff are J. M. Wheeler and W. P. Ball. The price is one penny and there are eight pages. Starting as a monthly it becomes, after four issues, a weekly, with Wheeler as sub-editor. It is published by the Freethought Publishing Co., of Stonecutter St. Foote makes the paper both scholarly and incisive, and the clergy are immediately incensed by its "blasphemy." There appear "Comic Bible Sketches" illustrating absurd miracles, taken from the French (Leo Taxil's *La Bible Amusante*). The Christmas number, which incidentally contains the first signed article by Aveling, is particularly blasphemous. At the opening of the Leicester Secular Hall the speakers, besides Gimson, are Holyoake, Bradlaugh (who is urgently called away on business connected with his parliamentary struggle), Mrs. Besant and Mrs. Harriet Law, with the poet James Thomson also on the platform. The works of Col. R. G. Ingersoll are being made available in Britain by Truelove and by Sugden of Leek. Mrs. Besant is engaged in opposing vivisection.

(To be continued)

A Chronology of British Secularism

By G. H. TAYLOR

(Continued from December 11, 1953)

1878. Bradlaugh and Mrs. Besant start their own Freethought Publishing Co. in Stonecutter St., publish the Knowlton pamphlet and are sentenced to six months each; secularists raise funds for their defence and the sentence is quashed. Meanwhile the new Knowlton edition sells 100,000 in three months, and a birth control pamphlet of Mrs. Besant's 150,000. Edward Truelove gets four months for selling birth control pamphlets; secularists raise funds for his defence and petition the government, unsuccessfully, regarding his sentence. This year sees the free distribution at London open air meetings of 48,000 N.S.S. tracts. An ex-Methodist minister of Leeds, Joseph Symes, is now lecturing, debating and writing for the N.S.S. A young journalist from the Isle of Arran goes to work on the staff of an Edinburgh paper, hears Bradlaugh speak there and joins the local N.S.S. branch; he is J. M. Robertson. Watts and Foote edit the *British Secular Almanac*. Edited by G. Standing the *Secular Chronicle* is now a monthly again. Bradlaugh has one of his most pleasant and instructive debates at Nottingham, his opponent being the Unitarian Rev. R. A. Armstrong. Though it is heavyweight versus

Pride Goeth

By A. R. WILLIAMS

REVEREND AMBROSE BRADDEN came out of the Vicarage, across a lawn and through a wicket which led into the churchyard. He was going to read evensong. Dusk was falling, leaving barely enough light for the reverend gentleman to see his way down the path, which curved to arrive at the west door of Saint Faith's Church.

The path was lined by cypresses whose stiff uprightness pleased the old parson. They reminded him of his soldier son, tall and smart, distinguished in his well-fitting uniform. He made great sacrifices to send Henry through Wellington and Sandhurst. This outlay and the economies entailed justified themselves. Henry was now a General. No clergyman of his acquaintance had a son of that rank, though many had officer sons. There seemed a close connection between the Anglican Church and the Army. Appropriately so, socially and on principle. Reverend Ambrose Bradden hummed "Onward Christian Soldiers" as he paced the gravel.

That crunching under his feet helped to guide him on the path, as did its greyness against the bordering turf, now black to look at, as were the cypresses against deepening sky, giving further guidance which he needed, so walked slowly without abating his habitual pompousness. His sight was weak, therefore he wore glasses whose thickness and curves made them resemble pebbles.

The Vicar of Saint Faith's had grown enormously stout. Standing six feet tall, broad of back and thick of limbs, his rotund belly was hemispherical. The best tailoring could not conceal, though it reduced the noticeability of his bulk. Not only did he employ first-class tailors but also the best of cooks working upon rich abundant foods, fortified by well-stocked wine cellar.

The old gentleman's massive head was proportionate to his body. It had gone completely bald, a huge oval domed cranium. Well for him he never heard pert choristers call it bladder of lard, for his dignity would have been much hurt.

Dignity he had, of stature and movement and voice; pride in inverse ratio to his intellect, which was simple, though not childlike.

He had reason to be proud. From a poor curate with no family influence he rose by gentlemanliness and impressive style of tone, mien and bearing to be incumbent of the wealthiest parish in the diocese. Wealthy in two ways; in size of its stipend and bank balances of its parishioners.

So Reverend Ambrose Bradden's social status was high. He visited and entertained the elite, some of them titled. It was expensive, often had he been in debt, but results were profitable. He could only be gratified by them. Henry married the daughter of a marquis, lady in her own right and by descent. He was as proud of her as was her husband.

II

At memory of his elder daughter's marriage, the Reverend Ambrose Bradden tingled with joy. Catherine was a beautiful child, as intelligent and accomplished as she was gracious of face and body. No trouble or expense had been spared to train her besitting exalted circles into which she went with ease and confidence and success astonishing even her father, trustful as he was in her excellences and ambitious for their fruition. Result had been her marriage to a viscount, heir to an earldom, succeeding to it on his father's death.

His lovely daughter a countess! It showed she was perfect, as had been his plans and workings for her. Often as he preached of the felicities of heaven it was doubtful if

such exceeded in his mind the magnificence of the wedding, celebrated in this church with the bishop officiating, while himself looked into paradise as he beheld the glories of the nuptials, Catherine centrally angelic.

Her sister was a colourless personality, plain of face, ordinary, though efficient domestically. Well Anne should be so. Her mother lacked the virility and style, the purpose and presence which he possessed. A good wife and mother, but in the background, leaving him to be doer of deeds which resulted in ennobling his family. Also she was ageing more rapidly than himself.

So with his usual prescience, which unkind people called selfishness, her father impressed upon Anne the homely virtues. Rewardingly, she became a home-lover, at least a home-dweller. Men who looked at her fondly were edged off or she withdrawn from them. One pressing suitor there had been. He being curate of Saint Faith's, the vicar dismissed him. A few tears from Anne and all was serene again. The venerable gentleman could foresee she would be a great comfort in his old age, transcending wife or maids or nurse, incorporating affectionately the duties of all three.

One grievance Reverend Ambrose Bradden had; lack of professional promotion. Bishopric he did not expect, but surely Archdeaconry or Canonry should have come to him! At his loftiest moments he imagined a Deanship. Though not given to self-examination, the Vicar of Saint Faith's knew he was not the type who are made deans, they being markedly the brains of the Anglican Church.

Yet his thoughts reverted to what he had missed. Were he a Dean, the verger bearing wand of office would meet him at his house door, escorting him to evensong and similarly on return. Instead he would have to be satisfied to find the church door left open for him to enter.

This was inside the west porch. Owing to the number and persistence of local dogs a wire mesh door on light steel framing had been fitted to the west porch, excluding the creatures, but making it possible to leave the inner doors open for light and ventilation.

Perhaps subconsciously elated by imagination of a Deanery the portly gentleman trod firmly on to the step of the porch. In the dark his poor sight did not see the wire mesh door still closed. With great force his protuberant abdomen thrust against the door. For a couple of seconds the Vicar clutched uselessly at nothing, recoiled, tottered, then fell heavily flat on his back.

A Correspondence Circle

A correspondent has drawn our attention to the plight of Freethinkers who live in such intellectual backwoods as many rural areas undoubtedly are. He says he never meets anyone with whom he can discuss serious social, moral and philosophical questions, and suggests that the solution is to be found in a Freethinkers' Correspondence Circle. Readers similarly situated may care to communicate with him, and he will put them in touch with one another. He is Mr. Rupert L. Humphris, 75, Graystone Road, Tankerton-on-Sea, Kent, whose name has appeared a good many times in our correspondence columns.

THE BIBLE HANDBOOK. By G. W. Foote and W. P. Ball. Price 4s.; postage 3d. (Tenth edition.)

AGE OF REASON. By Thomas Paine. With 40 page introduction by Chapman Cohen. Price, cloth 3s. 9d., paper 2s. 6d.; postage 3d.

Things Obscene

(Through Shameful Prudery)

WM. A. VAUGHAN

DELICACY is good sense refined and innocence is often synonymous for ignorance. Good and bad are relative words, and what is classical when expressed in Latin becomes vulgar in good English.

Thus, ethics and "tastes" vary when an immoral man is a brilliant writer, and Morality becomes paradoxical because laws are enforced to protect natural sentiments. Women who show too much breast or leg are condemned, but naked arms expose no shame. Why conceal modes of beauty; yet permit exposure of repulsive faces objectionable to public view? And, as fine art sculptures nature nudely, may not useful sex information be printed and not dubbed "OBSCENE" through shameful PRUDERY. Man know thyself and read all things is philosophy; though some scriptures which describe lustful actions of beastly men with innocent women, as related by XIX Judges, are offensive, and these indecent revelations are published by Act of Parliament.

Shocking scenes are always harmful, and ignorance implies a barren mind which urges immoral prudery. Theatres are closed by the Lord Chamberlain on the Lord's Day; when "morality" plays of "The Virgin Birth" are acted in Churches on Sunday!

Contradictory words wrongly influence untutored mind as when the "bloody sweat" is both sacred and scandalous swearing. A child is rushed out of the room when it says "pea," which in Latin is p—s, an indecent word for adults: Obscenity is a crime and rightly punishable; yet "obscene" was a religious word used by priests when sacrificing beasts; and originally meant ill-omen or unlucky; now it's a beastly distinction of the word obscene and the act signified. Prudes are sham moralists. Their feigned indecency is want of sense and admits of no defence, like John Lackinton, London's old-time second-hand book-seller, a rabid puritan, who rushed into his garden and twisted a cock's neck for treading a hen on "The Sabbath"!

Michaelde Monta-digne's moral book "Essays" condemned as "licentious and crammed with obscenities," was dedicated with permission to the Great Cardinal de Richelieu, and graciously accepted by Pope Gregory XIII; while similar moral writings are "Indexed" by super-fops like those fellows who donned white kid gloves before micturating.

There are few natural recreations without defamers, who retard social activities by mock modesty and obliquity of vision who see ill-omened obscenity in ill-luck.

There was a "Prude's Dictionary" of words forbidden to public speakers and writers; a finical collection suitable as a ribald gift for dabblers in smut, who, themselves, want to discover obscenity which is not in others.

Such ridiculous absurdity is instanced by a prude dame who forbade her groom to say "belly-band," instead of stomach strap; and the butler serving seedless oranges to ladies as "novels" for desert!

Then there is the over-ripe spinster who considered marriage a most shocking state, when she visualised a woman in bed with a naked man; cheres precieuses ridicules, the dear darling's sister who committed this shocking lawful act, not that she loved man's embraces, but to give evidences of herself to posterity by bearing children, FIE!

This old maid morality fearing the loss of virtues never possessed, produces pimply peevishness which forbids French ladies saying "aimer les confitures," mais "des

fitures." An English Wit proved that prudish chastity was ridiculous by asking a lady, which two letters alphabetically followed N, she replied unhesitatingly "O.P.," and, afterwards self-inferring a naughty idea, blushed profusely and hurriedly departed. This state of Cockney mind is well illustrated by another foolish trait to prate about indecencies in order to avoid them. These absurdities were known as "bawdy sermons" preached during the 16th and 17th centuries, when "warning deflowerers of young virgins, fornicators enticing maidens and sporting themselves," according to Saint Peter's 2nd Epistle, and a religious rascal became screwed with his own vice and emasculated a *prendre exemple pour les autres*; he being a gallant with three mistresses, one he kept, and two others in the "stews" kept him.

Finally, there is the ecclesiastical record of a Bishop, after expatiating on uncleanness, ended with the prayer; "O Lord, I beseech thee to send a seraphim with a burning coal to brand adulterers, and to purify my lips.

Capital Punishment

By RAYMOND DOUGLAS

EVER since capital punishment was enforced as a deterrent for crime, its effectiveness has been questionable. To-day we can look far back on the times when petty offenders were executed by hanging, and in England this method of punishment is now used only for murder.

Psychologists will tell you that a criminal believes he is too clever to be found out, so if someone is planning to kill you it is with every conviction that he will go on living after your demise. It does not matter what penalties are laid down for him if he is caught, for he is certain that his superior intellect will see him through. Therefore, in his case, capital punishment can be no deterrent.

So much for the criminal who premeditates his crime.

Of another order there is the crime of passion, in which somebody under great provocation—or in a blind rage—is likely to take up a chopper and give you a blow on the head for no other reason than that you have annoyed him. This is the killer who will try to cover up his action afterwards, and who nearly always leaves clues because he does not possess the cunning of the premeditator.

Then there are the mentally abnormal who fill Broadmoor awaiting the Queen's pleasure. These are the people who are homicidal maniacs, who commit sex crimes against adults and children, and who must be considered as a very serious problem in view of the fact that for long stretches they can appear to be absolutely normal.

These are distinct categories for which the law provides only one remedy. The great question that Freethinkers should decide is whether capital punishment is to be opposed or supported in dealing with one or all of the forms of murder. One thing certain is that it has no effect in decreasing the amount of crime, and murders will be committed whatever the methods used to punish the offenders. Until some effective method of dealing with the people psychologically has shown itself foolproof, there is little we can do in this respect except with some of the very young. These cases are different every time, and this makes it difficult to deal with them under any form of legal or government administration in which certain inflexible laws prescribe the punishment.

One of the chief arguments against capital punishment is the effect it has on the public, for in many cases it means the fulfilment of their sadistic impulses and blood lust. The answer to this is that executions should be carried out in complete secrecy and without publicity as to time, date or place.

If you are diametrically opposed to capital punishment you surely would not agree that the doors should be opened to these killers and that they should be permitted to go free. Yet how are we to deal with them when we know that the figures are so high and that we would need more and more prisons to accommodate young men of twenty over the span of a lifetime?

Other penalties could be imposed, or the prisoner could be given the option between death sentence being carried out or submitting himself physically as a human guinea-pig. This would, of course, have the backing of anti-vivisectionists in spite of the fact that murder in the animal kingdom is of daily occurrence.

Freethinkers cannot merely protest against a law that is meant to protect society, without being clear as to what can replace it. What is the solution?

Review

THE RATIONALIST ANNUAL, 1954. Edited by Hector Hawton. Watts & Co., 2s. 6d. net.

Most of the contributors to *The Rationalist Annual* are so well known that it was bound to reach its usual high standard. The articles by Bertrand Russell, J. B. S. Haldane, Somerset Maugham, W. E. Swinton, are typical examples of work which has, in the past, made their reputations; and the other contributors, T. H. Pear, P. Nowell-Smith, D. G. Macrae, F. H. George, and the Editor, Hector Hawton, have all provided more or less brilliant articles in their own fields.

If I am permitted some little criticism it would be that the writers, taken as a whole, have been rather chary of indulging in any forthright criticism of Christianity, so that they could have equally graced the pages of the *Hibbert Journal* with the same articles. In fact, some of these, with slight alterations, could have appeared in the *Church Times* without any protest from its more credulous readers.

Bertrand Russell is at his best in "Are the World's Troubles due to Decay in Faith?", and Somerset Maugham is wittily blasphemous—rather reminding one of that other great wit, the devout Dean Swift. Dr. Swinton deals with "Missing Links" with his usual scientific precision and, for those who are wondering what "Existentialism" is about, they will find a great deal of information in D. G. Macrae's article.

Hector Hawton's article is entitled "The Logic of Total War", and I cannot help wondering to whom it is addressed? His readers are, in the main, Rationalists, Ethicists and Humanists, and they are surely as opposed to total war as he is himself. And if the *Annual* is read by other thoughtful people they must be also opposed to total war. Who are the people who want total war? Mr. Hawton says "retired generals and backwoodsmen still bluster about a 'show-down'"—but as he gives no names or when or where they "bluster", I am inclined to think that they are the products of his excessive imagination. In other words, I do not believe there are any "such persons." His article is packed with "we's"—"we all felt", "we have adopted", "if we look back", "we attempt to deplete", "if we are not rational", and so on and on. In fact, so incessant are the "we's" that I was not surprised to come across, "We started the last war by refusing to bomb even warships . . . we ended with Hiroshima." Well, if this is so, Mr. Hawton is sadly to blame as, of course, he is included in the "we"—though, speaking for myself, as I am not an American, I cannot be blamed for Hiroshima.

In any case what is Mr. Hawton doing about all this atom bombing? "We" all knew that if atom bombs are let loose on London it may lead to our extinction even if he does remind us again of it. It may lead even to the end of civilisation; but I could see little in his article of a constructive nature.

H. CUTNER.

Correspondence

HUMANISM

SIR.—While I agree with much that Bissett Lovelock says on the nature and tactics of communism, I fail to see why this admonitory sermon is addressed to our Friends of the American Humanist Association. I refer, of course, to the "Letter to a humanist" published in *The Freethinker* of November 6. Realising as I do that many readers of your journal may not be familiar with the philosophy, activities, etc., of the American Humanist Association I will here discuss something of what I know of them. Many of your readers will then perhaps wonder with me why these irrelevant remarks of Bissett Lovelock's are directed at the association.

The association exists of course to extend and publicise the principles of naturalistic humanism, broadly as laid down in the *Humanist Manifesto* of 1933. This is published in full in the March-April issue of *The Humanist* last year, or alternately, is to be found on page 203 of James H. Leuba's *The Reformation of the Churches* (Beacon Press, Boston, 1950). Particularly important points from this *Manifesto* are as follows:—

"Point Six: We are convinced that the time has passed for theism, deism, modernism, and the several varieties of 'new thought.'"

"Point Eight: Religious humanism considers the complete realisation of human personality to be the end of man's life and seeks its development and fulfilment in the here and now. This is the explanation of the humanist's social passion."

"Point Ten: It follows that there will be no uniquely religious emotions and attitudes of the kind hitherto associated with belief in the supernatural."

"Point Fifteen: We assert that humanism will (a) affirm life rather than deny it; (b) seek to elicit the possibilities of life, not flee from it; and (c) endeavour to establish the conditions of a satisfactory life for all, not merely for the few. By this positive morale and intention humanism will be guided, and from this perspective and alignment the techniques and efforts of humanism will flow."

The *Manifesto* was signed by, amongst others, John Dewey, Harry Elmer Barnes, Charles Francis Potter, Curtis W. Reese and Roy Wood Sellars.

Here then is a sane and satisfying philosophy of life, here is the true and inspiring call of democracy. At least there is little that a Freethinker can quarrel with, and much that we can support.

One of the major activities of the association is the publication of the bi-monthly magazine *The Humanist*. This regularly contains articles attacking supernaturalism, religious intolerance, racial discrimination, irrationalism, and perhaps most important of all in relation to Bissett Lovelock's remarks, McCarthyism in all its forms. During recent months *The Humanist* has been giving particular attention to political witch hunting and bigotry on the American continent.

In addition to publishing, the association also organises meetings and conferences in the cities of the U.S.A. At the Mid-west regional humanist conference held in Chicago in February of this year, speakers included Corliss Lamont, author of *The Illusion of Immortality and Humanism as a Philosophy*; and Washburn McCollum, that untiring defender of the principle of separation of Church and State.

By now, readers will I am sure, see that the American Humanist Association should have the complete support of Rationalists and Freethinkers throughout the world. It is doing wonderful work in the fight against superstition of all kinds and, in addition, as I have shown above, supports all campaigns in defence of democracy.

No, Bissett Lovelock, the American Humanist Association cannot by implication even, be accused of jumping on the irrational McCarthy band-wagon, for the association represents American democracy at its finest and truest. Let us, then support and aid these defenders of democracy, not hinder them.—Yours, etc.,

ALAN E. WOODFORD.