

The Freethinker

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IN a way this book* marks an era in freethought. It shows we have reached a stage in English public opinion when the discussion of homosexuality can be tolerated; indeed, even a brace of working Conservative politicians like Lord Birkenhead and Montgomery Hyde, M.P., dare to encourage a personal book about Wilde and to review it.

But this work is not mere filial whitewash of Wilde, done tardily and timidly by a son in his 68th year. The only whitewash lies in trying to show the "esurient Oscar" as a heavy sentimental father playing on the nursery-floor (how he would have hated that, except as a private and momentary rôle!) and as the golfer, fisherman, swimmer, rider and general "he-man" of his early youth.

The book has a great and tragic theme: the frightful bewildering shadow of disaster and shame cast over the lives of two innocent growing boys, half-apprehended but not known or understood. Of it, a minor classic of the order of Edmund Gosse's *Father and Son* might easily have been made. But Mr. Holland has muffed it. He has been too interested in minor details of his own education; in trivialities; and, falling between two stools, he has sometimes regarded himself as the protagonist of, and sometimes his father. One thinks of how differently (remembering *De Profundis*), the genius of his father would have treated the theme; or what David Copperfield's creator could have done with it.

The best thing in the book by far is Cyril, the elder Wilde boy. He comes alive. But it is not Mr. Holland's skill that makes him vivid and real, but the unhappy Cyril's own words in a letter about "his purpose for 16 years" to blot out the stain on the Wilde name:—

"In Tibet . . . when I was weary and ill with dysentery and alone in a strange and barbarous land it was this Purpose which whispered in my ear: 'It is the cause, my soul, it is the cause'. . . I ask nothing better than to end in honourable battle for my King and country."

And he was killed at Neuve Chapelle in 1915, this son who would be "a man" and not "a decadent artist, an effeminate aesthete, a weak-kneed degenerate." It is not to the point that this letter is naïve nor that he attributes to *Hamlet* lines that are not there. So far as he could, Cyril redeemed the family name.

There is a poignant picture of him as a little boy, desperately cutting the name from his clothing with a knife. A fine fellow, like so many killed in the 1914-18 War!

There are new letters of Wilde in the book, but they are jejune and uncharacteristic, done in youth and of no literary value. They only show what Wilde was like before he was Wilde as his readers know him.

Mr. Holland is not altogether just to Robert Sherard (next to Ross his father's loyalest male friend) deprecating him as a journalist to whom "a good story" alone mattered. Sherard was a novelist and man of letters as well as a journalist: he collaborated with Daudet; he was the

rescuer of Ernest Dowson, the poet, in his last straits; the friend of Zola and Maupassant, a Chevalier of the Legion of Honour. He was more than personally kind both to Oscar and Constance Wilde; and I possess a Wilde letter written from prison (given to me by Sherard) expressing almost fulsome gratitude to this "dear good chivalrous friend." Mr. Holland, however, is not consistent, for

having denigrated Sherard's accuracy, he approvingly quotes his tribute to his mother later on as "the best." It is true that there are errors of fact in Sherard's biography of his friend (as indeed in Mr. Holland's work) but they were due to the difficulties and haste under which the

work had to be completed, and Mr. Holland must agree that Sherard is truthful, meritorious and invaluable, even if sometimes factually mistaken.

Moreover, it was not prison which killed Wilde's genius. Prison, according to those who knew Wilde, improved the man, and obviously did not harm his work, as *De Profundis* and *Reading Gaol* prove. What killed Wilde (as Wilde would agree) was Wilde himself. Drink, meningitis and the late effects of uncured meningitis, or syphilis, or both, broke him mentally and physically and turned a writer of genius into what Bernard Shaw called "a drunken, unproductive swindler"; harsh words indeed for the pitiable last phase in Paris.

Now, however, the wheel has come full cycle. Wilde's work is recognised—and even over-rated—all over the world. On its merits that work endures, which is all that really matters. Mr. Holland's book, plain, pedestrian, and unpretending as it is, will give satisfaction to many thousands of Wilde "fans", for it is a sincere, honest completion (to date) of the Wilde story.

Only—one wishes the writer had that father's genius, and had given us the little masterpiece his story could have been.

* *Son of Oscar Wilde* by Vyvyan Holland. Rupert Hart-Davis, 18s. net.

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

Oscar Wilde Up-to-Date

By C. G. L. Du Cann

Cohenisms

(Culled from the works of Chapman Cohen)

The greatest slander on Satan that the Church perpetuated was in depicting him as paying an enormous price to secure the soul of a monk.

Civilisation is man's method of remedying God's inefficiencies.

It is not, after all, very hard to acquire a fortune. The real difficulty is to deserve one.

To the Puritan, morality is usually something he likes. Immorality is something liked by others.

Debunking the Miraculous

By E. H. GROUT

FREETHINKERS have a short way with miracles—they don't believe any of them. That method has the advantage of simplification and saving time. They don't worry whether it was a couple of quarts or a hundred firkins of water that was turned into wine. For the purposes of romance, large round numbers are delightful. From that point of view one need not inquire whether the Gadarene swine were likely to be so numerous as the 2,000 mentioned by Mark.

Christians, too, have not found it easy to comprehend what real good was wrought by some of the biblical miracles (assuming that they were in fact performed). Thus Prof. Moses Stuart in his *Critical History and Defence of the Old Testament Canon* writes:

"There are men who at least would be greatly offended at having either their learning, or their logic, or their piety called in question, and who in fact regard religion as a matter of very grave import, and yet have avowed themselves unable to discover the great moral end of converting the water at a wedding feast into a large quantity of wine; who are not quite satisfied with the moral bearing of Christ's permission to the demons to enter an immense herd of swine and drown them in the sea; who hang in suspense concerning the great moral design manifested by cursing and withering the fig-tree."

The Freethinker escapes all this perplexity. He denies that any miracle (assuming for the sake of argument that it has been wrought) has any argumentative value apart from its own sphere of action. For example, the Freethinker says: "I don't believe that J.C. was born other than in the normal way."

Christ answers: "Very well. I'll raise Jairus's daughter from the dead."

Assume that J.C. does do so. What it proves is that J.C. could in that instance raise Jairus's daughter. But it had no bearing on whether he himself was conceived other than in the natural manner.

This irrelevance of miracles is an unanswerable argument against them. The Synoptists did not realise this. Here's another example. John the Baptist sends to J.C. asking: "Art thou He that should come, or look we for another?" J.C. replies: "Go back and tell him that lepers are healed, the blind are cured, and the poor are preached to"—which, like the famous flowers that bloom in the spring—has nothing to do with the case. It reminds me of the man who ran into the Duke of Wellington without knowing him, and said:

"Mr. Smith, I believe?"

The Duke replied: "If you can believe that you can believe anything!"

It used to be claimed by Christians that the miracles attested the Revelation, but now both sides of this equation have been cancelled down to nought. Archbishop Trench (*Notes on the Miracles*, p. 54) recognises that more and bigger miracles are reported of others than those attributed to J.C.

When it was proposed to canonize Ignatius Loyola (founder of the Jesuits), over 200 miracles by him were submitted to the Pope—"miracles beside which those of our Lord shrink into insignificance." It is interesting to find in this "cold materialist" age, that some of them, like the coin so conveniently coughed up by the fish caught by Peter in the sea near Capernaum, have quite an economic value. Thus, on entering into dark chambers, Ignatius Loyola was able to light them up by his mere presence. Such economic advantages are extremely touching, and I readily admit that I should modify my attitude towards miracles if I found them contributing to my taxes or

eliminating my bills for electricity! Being raised from the dead does not appeal to me so much. Trench points out that Christ raised only three persons from the dead, but the number thus raised by Francis Xavier "exceeds all count." Of all such resurrectees, it is the subsequent proceedings that would interest me more and more, but we never hear another word about them. Why wasn't something more done about it? Why wasn't the chance taken to disprove *Job* (vii, 9, 10): "As the cloud is consumed and vanisheth away: so he that goeth down to the grave shall come up no more. He shall return no more to his house, neither shall his place know him any more."

Now when it was a matter of *Roman Catholic* miracles, Trench was a rather downy bird. He points out that fifteen years after Loyola's death—in 1572—his early scholar and companion, Ribadeneira, published a life of his departed friend; and fifteen years later, namely in 1587, he published a second and enlarged edition. In neither edition is there any record of Loyola's miracles. "So far from this, the biographer discusses at length the reasons why it did not please God that miracles should be wrought by this eminent servant of his." With regard to Francis Xavier, Trench says we have "a series of letters written by this great apostle to the heathen, out of the midst of his work in the Far East . . . but of miracles wrought by himself, of miracles which the missionary may expect in aid of his work, there occurs not a single word."

Such negative results produce no heartbreak in the Freethinker: he knows that there never has been and never will be within his knowledge any miracle, that is, an "event" due to supernatural agency, act of supernatural power" (*Oxford Dictionary*). As soon as that word *supernatural* is brought in, humanity is shut out. This was admitted by Prof. J. B. Mozley in his first Bampton Lecture on *Miracles*: "Human reason cannot in the nature of the case prove that which, by the very hypothesis, lies beyond human reason." The foundation of Atheism lies in this inability of man, being finite, to grasp the infinite. If there is a deity without body, parts, or passions, an Absolute without relation, Man is unable to know it; for Man's knowledge is the knowledge of relationships—*big, heavy, small, strong, wide, poisonous, red, nutritious*, and so forth. Man is quite unable to "grasp this sorry scheme of things entire": he has to proceed bit by bit: and where there are no bits for his attachment, he cannot know.

There cannot be a valid contract between Man and an Absolute God, for their minds are never *ad idem*. (It is really going beyond our brief to refer to God as having a mind or thoughts or ways.) These things were indeed admitted as long ago as 1594 by the Rev. Richard Hooker in the first book of his *Ecclesiastical Polity*: "Our soundest knowledge is, to know that we know Him not as indeed He is, neither can know Him; and our safest eloquence concerning Him is our silence."

This may be a sorry scheme of things, but we can find some sort of order that has settled down out of the vast ages of whirling worlds and cataclysms. We have found a uniformity in nature, with natural causes and events proceeding in an unbroken and predictable line. It is ridiculous to suppose *as true* that the Jewish chieftain, Joshua, was able to interfere with the complicated arrangements of the astronomical universe. The world would be a much more formidable place to live in if we could not depend upon the working out of natural laws, and if they were subject to the capricious interference of wonder workers.

Brave Little Books

By COLIN McCALL

DURING my regular round of the second-hand bookshops, I recently picked up a little book that I have wanted for a long time. It cannot be called a "rare" book in the usual sense, for it was published only twenty years ago. But it is rare in a much more important way. It combines intelligence with sensitivity and is a model of clear expression. It is *The Romance of Reality*, by the late Janet Chance (George Allen & Unwin, 1934). Older Freethinkers will doubtless know the book, but younger ones and newcomers to our movement may be grateful for an introduction to it and its precursors.

I was fortunate. Some seventeen years ago I heard Mrs. Chance speaking for the National Secular Society in Manchester and was enormously impressed by her. True, I was at an impressionable age; that was part of my good fortune. But I am sure she would have impressed me had it been to-day. Certainly her book does. And it joins her two others already on my shelves: *The Cost of English Morals* and *Intellectual Crime* (1931 and 1933 respectively). Each of the books is small, but I would not exchange them for any massive trilogy.

These three little volumes are the finest written guides to living that I know. They are not, of course, substitutes for living. No writing can be that, and Mrs. Chance is the last person to attempt such an impossible task. It is our mystically-inclined literateurs who exalt art above living and Mrs. Chance is the very opposite of them. She is the complete realist. Not the type that is wrongly so named, who describes only the mean and bestial aspects of life, and seems often to revel in doing so! That is not realism, though it may sometimes provide a useful antidote to over-romanticism. Realism proper does not blind itself to the "seamy" side of life but neither does it present this as the whole picture. It is a balanced, sane view of existence, avoiding the distortion of both extremes. As such it is the necessary ingredient of sane existence. And Mrs. Chance was a splendid advocate for it. Nobody could accuse her of evading the misery and suffering of human beings. She knew these from first-hand experience and devoted much of her life to their alleviation. Sex-problems of the poor and ignorant received her special attention, and the work she did in this connection brought deserved praise from some quarters and obloquy from others.

Inevitably, her first book was an attack on conventional morality. Inevitably, too, it involved an attack on Christian influence in this country. *The Cost of English Morals* began with three short, compelling sentences, viz.: "We are paying too high a price for our English morals. They hamper intellectual life. And they debase sexual life." It went on to prove conclusively that this was so. And though some advances have been made since the book was written, most of the evils remain. Cardinal Bourne may no longer be with us but his successors are quite as adamant in their opposition to birth control, divorce and sterilisation. We recall his explicit declaration that "No Catholic ought to look on those things from the human standpoint." But other Churches, Parliament, and the medical profession all came in for legitimately strong criticism in *The Cost of English Morals*. In their often aloof way, representatives of these might preach, vote or keep a discreet silence on sexual problems, but Mrs. Chance knew of the terrible fear of pregnancy that haunted thousands of working-class women. She knew that "most of us spend our lives learning what we ought to have known years before" and die "half-grown."

Professor Lancelot Hogben wrote the Foreword to Mrs.

Chance's next book, *Intellectual Crime*. As a parent and a citizen he welcomed it, believing that "there must be a conflict between religion and science, until we have built up a system of public instruction which is secular and rooted in the scientific outlook." The book was a search for truth—"the most man-forsaken aspect of life on this planet"—and comprised an investigation into "intellectual crime" in many walks of life, including religion, the Churches, the religious writers and preachers—the believers, said Mrs. Chance, are the worst by far of all our offenders. "They are our intellectual criminals whose offences against the sanctity of human thought and the store of human knowledge are too many to be counted and are the more shocking because they are proudly perpetrated in the name of man's spiritual welfare." "Religion to-day," she wrote, "is, at its best, an emotional good and an intellectual evil." And she ended the book with this pertinent question regarding man: "What will it matter if no Ghostly Presence blesses his efforts or if no second life awaits his little person after death, when he has found himself and seen the god-like work offered him here, himself to attempt creation, out of to-day, of a more glorious to-morrow?"

This note was echoed at the close of her plea for realism (*The Romance of Reality*) which, as she said, allows us "instead of searching for a cosmic answer to the question why we are here, to create and act a present living justification of that tremendous fact." Mrs. Chance described this third book as "an attempt to express a personal philosophy of life" and one that is, "to many people to-day, suspect." The words are as applicable in 1954 as in 1934. The realist, she stated, is "atheist, i.e., without any but human guidance," lacking "the hushed attention of a believing audience." Consequently he must show "the origin and justification of his view of life." Mrs. Chance proceeded to do this admirably but it is a sad indication of the harmful influence of religion that it should have been necessary. Sadder still that it should be equally necessary to-day. As she herself commented: "To a visitor from Mars, the emphasis on reality might surely appear absurd; and only a study of our history and its present resultant social conditions could explain to him so fantastic a phenomenon." I am reminded of George Santayana's suggestion that idealists should try to disprove to their dogs the objective existence of bones.

The realist, on the other hand, deals honestly with the world in which we all live. Realism is both the occasion for, and the consequence of, science. In the words of Mrs. Chance, it is "life without supernaturalism, and it implies in any situation a sense of the importance of knowing the truth about that situation and a willingness to admit that truth and learn from it." This does not make it prosaic. On the contrary, realism is, as she said, "an attitude to life of more profound emotional and moral significance than even the best attitudes associated with supernaturalism." It is fundamentally necessary to all lasting happiness in personal relations and "has a greater emotional stimulus to creation in it naturally than any religious one." "It is not the wild and disordered mind, it is the ordered mind, disciplined to reality, that reflects the loveliness of life, perceives how life justifies itself and reaches the subtlest and most varied heights of human enjoyment."

To heighten human enjoyment of life was Mrs. Chance's primary aim in writing these books and in my case, at any rate, she succeeded.

This Believing World

Nobody appears to have been very much excited when a statue of Jesus Christ was recently discovered in London. But quite large crowds have been visiting an ancient Roman temple unearthed while excavating part of Cannon Street. Everybody now wants to see the head of Mithras which has been found. And why not? For hundreds of years Mithras was just as important a God for the Romans as Jesus Christ is for Billy Graham, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Pope, and all their followers. People believed he had really lived just as our Christians believe that Jesus really lived. In fact, there are even some horrid blasphemers who claim that a good deal of true Christianity was deliberately pinched from Mithraism.

It would prove a fine intellectual appeal if the B.B.C. could broadcast a scholarly study of Mithras and show how much of the religion ascribed to him has been bodily taken over by Christianity; but, of course, that could never happen. Mithras was a Sun God, and when Jesus proclaimed himself the "Light of the World" he was only following in Mithras's footsteps. There is very little left of Christianity when all its debts to Paganism have been paid.

It is as well to know how converts come to Rome—and one of the most distinguished tells us in the *Universe*. Sir Arnold Lunn says he went through "three phases." First, he admired "the brilliance with which my Catholic friends defended an impossible case." Second, he became "nervous" lest he fell "to their apologetic talents." And third, he surrendered. We think Cardinal Newman had the same experience before grovelling at the feet of some priest, so Sir Arnold is in good company. The only thing we ourselves have never found are these "brilliant" apologetics from Catholics.

There is only one way in which Christianity can be defended. It is to have Faith and abrogate all reason. Any properly ordained priest must be believed at sight; no questions must be asked. The only right thing is to believe and you will be saved. If not, you will be damned. And the way Sir Arnold proves this in his own person and in his books and articles is most piously interesting.

The famous surgeon, Mr. Kenneth Walker, has been letting himself go on Spiritualism in *Picture Post*—much to the disgust of *Psychic News* which calls his criticism "pure ignorance." Mr. Walker claims that "the accounts of life after death by Spiritualists are tawdry and banal in the extreme," and "no message of any value to humanity has ever been delivered at a seance." He must be an ardent reader of our Spiritualistic journals to have discovered this for they constantly give us the gems of wisdom pouring from mediums. Still, it may be that to *them* they are gems of wisdom while to Mr. Walker they are twaddle.

We are always pleased to give credit where it is due and so must congratulate the way in which the upholders of the sacredness of the Sabbath Day have once more gained a striking victory. A military tournament at York was going to produce some Shakespearean scenes with costumes on a Sunday and so raised a howl from the Lord's Day Observance Society. It would contravene the Act of 1740 and therefore the show had to be changed. Details of the new one will be sent to the Society to be O.K.'d "to make sure they have no further objections." That's the stuff to give 'em. Give in every time rather than incur the wrath of an offended Deity—and of course the L.D.O.S. Or should it be the other way about?

Then there is the case of the comedian, Arthur English, who was engaged to make people laugh at Shanklin Casino and who was told not to wear "loud" clothes on the Sunday. What he wore, which was an offence to God Almighty, the various Sunday Acts, and the Lord's Day Observance Society, was a "huge" tie. That did it, and a fine was imposed at the courts of £2 with £5 5s. costs. You cannot mock the Lord without getting it in the neck.

Notes and News

Speaking at the Conway Hall on Sunday, September 26, on the occasion of the Annual Reunion of the South Place Ethical Society, a well attended and enjoyable function in celebration of the 25th anniversary of Conway Hall, Dr. W. E. Swinton remarked that "the term freethought is outdated, and tied up with a Lancashire accent and J. B. Priestley's plays." Perhaps Dr. Swinton would care to unravel this mystery. Until he does, we shall continue to think that freethought is freethought in any accent and in any age. The connections between freethought, Priestley's plays and a Lancashire accent would appear somewhat less relevant than the connections between chalk, cheese and China. Fortunately for our peace of mind Dr. Swinton is not an authority on the freethought movement, and presumably not even on Priestley's plays. Priestley is not a Lancastrian.

Mr. Joseph McCabe, the famous veteran freethinker, has been seriously ill in hospital for some weeks, and unable to deal with correspondence. We know all readers will be glad to learn that he now seems to be well on the road to recovery, and at the moment of writing he is hoping to keep his lecturing engagement with the West London Branch N.S.S. Mr. McCabe was not able to be present at the Annual Reunion of the South Place Ethical Society, at which he was to have been a guest of honour. All the speakers expressed disappointment at his absence.

The recent debate between the N.S.S. Secretary and a clergyman at the Streatham Debating Society on the motion "That Secularism includes all that Mankind needs for Social and Moral Progress," ended with 22 of those present voting for the motion and 16 against. As not more than half a dozen N.S.S. members were there, and the Streatham Debating Society has no connection with our movement, this was a noteworthy victory, indicating that the habit of paying compliments to religion as a moral force of high social value is on the wane.

Opening the debate, Mr. Morris went through the N.S.S. Principles and Objects one by one and invited the Rev. O. Fielding-Clarke, M.A., B.D., to say why they were not consonant with social and moral progress. The latter, a courteous and fluent debater, while "fully agreeing with 13 of the 16 N.S.S. Immediate Practical Objects" (actually there are 17), held that Secularism was inadequate for the advancement of man, since it did not recognise him as the child of God. He argued that the latter conception gave mankind a dignity that was absent from the views of scientists, and he referred to modern biological and psychological discoveries in support of his case. A lively debate from the floor followed, strong criticism of religion provoking equally strong retorts from its supporters, one of whom said that if he accepted Mr. Morris's principles, which provided freedom for abominations, he would want to commit murder, rape and every other sort of crime! Neither Mr. Fielding-Clarke nor other speakers on his side advanced any new arguments, and Mr. Morris made good use of his knowledge of Secularism to dispose of their contentions.

THE FREETHINKER

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

To Correspondents

Correspondents may like to note that when their letters are not printed, or when they are abbreviated, the material in them may still be of use to "This Believing World," or to our spoken propaganda.

P. M. LOUGHLIN.—It was Aristotle's way of differentiating between plants, animals and mankind. Modern psychologists have no use for his hypothesis; they discard "soul."

BERT SMITH (Guernsey).—Our speakers land a variety of fishes, including officers, who willy-nilly have to attend their meetings.

W. J. PYE.—Thanks for your views on Hell. We hope we both keep out of it.

FRANK A. WATSON.—When Paine says "My religion is to do good," he cannot, in six words, go into the niceties of ethical definitions.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

J. CLAYTON'S LECTURES.—Sunday, October 10, 3-15 p.m., Padiham; 7 p.m., Blackburn Market.

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

Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle St.).—Sunday at 8 p.m.: J. W. BARKER and E. MILLS.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every week-day, 1 p.m.: G. A. WOODCOCK. Every Sunday, 3 p.m., at Platt Fields: a Lecture. At Deansgate Blitzed Site, 7-30 p.m.: C. MCCALL.

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, October 10, noon: L. EBURY and H. ARTHUR.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Every Friday at 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY. Sunday, 6-30 p.m., Old Market Square: T. M. MOSLEY and A. ELSMERE.

INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute, Second Floor).—Sunday, October 10, 6-45 p.m.: HAROLD DAY, "A Challenge to Believers."

Conway Discussion Circle (South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, October 12, 7 p.m., in the Library: DONALD FORD, "The Future of the Novel."

Junior Discussion Group (South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall).—Friday, October 8, 7-15 p.m.: E. T. MACMICHAEL, "Circuses—Kindness or Cruelty?"

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Large Lecture Theatre, Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, October 10, 2-30 p.m.: C. COFFEY, "A Visit to U.S.A."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall).—Sunday, October 10, 11 a.m.: S. K. RATCLIFFE, "Arnold in Perspective."

West London Branch N.S.S. (The Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, Marylebone, W.1, five minutes from Edgware Road Station).—Sunday, October 10, 7-15 p.m.: JOSEPH MCCABE (N.S.S.), "Is There a Religious Revival?"

CHAPMAN COHEN MEMORIAL FUND

A Personal Appeal

ABOUT the beginning of this century, when I was graduating into manhood, appeared a book, written by an American, entitled "When It Was Dark." I fancy the author was a pastor, labouring in a rather intractable vineyard called Chicago. I never read this opus, but it was widely reviewed, and created quite a stir among our Christian parents and grandparents. The theme of this work was that in some striking way scientists, or other evil-doers, had demonstrated, and proved beyond refutation, that the Crucifixion was a myth, that it had never taken place.

The Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund

Previously acknowledged: £320 4s. 3d.

Wm. Scarlett, 5s.; J. McCartney, £1; A. O'Keeffe (Cork), £1 1s.; W. Morris, £1; A. Hodgkinson, £1; M. Taylor (In memory of Eliza and Parkin Taylor), £3 3s.; A. R. Williams, £1; A. D. Corrick, £2; G. E. Bond, 5s.; N. Cassel, £2; A. E. Stringer (Dublin), £5; Mrs. M. Watson, £1; Glasgow Secular Society, £1; Mr. and Mrs. J. Barrowman, 10s.; Mr. and Mrs. J. Corrisken (Dumbarton), 10s.; R. Adams, £1; A. Hancock, 1s.; Mrs. E. Grout, 10s.; E. H. Grout, 10s.; E. H. A. Scott, 5s.; J. Humphrey (Glasgow), £1; F. B. Bolton (Lancs.), £4 1s. Total £348 5s. 3d.

Under the impulse generated by this release, the Christian part of mankind threw off all the restraints of a discredited faith, and gave themselves up to theft and thuggery. No doubt, with the Christian citizens of the Windy City under the author's eyes, the writer had a high-old-time describing the doings of infidel mankind. I too might have been windy had I dwelt in Chicago then.

Why do I recall this amusing and forgotten work now? Because of the author's idea that belief in the Crucifixion was central to Christianity and, indeed, to civilised living. I will not attempt here to say what might be an equivalent disillusioning blow to Freethinkers and Secularists. As most of these folk have already cleared their minds of cant and hypocrisy, and are clairvoyant in the true meaning of that word, it is highly unlikely that such a moral break-down would happen to them. But this hopeful, and intelligent, but necessarily small, section of society could in this country (and in other English-reading lands) suffer one calamitous blow, namely, the possibility that our beloved journal, *The Freethinker*, had to close-down because of lack of wherewithal to meet the present high costs of production. This is an ever-present nightmare to its directors and contributors, a nightmare shared nowadays by the proprietors of other progressive papers with an intellectual appeal. Most, almost all, of our contributors are at present proudly giving unremunerated service to the "Best of all Causes," and it would be heart-breaking to them to have no such honest organ for the expression of their thoughts, thoughts free, and unrestricted.

What, if *The Freethinker* died, would you feel like, Reader? Would you too not feel that the sky had been darkened, as by an eclipse? An eclipse that might last a very long time. Freethinkers are often lonely people, cut off from the believing mob, their deluded fellows. We readers and writers, through our journal, bring comfort and strength to each other in our solitary superiority. As *The Freethinker* has many overseas readers, we can feel that we are part of a great catholic movement, catholic without a pretentious capital "C." Indeed, our dear journal, so long edited by our late leader, Chapman Cohen, binds us unbelievers in a world-wide bond of fellowship. And as old John Ball said hundreds of years ago "Fellowship is Life, and lack of fellowship is Death." Must these bonds of sympathy be snapped; must the link binding land with land, and races with races, be sundered? We are privileged to serve truth, slay superstition, and greet each other in one Grand Family: and to each and all of us now comes this call to help our journal and ourselves by contributing to its upkeep.

BAYARD SIMMONS.

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

Catholic Counter-Reformation of the 20th Century

By F. A. RIDLEY

(Continued from page 320)

THE CO-OPERATIVE OF EXPLOITATION

The era of "The Holy Alliance" between the Papacy and Fascism is so recent that it is not here necessary to describe it in any great detail. The Catholic-Fascist period has been, in any case, fully described in the admirably documented volume of that gifted European historian, Avro Manhattan, *The Catholic Church against the 20th Century*. One can accurately compare the policy then pursued by the Vatican, with that earlier era of the Counter-Reformation, when the Papacy combined with the Spanish Empire to drown the Protestant Revolution in blood. It was, as in the earlier case, an era of the Big Stick, of "the co-operative of Exploitation" between the ecclesiastical and Secular Totalitarian States, with the object of drowning the common enemy, to-day, Marxism, Russian Bolshevism, and Communism, in blood. The successive stages of this "Holy Alliance" in Italy, with Mussolini; in Germany, with Hitler; in Spain and Portugal, with Franco and Salazar—not to mention Portugal's most celebrated "invisible import" our Lady of Fatima!—in Croatia, with Pavelic and his "Ustashi" in Vichy France, with Petain, that "senile Buonaparte"; all these besides other less important chapters in the Catholic-Fascist alliance, which transpired in between 1922 and 1945, when the Fascist empires finally crashed; have been lucidly portrayed for us by Manhattan.

Naturally the aims, as well as the extent of collaboration between the Vatican and the Fascist regimes, varied. In immemorially Catholic States, such as Spain, Portugal, and Croatia, it was well-nigh absolute; the recent Concordat (August, 1953) between Rome and the still existing regime of Franco in Spain, restores mediæval conditions unknown elsewhere in Europe since the Reformation. Whilst in Croatia, *religious* persecution was openly reintroduced. In the stronger or less completely Catholic States, the degree of collaborations was more limited and less one-sided. Whilst in a still largely Protestant Germany with an undercurrent of pre-Christian paganism, the alliance between the two most powerful dictators, the Pope, who is infallible, and the Fuhrer, who was never wrong, was liable to friction, and was, in fact, mainly defensive in character against the common enemy, Bolshevism. However, the fundamental aim was, in all cases, the same! The forcible suppression immediately, of the Social Revolution of our times, ultimately, of modern secular civilisation, independent of the Church. To pursue our previous parallel with the earlier Counter-Reformation: Hitler was the "Charles V"; Mussolini, the "Alva"; the Gestapo, the "Holy Inquisition" and Franco, the "Tilly" of the new Counter-Reformation. One can, fortunately, continue the parallel to the end. For just as the "Wars of Religion" ruined Spain, the militant Catholic standard-bearers; so the new "Holy Alliance" led Fascism eventually to ruin. Death, the death of the Fascist ally, terminated the "co-operative of exploitation"! In 1945, the Papacy had to seek new allies.

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND DEMOCRACY

THE period between the two world wars was, essentially, the era of "The Holy Alliance" between the Catholic Church and Fascism. However, the Church of Rome is a worldly-wise institution, and it never puts *all* its eggs into one basket! Even at the height of its alliance with Nazi-Fascist dictatorships, Rome never neglected other potential allies. Throughout, she kept on excellent terms with the Democratic U.S.A., nor did she ever condemn even left-

wing political parties in which the Catholic Church was, or might become, influential. For example, the Australian and British Labour Parties. When the Fascist Empires finally crashed in 1945, she found this policy useful. Rome is ambidextrous: when her right hand fails her, then is the time to use her left! In this instance, the policy of violence having failed, Rome, willy-nilly, had to fall back on other weapons. She did so: the ancient chameleon changed colour yet again! The erstwhile ally of Fascism turned Democrat over-night! To-day, we witness the astonishing spectacle of the oldest Totalitarian Dictatorship in the world masquerading as the friend of Democracy; the former champion of Feudalism against capitalist "usury" has now "suffered a sea-change" into the indispensable ally of the Wall Street Bankers!

A notable feature of Catholic "development" since the downfall of Fascism, has been the increased role played by "Catholic Action"; that mass-movement of the laity organised for social and political purposes under the direction of the Church hierarchy. More and more, this mass-following plays a leading role in Church activities: may not this increased activity on the part of the hitherto inert laity spell ultimate danger for the priestly corporation which has been, hitherto, the despotic ruler of the Church of Rome?

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE SOCIAL CRISIS

Since 1945, however, the trump card of the Church has been the social crisis; the fear of Communism. Since the downfall of Fascism, the anti-Communist counter-revolution has assumed new forms: its political leader is now America, its ideological centre is to be found in the Vatican. The Papacy, which execrated Democracy in the era of the French Revolution, poses now as its principal defender against the Russian Revolution. With the support of Wall Street, Washington, and in alliance with the classes threatened with expropriation and with physical liquidation by the Communist Revolution, the Vatican has again become a potent force in human affairs, a world-power, under the leadership of Pius Pacelli, the former professional diplomatist.

"APPETITE COMES WITH EATING"

With the recent expansion of her influence, "appetite has come with eating," at the Vatican, as in other more mundane spheres. The "Universal" (Catholic) Church now aspires to become really "Universal" in the *geographical* sense of the word. Her influence in the Americas and in Australasia expands; she approaches the hitherto inaccessible races of Asia and Africa, which formerly dwelt in "invincible ignorance" of her teaching. To-day, with a Catholic disregard of the Colour Bar, we have Indian Cardinals, Chinese, Japanese, and African bishops. In Catholic art, it is now "lawful" to depict Christ, the Virgin, and the Saints, as coloured. The white races no longer have a monopoly either in the "Universal" Church or, apparently, in the *celestial* hierarchy. The counter-Reformation of the 20th century seeks to conquer the entire world. Indeed, it may be that Rome also seeks, like Alexander, for new worlds to conquer! For, recently, the Vatican has displayed much interest in the new quasi-science of astronautics, and has even issued theological pronouncements on the spiritual state of the hypothetical dwellers in the planets of outer space! Is a new Columbus destined to plant the standard of the Cross on the deserts of Mars and the mountains of Venus? Are fresh crusades to be undertaken to extend the empire of the Vatican over the denizens

of outer space? Or is Rome riding for a fall? Is she gambling on an atomic "crusade" against Communism and, if so, will she succeed? Will the Church which condemned Galileo, finally triumph with the aid of the physical science which she formerly condemned? Or conversely, will she finally fail, and will her gamble for world power end with the hydrogen bomb in a victory of "Science over Religion," though of a kind hitherto hardly foreseen? This is the great question-mark which, to-day, hangs over Rome's drive to world power.

(To be concluded)

A Quaker Pamphlet

By G. I. BENNETT

WHENEVER I have had occasion to spend any time in a Friends' meeting house I have found it congenial to browse over the various small publications there displayed, and I have usually lighted on one or two that interested me sufficiently to bring away with me. One of these from my last visit to a Quaker place of worship forms the subject of this article. It is entitled "Christian Affirmations in a Changing World" by Thomas F. Green, headmaster of Bootham School, York, reprinted from the FRIENDS QUARTERLY EXAMINER of a few years ago.

Mr. Green begins by remarking that the outlook for the Christian Church "is not a happy one. Its influence on Western civilisation has declined considerably during the first half of this century, and there are many sociologists who prophesy . . . that before the century is out Church leaders will be nothing more than curators of ecclesiastical museums, the guardians of interesting relics of a past culture."

What worries him is that some of the most thoughtful young men he knows are unable to accept articles of faith fundamental to the Christian life.

In an effort to learn the state of religious opinion of boys at his school Mr. Green sought written answers from the boys in one class to questions he put relating to the Christian religion, giving them complete freedom to answer or not as they chose. Most of the boys *did* answer; but he was unpleasantly surprised by the amount of agnosticism among them. "All of them say it is profitable to meditate . . . but petitionary prayer is looked upon as a dying superstition. All the claims of answered prayers can be explained without the hypothesis of God."

Mr. Green goes on to note that "every one of these young agnostics is a fine type of man in the making. He may not have faith in a personal God, but he has a great regard for human personality, and . . . will endure hardship in serving the distressed in the far corners of the world. These are men we must win to our Society. If we do nothing about it they will become the best type of pagan, exercising a good influence on their fellows by their moral integrity, but taking no active part in the necessary organised work of the Church in extending the Kingdom of Righteousness. How are we to set about this very difficult task?"

I don't think Mr. Green really knows; but he details half-a-dozen Christian affirmations that he holds do not "do violence to the world-view of modern science." We cannot examine all these here, so I propose to take just one of them, which I think the most interesting. It, in part, reads: "Morality is not a question of what is socially expedient, but is to be measured against an absolute standard of values. Conscience may be all the psychoanalysts say it is, an introjection of social rules and taboos, but the spiritually alive know an inner guide, a compelling drive which is other than society. If man is nothing more than a socially conditioned animal, how could he have

climbed to a higher level than the conditioning environment?"

Now it is undoubtedly true that in every age there have been individuals who have risen above the standards of thought and conduct peculiar to their time and it is upon such that the intellectual and moral progress of our kind has largely depended, and will always largely depend.

The Roman emperor, Marcus Aurelius, was clearly a man of the highest nobility. Whence arose that nobility? It was not fostered by the society of the times. It may be said that his virtuous life, and his unflinching sense of duty and justice were encouraged by the Stoic philosophy he professed; but the pity that he felt for those who suffered was nowise derived from Stoicism, which viewed such a human emotion as unbecoming in the philosopher.

Francis of Assisi, that man of ineffable gentleness and love, did not imbibe these qualities from his age—nor from the Christian faith he so rapturously embraced: he would have been a kind and generous soul without it. Similarly, there was nothing in the early life of our modern St. Francis, Albert Schweitzer, to cause him to be stirred to the depths in face of the sufferings of human and animal kind. Nor could the fact of his being a Christian add much to the acuteness of that painful awareness.

So far I have been corroborating Mr. Green's view that men—or, at any rate, *some* men—are other than "socially conditioned animals." But where I part company with him is in this: that the "inner guide," which high-souled individuals possess, the "compelling drive which is other than society," is not in my view a manifestation of the spirit of a Divine Being, which he implies it is. It can be explained in language not in the least mystical or theological.

The less thoughtfully sensitive a man is, the more will he be inclined to take ready-made his moral values and views about life from the age and generation into which he has been born. The conscience of such a person may indeed, be as Mr. Green expresses it, "an introjection of social rules and taboos." But the leaders of intellectual and ethical thought, who elevate the tone of their age and enable man to climb yet higher, are never simply moulded by their environment. They help to mould—or rather, remould—it. And for this reason: they think and feel more deeply and see more penetratingly.

If your moral code is merely that of the community, you may do what is socially approved, but you will not be positively and intrinsically good. Goodness consists in sensitivity to suffering, physical and mental, in the recognition that all pain is evil, and in working for its relief and banishment. Goodness is sympathy—but sympathy infinitely extended.

Now sympathy has its beginnings in the bonds of conjugal and parental affection uniting the family, from which it radiates in ever-wider circles until it pervades the bounds of the community. In exceptional natures it goes further, reaching out to embrace the whole of humanity, and even bringing the denizens of the purely animal kingdom within the ambit of its moral sentiment.

But that this moral sentiment, however exalted it may be, has evolutionary roots should not be forgotten. It is, as Winwood Reade perceived, "founded on sympathy, and sympathy is founded on self-preservation. With all gregarious animals, including men, self-preservation is dependent on the preservation of the herd. And so, in order that each may prosper, they must all combine with affection and fidelity, or they will be exterminated by their rivals."

Mr. Green, and those who likewise imagine that fine human qualities are attributes of God, would do well to ponder these words of one who was an acute thinker and a shrewd student of the Book of Nature.

Correspondence

CHAPMAN COHEN AND "THE FREETHINKER"

I regretted the death of Chapman Cohen whose obvious honesty, wide and deep knowledge, and directness and force as a writer, I had long admired. He did a great service to freethought (and therefore to humanity) and will for ever have a place among the world's benefactors. May *The Freethinker* continue the good work it has so long been doing. Best wishes to all associated with the publication.—Yours, etc.,
Wentworthville, N.S.W.

R. R. F. HILL.

EMOTION AND REASON

I think I may be expressing the feelings of some when I beg to differ from G. I. Bennett's statement that "belief as such is not necessarily an index to intelligence." While I can agree with Mr. Bennett that there is an immense difference between fundamentalists and "enlightened" religionists such as Quakers and Unitarians, I still feel that a wide mental gulf exists between ourselves and even the latter type of believer. No one could fail to admire the benevolence and integrity of men like Schweitzer, and it is true that his intellectual attainments are impressive beyond those of many freethinkers; but, to me, and I feel that I may be speaking for others of us, there still remains that gulf which nothing can wholly bridge.

It is true that believers of every type are largely governed by their emotions (and, unfortunately, it is also true that some freethinkers and rationalists are too much governed by cold, unemotional factors), but it seems to me that in this century no man or woman of really first-rate intelligence can any longer believe in God or in the divinity of Christ. Until recently there was some justification for holding old-fashioned Christian beliefs before a certain stage of modern knowledge and sophistication had been reached. In the case of old people one can still make excuses and leave them with their illusions. But there will not, I think, be any more like Bishop Barnes and Dean Inge, for in the world of the present and still more of the future men of such mental calibre will not choose the Church at all.

Mr. Bennett asks: "Who would doubt the mental calibre of Dean Inge and Bishop Barnes?" Well, with all due respect both to him and to them, I would! At least if they had been a little younger I should question their intellectual soundness, and even as they were I am not quite so sure as Mr. Bennett is that they were the equals of freethinkers belonging to the same generation of which it is unnecessary here to cite examples.

Since recently I had an argument with a well-known "enlightened" churchman who assured me that the innocent suffered because God thought it good for them. I have lost what little remaining patience and tolerance I had for religionists: they are an anachronism in the world of to-day, and in the really basic sense I think that the difference between the fundamentalists and Catholics and the "extreme left" Christians is less than it at first appears to be.

What is the precise difference, after all, between "innate intelligence" and the "mind's freedom from emotional prepossessions"? It is lamentably true that the atheist position requires colossal courage and stoicism, but it is equally true that there is more need for that kind of calm courage than ever before, and therefore I think no one is so deserving of our unqualified admiration as the steadfast unbeliever who simply faces up to life's problems, defeats and tragedies unaided by any prop whatever in the shape of a deity or divinely inspired figurehead that the twentieth century human intellect cannot with self-respect any longer uphold. To me, complete mental courage and clear-sightedness are not one whit less admirable than the wholehearted philanthropy of men like Schweitzer—and it is so much easier for the ordinary person to admire philanthropy than the other type (which, incidentally, is frequently extremely philanthropic into the bargain) which deserves all the praise we can give!—Yours, etc.,

EVELYN BELCHAMBERS.

CAUSALITY

Mr. W. Scott says that causality is a product of logical thinking, and so implies that logical thinking is innate in the mind. But the power of apperception which is essential to such thinking develops only with experience. The basic property of the mind is the capacity to experience pure sensations, and these, being qualitative, are orderless; it is impossible to establish subjective relationships between (say) redness and blueness. I hold, therefore, that logical thinking derives from causality, this being an attribute of nature that enables the mind to formulate hypotheses and so make predictions. The incidence of stimuli on the mind in an orderly manner thus produces from irrational sense-qualities

quantitative conceptions. To contravert this, it seems to me the mentalist must hold that the germ of rationality is present in the mind at birth and later develops spontaneously, giving the capacity to form coherent pictures out of orderless data.

Clearly my letter does not refer to pure logic, which consists simply in definitions, or statements of equivalence. This has no value until its propositions are given factual content through identification with hypotheses, when, by means of translations into new statements of equivalent meaning, a given proposition can be tested.

Thus, the mentalist maintains the proposition "The mind is all." This is equivalent to "The mind is uncaused," since any cause of which the mind was the effect must necessarily be differentiated from the mind. From the hypotheses of evolutionary science, however, it follows that the mind was caused and that it has a distinct place in nature. Therefore it cannot constitute the totality of existence.

Matter, on the other hand (or force, if you wish) is not held by any empirical principle to be the product of a cause-effect relationship. Hence the materialist's belief that it is the sole reality.—Yours, etc.,

D. G. HOLLIDAY.

SECULAR EDUCATION

Mr. Toudie's letter raises a very interesting matter. I attended an Anglican Church School built in 1811 and at this moment in process of demolition. In my class was the son of a well-known local atheist who had given notice for his boy to be withdrawn from the class during Scripture lessons: he was usually sent in a lower class to await the time of the next subject.

Returning on one occasion to rejoin his class he had to pass a table at which the schoolmaster and the Rector were sitting and which was within easy earshot of me. As he rejoined his class I heard the schoolmaster distinctly say "That boy's father is an infidel," this being followed by a look of horror on the part of the Rector.

There was a tradition among local employers to send to this school for boys to be recommended mostly for clerical work and I was one of the fortunate ones. But my boy friend, although beyond doubt the smartest in the class, was always passed over. After leaving school I met him in the street pushing a truck and on making enquiries about his welfare was informed that his father's attitude and opinions had interfered with any prospect of his brother and sisters getting on. I saw him the day before his departure for New Zealand, where he died an old-age pensioner. What I have related happened more than 70 years ago, but in my opinion it is typical of what would take place today.

I thank Mr. Toudie for his recommendation of Bertrand Russell's book "Education and the Social Order" and the very interesting quotation.—Yours, etc.,

W. MORRIS.

Obituary

We deeply regret to learn from the old Secularist stalwart himself, Mr. Ernest Smedley, of Hucknall, near Nottingham, of the loss of his loyal (to him) Christian wife. He is, he tells us, 85, and has read *The Freethinker* for 56 years. He writes that he is alone, "but will keep cheerful with *The Freethinker*." We send our deepest sympathies to him for his loss.

OPEN LETTER TO Fr. PARIS.

Who is Responsible for so-called "Acts of God"? It is said: "HE only is the maker of all things, near and far." It is also said: "It is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves." If this is true, He is not only the cause of earthquake, drought, blizzard, etc., but also responsible for ignorance, cruel tendencies, avarice, selfishness, and all other ugly human failings.—Yours, etc.,
C. E. RATCLIFFE.

NEXT WEEK

C. McCALL—ACTS OF GOD

N.S.S. BRANCH NEWS

NATIONAL SOCIETY OF NON-SMOKERS (est. 1926) exists to enable members to travel, eat and enjoy entertainment in an atmosphere free from tobacco smoke. Young and old invited to join. Details from hon. sec., 23, Lyncroft Avenue, Ripley, Derbys.