

The Freethinker

Vol. LXXV—No. 9

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Fourpence

THE most far-reaching change in the religious history of the Western World is to be found in the "conversion" of the Pagan world to Christianity. This period roughly corresponded to the first four centuries of the era now named after the victorious religion. The change was profound, since, while the Christian Church, particularly in its mediæval Catholic form, borrowed a great deal from the ritual cults of Paganism, the spirit which animated the new creed differed greatly from that of earlier Pagan cults. Unlike the eclectic and easy-going deities of the ancient European pantheon, the God of the Christians, like his god-father, Jehovah, the God of the Jews, was, pre-eminently, "a jealous god." The exclusive and dogmatic creed of the Christian Church differed not only in degree, but in kind, from the Pagan polytheism of classical antiquity.

Why Did Christianity Succeed?

This question does not lend itself to any easy answer. If one rejects, as it must be assumed all Freethinkers do, the theological explanation of Christian origins and subsequent success, one is forced back on a study of the age in which the new religion originated, in order to find a satisfactory answer. The ultimate causes for the victory of the new religion were by no means of an exclusively theological nature. Ultimately they are to be sought in the peculiar social conditions of an age headed for the greatest cultural collapse in European annals. But while it is easy to show that some sort of religion was inevitable in the declining Roman Empire and collapsing civilisation, it is by no means easy to indicate why the particular Christian cult should have been selected for ultimate victory. The dogmatic character of the new creed no doubt gave it a decided advantage in competition with its more easy-going rivals. Islam, the creed of Muhammed, had the same advantage at a later date. It is probable, perhaps, as the Swiss historian, Jacob Burckhardt, has suggested, Islam would have eventually supplanted the ancient Pagan cults, had not Christianity done so. (cf. J. Burckhardt, *The Age of Constantine the Great*.)

Celsus versus Origen

The oldest, and one of the ablest, of Pagan critiques of the new religion is to be found in *The True Word* of Celsus, an otherwise unknown Pagan "apologist," who seems to have written early in the Third Century A.D. The book of Celsus has perished, like most of the anti-Christian literature composed before the triumph of the Church, and efficiently suppressed by it after that triumph. But the Pagan author's polemic, at least as far as its major points are concerned, is known from the reply of the Christian theologian, Origen, about the middle of the Third Century. From the intellectual standpoint the controversy was definitely one-sided. Celsus, a philosophical Pagan, a keen student of Greek philosophy, carried guns too heavy for the rather naive polemic of the Christian writer. But on one

point Origen ultimately proved to be the more far-sighted judge. To the objection of Celsus that it would be impossible, either then or at any time, to persuade all the numerous peoples of the Roman Empire to agree to worship an identical god, as the Christians suggested, Origen replied in effect that such a unified religious cult was actually just what the Roman Empire required! There

is no doubt that, in the next century, the Emperor Constantine agreed with Origen. As a politician—for he was not a theologian—Constantine noted that a single unified creed represented an immense political advantage to an empire and a civilisation already on the verge of dissolution. His

"conversion" was largely, if not entirely, due to this political reasoning.

Constantine and Paganism

Whether Constantine, "The first Christian" Emperor of Rome, was ever a Christian at all is at least doubtful. In the opinion of several authorities on his period, his "conversion" was purely political, and in any case it appears to be quite certain that he went on building temples to the pagan deities, and striking coins in their honour down to the very end of his life (305-337 A.D.). Even his most recent Christian biographer, while claiming that Constantine was really a Christian, admits that his "conversion" was due to superstition, not to any real intellectual conviction. (cf. A. Abfold, *The Conversion of Constantine*.) Be this as it may, Constantine did give the Church what it had never had before, legal recognition by an officially Pagan state. The Christian Church spent the rest of the decisive Fourth Century—the decisive turning-point in the history of Christianity—in feverishly striving, and eventually succeeding, in transforming the newly-won status of legal recognition into absolute supremacy in, and over, the Pagan state. By the end of the century the issue was virtually decided. What we have termed "The Christian Revolution" was effectively decided in favour of the Christian Church. Not until fourteen centuries later, at the time of the French Revolution, did Christianity have to fight for its life again.

The Pagan Reaction

The struggle was not easy, and the issue in doubt right to the end of the Fourth Century. One must not adopt the complacent attitude often found in the text-books of the period, taking it for granted that Christianity was bound to win, and that this was "inevitable" from the start. On the contrary, the temporarily successful Pagan Reaction, under Julian "The Apostate" obviously frightened the Christians out of their wits. Their language of wild relief on hearing of Julian's untimely death in battle (363) is self-evident in this connection. There does not appear to have been any obvious reason why the Roman State, under a zealous Pagan like Julian, should not have suppressed the Christian minority, as effectively as, a few years later,

VIEWS and OPINIONS

The End of Paganism

By F. A. RIDLEY

the Roman State, under a zealous Christian like Theodosius (378-395) did succeed in suppressing what was, in all probability, the still Pagan majority. Even as late as 393, the Pagan West revolted under Eugenius, and reopened Pagan temples in Rome. Had the Alpine battle, which ended the revolt, gone in favour of the Pagans, even then, at least temporarily, a restoration of Paganism might have occurred.

The End of Paganism

The civil war of 393 put paid to the account of Paganism as a State Cult. Any chance of restoring Paganism seems to have gone after the end of the Fourth Century. The Christian Church, using the secular power of the Roman State as its coercive instrument, systematically destroyed the Pagan cults and rammed Christianity down the throats of its reluctant subjects. In 441 all writings against Christianity—an entire literature—were officially suppressed. It is true that in the intellectual field pagan philosophy lasted until 529, when the fanatical Christian emperor, Justinian, forcibly closed the Pagan Schools of Philosophy at Athens. In fact several of the leading intellectual figures of the Fifth Century, Hypatia, Proclus, Claudian, and Ammianus Marcellinus, were pagans and did not disguise their dislike of the new religion. This indiscretion had fatal results for Hypatia at the hands of the followers of the "Jealous God." Nevertheless, after the

Fourth Century, Paganism was obviously on the way out. The famous "last word" of the last Pagan emperor, Julian—"Thou hast conquered, O Galilean!" represents a Christian forgery of a later age—probably monastic. But it was actually true, in historical perspective at least. Julian never said it, but his biographers could accurately do so!

An Historical Analogy

Frederick Engels, the famous socialist thinker, once compared the rise of ancient Christianity with that of modern Socialism. This comparison seems apt, and it can be extended since Engels first made it. For there is a striking resemblance, other things being equal, between the rise of Christianity and that of present-day Communism. The latter also began in underground obscurity, and the reverse of "respectable" (like Christianity) in current society. Both movements rose to power by ardent propaganda, and by the eventual seizure of power, with its subsequent ruthless use of the originally hostile State power. It was again, in both cases, an energetic and fanatical minority which prevailed over an inert majority. We can be even more precise: the language of agitated alarm employed by Pagan emperors, who legislated against Christianity, is remarkably, even verbally, similar to the contemporary language used by present-day defenders of our self-styled "Christian Civilisation."

The B.B.C. Mentality

By GEORGE MILLER

CONSIDER. A Hyde Park orator can lecture to a mere handful, any of whom may answer back on the spot; the B.B.C. can dictate to millions and need not fear the heckler's spontaneous interpellations. This engenders a feeling of power, a feeling that all is accomplished and all is well, sufficient of itself to lull the mind into a semi-perpetual dose. The dissatisfied listener can, indeed, write the Corporation a letter, but must be prepared to wait ages for a reply, though possibly less if he perpetrates the fib that he is not as young as he was and, under the circumstances, would they . . . ? Not to have heard the B.B.C. snoring is a shameful thing to have to admit to one's children when telling them the facts of life.

That there is a special, individual, homogeneous thing as B.B.C. mentality is beyond question. Even ubiquitous Wilfrid Pickles testifies to its existence. In one passage of his autobiography we find Wilfrid having a censorious go at certain B.B.C. departments, and his remarks, besides betraying the fact that the hand of sleep which closes the latch is as soft and gentle in Portland Place as it is in Wordsworth's sonnet, soothe my tumorous growth of suspicion that nothing happens quickly at the B.B.C.

Some may argue that the B.B.C. succeeds most admirably at the difficult task of satisfying all tastes, a job so colossal demanding perpetual owl-eyed wakefulness. They do indeed; one cannot only have pious platitudes on the "Home," but also *outré* innuendos on the "Light," and no doubt the B.B.C. pays its directors and producers from the same bulging purse as it pays the well-wishers who lift up our hearts of a morning. The declared aim is to cater for all sorts and conditions of men, except, of course, those dreadful Freethinkers, and the B.C.C., having sought to please all, thinks it has evaded the usual depressing fate of pleasing none. I have yet to hear of anyone dying satisfied with B.B.C. programmes, and an anarchist friend recently announced with pride that he uses his wireless only to set his watch and time-bombs by. He believes in nothing, and we shouldn't wonder if the B.B.C. helped to reduce him to that condition.

But you must not stoop to find fault with the programmes, otherwise the B.B.C. "Gestapo" is likely, and this has happened, to set on you one of its pet gagwriters, and you have no defence. It is the facility to speak to millions as to one that gives a sense of power, together with a conviction of infallibility, and infallible people, when challenged, are notoriously vindictive. What is probably the lowest form of radio life—comedians and their script-writers—partake liberally of this B.B.C. mentality. Their material consists all too frequently of shocking twaddle, and if any listener timidly suggests occasionally that he can do just as well, or better, the lowest form of broadcasting life reacts with a curious mixture of disdainful laughter and affronted dignity. We have an audience of millions (they reason, in a crippled sort of way) and millions of people cannot be wrong. They do not seem capable of understanding that it is science that makes such a huge audience possible and not their own talents, efforts and energies. Hannen Swaffer must be weary of pointing out this truth.

A short while ago a body of the religiously-obsessed warned the B.B.C. that all religious events, occasions and goings-on must duly be reported in the news and on TV Newsreel, any omission would result in complaints and the application of pressure. The threats of these petulant bullies ought to have made the B.B.C. quake to its foundations, but there was no likelihood of this for there is not a more devoted servant of the Church than the Corporation. It need not be coerced into giving us a constant stream of heartlifts, morning services, prayers, daily services, epilogues, choral evensongs, and the five minutes snippings from the end of *Housewife's Choice*, which constitute another half-hour a week won for Jesus.

Why so modern a building as Broadcasting House, headquarters of so modern a thing as radio, should be inhabited and pervaded by the spirit of so ancient a religious cult is a mystery inscrutable, as it is dark; dark, as it is baffling. It is a problem which, some day, a fearless thinker may have the hardihood to attempt to solve.

The Author of "Nineteen-Eighty-Four"

By COLIN MCCALL

"I SUPPOSE George Orwell is best known for two works—the brilliant satire *Animal Farm* and the terribly predictive *1984*." That is how I began a review of the same writer's posthumous volume, *England Your England*, in *Forward* just over twelve months ago. Since then the two books have received nation-wide publicity through television and the press. There were some indications that *Animal Farm* might suffer the fate of *Gulliver's Travels* and become a book for children when it was recently issued as an illustrated volume: that process has been carried a stage further by the film and strip cartoonists. As for "Big Brother," he came as a boon to the radio comedians with the guarantee of an immediate response from audiences. How many of the latter appreciated his deeper significance? Yet such sudden and unexpected popularity should by no means be deplored. Many people will have met Orwell's work for the first time and some appetites will have been whetted.

Orwell stood out from his contemporaries as a man who concerned himself with real problems and who wrote about them in a straightforward, uncompromising way. There was nothing of the escapist-intellectual about him: "a purely æsthetic attitude towards life" was, he maintained, impossible. He faced facts squarely and did not shirk the conclusions to be drawn from them, however unpalatable these might be. He was, in short, intellectually honest—often disconcertingly so.

His main interests were, of course, political. "Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written directly or indirectly, *against* totalitarianism and for democratic socialism, as I understand it," he wrote in 1947; and it seemed to him nonsense that one could avoid writing of such subjects at such a time. A good deal would seem to depend upon the adverb "indirectly." I see Orwell's attitude as broadly freethinking: he was, in fact, a socialist who retained much of the old—and valuable—radical outlook. Educated at Eton, he found "five years in a lukewarm bath of snobbery" anything but a sound training for modern life, and he never went on to university. Mr. Angus Wilson regretted this. "The truth is," wrote Mr. Wilson, "that by leaving Eton, not for Oxford or Cambridge, but for 'experience of the world,' he lost more than he gained. He lost touch with those in all classes whose lives were in fixed patterns, the *rangés* of the world." I cannot agree with this assessment. Indeed, I think it is disproved by Orwell's works, which reveal a sympathetic understanding of humanity, untinged by sentimentality, that is rare, if not unique, in our time. It may have been a sympathy for humanity in general rather than for individuals, but it was a rare quality nevertheless. And it is surely significant that he was "almost the only example of the sort of critic whose voice . . . could at once attract the attention of a wide audience" (G. S. Fraser).

This, of course, was long before the TV success, and it is traceable to Orwell's concern with human affairs. He was concerned with this earth and the human beings on it. "The belief in life after death and the desire for earthly happiness are not irreconcilable," he wrote in an article on Christian reformers, "but they pull in opposite directions." Orwell was completely for happiness here and now. He hated poverty, ignorance and oppression, and he fought them with the bitterest of pens without losing his compassion for their victims. And, like the true internationalist, he had a deep love for his native land. The really important fact about so many of the English intelligentsia, he said, was their severance from the common culture of the country. Such a severance never occurred

in Orwell's case. He analysed the rôle that boys' magazines and comic postcards played in our lives; he considered the possibility of popularising English poetry through the radio. The divorce between poetry and popular culture, he insisted, "belongs only to our own time and to a comparatively small area of the earth." If the breach was to be healed we should have to reverse the trend towards obscurity on the part of the poet and increase public appreciation. It would have to become normal to read verse aloud again, and radio provided the obvious means.

Orwell's principal attack on literary escapism is found in the essay *Inside the Whale*. Writing of the twenties he said: "Our eyes are directed to Rome, to Byzantium, to Montparnasse, to Mexico, to the Etruscans, to the Subconscious, to the solar plexus—to everywhere except the places where things are actually happening." He was one who committed "the unforgivable sin" of judging a book by its subject matter whereas "Literature was supposed to consist solely in the manipulation of words." The situation is not dissimilar to-day, though there has been a slight change for the better, for which Orwell is entitled to some credit.

Whilst not equating all Christian belief with Conservatism—for even in the Middle Ages there were some revolutionary heretical sects—Orwell thought that "the idea of submission to the will of God, and the idea of increasing human control over nature, are felt to be inimical. On the whole, therefore, the Christian churches . . . have been hostile to the idea of progress and have resisted any political theory tending to weaken the institution of private property." Realistic Christian thinkers "still have to face an unsolved problem," he continued, for "If the Church clings to such doctrines (as the belief in personal immortality) it cannot attract the great mass of the people—but if it abandons them it will have lost its *raison d'être* and may well disappear. This is merely to say over again, in different words, that Christianity is of its nature 'other-worldly' while Socialism is of its nature 'this worldly'." As he remarked elsewhere, religion is ultimately an escapist illusion.

It was George Orwell's self-appointed task to dispel illusions: he was, as Mr. George Woodcock indicated, "essentially the iconoclast." And he himself said: "When I sit down to write a book, I do not say to myself, 'I am going to produce a work of art.' I write it because there is some lie that I want to expose, some fact to which I want to draw attention, and my initial concern is to get a hearing." It is to be hoped that those who saw *1984* will turn now to the writings of the man whose premature death five years ago was a tragic loss to literature and rational thinking.

THE YEAR'S FREETHOUGHT ARMOURY

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This Believing World

To the thousands of lives of Jesus already written is now added one by Dr. Wand, the Bishop of London. The distinguishing feature of this new "biography" is that it is "factual"! It is based on facts. The Devils were real, the Miracles and the wholesale Resurrections all literally took place. The Angel who came to Joseph in a dream to tell him about the Virgin Mary was a real Angel. And we are living in the year 1955. Yet we are solemnly told that times have changed, and that Freethought must adapt itself anew to these times. But are we not faced still with the same old Fundamentalism?

Although the church of St. Mary Abbott's, Kensington, had a congregation which included peers, M.P.s, admirals, and society people, the Vicar found it necessary to put a notice on the church door which reads, "Ladies are strongly advised not to leave their handbags in the pews when they go to the altar for Holy Communion." And the Vicar actually told a reporter of *The People* that "the handbags would be safer in a public-house." What a magnificent testimonial to the power of prayer and of the Holy Communion when you accept Jesus Christ as your Personal Saviour!

When a wealthy middle-aged spinster who had been spiritually advised by the Rev. P. G. Parker to live at his Christian Workers' Bible Centre in Devon, and to sell all she had and give—well, not exactly to the poor but to this Bible Centre and other concerns, eventually wanted her money back, she was told that if she showed any "reluctance" in thus getting rid of it, it was because Satan was "getting at her." She thereupon went to court and the judge found for the ungrateful lady against the Christian parson, in spite of the fact that the parson had found Christ and the lady—according to Mr. Parker—had found Satan. What are our courts coming to?

Although he had practised as a medium since he was 16, and was "gifted to give evidence from the spirit world" besides packing his Spiritualist Church for 17 years, a Mr. N. England was recently heavily fined for "fortune-telling" at Salford, Lancashire. Mr. England told a number of very extraordinary things to two policewomen—though we must confess that there are far more extraordinary things in the Bible which we are expected to believe on "faith." Is there very much difference between a medium who tells us what happens in Spiritland, and a priest who tells us what happens in Heaven?

Dear little Bernadette of Lourdes fame has a lot to answer for. Ever since the Virgin Mary paid her a personal visit and told the young girl that she was the "Immaculate Conception," quite a number of other kiddies claim to have met the Mother of God. The latest is Emilia Leyva of Argentine who insists that the Virgin came in contact with her in the shape of a Dove—a transformation dead easy to do for anybody who can perform miracles. The result was that the girl's home town has been inundated with thousands of sick people who clamour to be cured, and the hard-hearted authorities have had to "quarantine" the town against wholesale epidemics. Perhaps it wasn't altogether Bernadette's fault. Perhaps part of the blame must be shared by the Holy Virgin herself.

The words "Moral Rearmament" have been captured by the followers of Dr. Buchman, though their activities, in spite of their slogan, appear more and more to be a question of grabbing money than anything else. Recently, the Church Assembly had to discuss the Buchmanites, and

the Archbishop of York admitted to the Assembly that to influence him in their favour, he had to submit to great pressure from the Group. He was "inundated" with papers and letters. And what was the Assembly's decision? It preferred to give "no judgment" on the question. After all, are not all Buchmanites Fundamentalists of the deepest dye?

A few—more or less—Biblical scrolls, found in a cave near the Dead Sea in 1947 and dating—it is supposed—from the first century, have been bought by the Israeli National Trust for £90,000. This should make the mouths of all Buchmanites water—what they would call, money for jam. Except as antiques, of what earthly use are these scrolls? Do they prove anything? All the same, we admit that any documents which would prove the Bible true would be worth far more—though any such are quite non-existent. Nothing can prove the Bible true.

H.C.

"Hungarian Rhapsody"

OF undoubted interest to freethinkers is a well-produced illustrated booklet recently published by the British Hungarian Friendship Society entitled *The Church in Hungary* (Copies 6d. post free from B.H.F.S., 33, Pembroke Square, London, W.2).

Its author is the Rev. Canon C. F. Harman, M.A., L.Th., and, obviously destined for a Christian readership, its aim is to present the Hungarian ruling regime in a light somewhat more favourable than that usually accorded it by the orthodox anti-Communist Press.

The reverend author, himself the President of the B.H.F.S., writes from the standpoint of a Nonconformist minister, and, reading his comments, one realises that he enjoyed himself very much in this People's Republic during his fortnight's stay . . . "the simple ritual and the marked reverence of the worshippers made me feel quite at home." Indeed, so delighted is he with the progress of Christianity there, that it is a most natural outcome for him to share his joy with fellow believers upon his return to an unlightened West. "We cannot but marvel at the transformation that has taken place. I should say that the percentage of the population regularly attending church is far higher than it is in England."

Now, personally, I have no just cause to doubt the statements of physical fact made by the Canon, although perhaps some of his not-quite-so-nonconforming Protestant colleagues might think that some of them are more the result of enthusiasm for Communism than love of Christianity.

Christians abound in Hungary: churches are well-attended by God-fearing congregations: bishops continue to wax fat, Calvinist ones at least—although it occurs to me that one or two of the Roman variety may be a bit leaner, but that's life, isn't it? Generally speaking, everyone is tremendously happy and wondering why on earth they hadn't thought of having a Communist government before. From all of which I can only conclude that it must be that insignificant minority of troublesome nobodies, neither Christian nor Communist, but—dare we say it?—freethinkers, who find life under absolutism so tedious.

Thin indeed is the dividing line between the acceptance of the idea of an almighty God and the acceptance of the idea of an almighty State, in fact, as Canon Harman so ably sets out to prove, the two can blend together quite peacefully with the minimum of inconvenience to both parties. To quote his own words, "Abasement and adoration are inseparable factors in any healthy spiritual life."

VALRANDO.

THE FREETHINKER

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THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, £1 4s. (in U.S.A., \$3.50); half-year, 12s.; three months, 6s. Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1. 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.

A. W. DAVIS.—Suggestion followed up; thanks.

F. WINKLER.—100 people on a platform, all beating their breasts and testifying to the Power within, would be just as much material for the psychologist, whether they were Christians, Moslems, or Hottentots.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

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

F. ROTHWELL.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every week-day, 1 p.m.:

G. A. WOODCOCK.

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, March 6, noon: L. EBURY and H. ARTHUR.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Every Friday at 1 p.m.:

T. M. MOSLEY.

INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Satis Café, 40, Cannon Street, off New Street).—Sunday, March 6, 7 p.m.:

F. J. CORINA, "From Savagery to Space Ships."

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, March 6, 6-45 p.m.:

E. T. FOX, "U.N.O. Charter Reform, 1955."

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, March 8, 7 p.m.:

J. H. LLOYD, "Gambling—its Social and Ethical Aspects."

Glasgow Secular Society (Central Halls, Bath Street).—Sunday, March 6, 7 p.m.:

Mr. COLIN MCCALL, "Freethought in the Modern World."

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, March 6, 6-30 p.m.:

The 74th Anniversary. Guest Speaker, F. A. RIDLEY, President, N.S.S.

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare St.).—Sunday, March 6, 2-30 p.m.:

C. COFFEY, "A Visit to the U.S.A."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, March 6, 11 a.m.:

S. K. RATCLIFFE, "The Parables of Jesus."

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, March 6, 7-15 p.m.:

G. ATT-FIELD, "Communism, Democracy and Liberty."

The 46th Conway Memorial Lecture, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1. Friday, March 11, 7-30 p.m.:

The Rt. Hon. The LORD BOYD ORR, D.S.O., M.D., F.R.S., "Ethics in the Atomic Age." Chairman, the Rt. Hon. the LORD HORDER, G.C.V.O., M.D. Admission Free.

Notes and News

In accordance with a resolution passed at the 1954 Annual Conference of the National Secular Society, the talk by the late Chapman Cohen, "The Meaning and Value of Freethought," which was issued as a gramophone record in 1932, has now been printed for the first time for propaganda purposes. Several thousand copies have been distributed and received with general appreciation. Readers who would like one should send a 2½d. stamp to the Secretary.

THE last letter published in a recent series in the *Nottingham Guardian Journal* on the respective merits of religion and "Scientific Humanism" was signed "Christian" and stated that Charles Bradlaugh's *Memoirs* showed that he

The Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund

Previously acknowledged, £790 3s. 2d.; Mr. and Mrs. H. T. Nicholls, 10s.; W. H. D., 2s. 6d.; A. Hancock, 1s.; Mr. and Mrs. Askey, 5s. 6d.; H.C., 10s.; Total, £791 12s. 2d.

Donations should be sent to "The Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund" and cheques made out accordingly.

was "a drink addict." A footnote announced, "This correspondence is now closed." We were pleased to note the exposure of the slanderous nature of the statement and the irresponsible malice of the anonymous defender of the Faith a few days later in the following letter printed in the same paper, under the title, "Not a drink addict":—

While you have closed the correspondence initiated by my friend, Tom Mosley, it would be manifestly unfair to allow "Christian" to call Charles Bradlaugh "a drink addict" in the final letter published, and not admit a refutation of the charge.

"Christian" alleges that Bradlaugh's "Memoirs" establish its truth, but I cannot find such a work amongst those recorded in a published bibliography of his writings. What we do know, from the biography written by his daughter after his death, is that he was an ardent advocate of temperance as a young man, and a total abstainer until he was 28. In 1861 he was in bad health and was told by his doctor that he was drinking too much tea. After cutting this down, he formed the habit of taking a little claret or hock at dinner. The fact is that Bradlaugh was a man of simple and austere life, whose passion was working for causes in which he believed.

P. VICTOR MORRIS,
Secretary, National Secular Society.

The newspaper controversies which followed Mrs. Knight's talks have been carried on extensively in the correspondence columns of those papers in which official religious "answers" have been published, or in which a series of religious statements have appeared.

During February one of two things must have happened. Either Freethinkers have stayed the course better than Christians, or editors have begun to realise that there are more Freethinkers and Humanists than they supposed, because there is repeated evidence of a much fairer treatment of anti-religious views.

In Yorkshire, Mr. H. Day, for long the *bête noire* of the editors, was throughout February carrying on his epistolary debate with the vicar of Clayton in the *Telegraph and Argus*, the vicar proving a courteous and, on Christian standards, able opponent abler, at any rate, than the flock of futilities who flew, perhaps embarrassingly, to his aid. Christian letters in general throughout the country have shown the usual high percentage of dimwits and dullards, with the editors apparently putting them in for want of something better.

In the *Liverpool Echo* of February 16 there were four freethinking letters to one Christian, and Mr. Parry's letter was acknowledged as coming from the chairman of the local branch of the National Secular Society.

Another *Freethinker* reader, Mr. G. Hilbinger, was given a surprisingly generous allowance of space in both the *Paddington Mercury* and the *West London Observer*. These are but three examples of the recent encouraging trend.

—NEXT WEEK—

CONCESSIONS TO SECULARISM

By LEON SPAIN

Review

The Story of South Place, by S. K. Ratcliffe. Watts & Co., 1955. 5s. net.

FOR nearly a century, South Place has been a landmark in the history of liberal religion and religious toleration in London and, for that matter, is still. We may refer to Conway Hall, it is true, but we are generally thinking of South Place when we do. The old Unitarian chapel no longer exists, but it had a remarkable influence when Victorian Protestantism was at its most powerful, fighting doggedly the fierce narrowness of the current religion through a remarkable number of fine preachers.

Mr. Ratcliffe has brilliantly recalled its early days before it took over the Finsbury Unitarian Chapel, sketching the determined little band of Londoners who broke away from orthodoxy under a young American minister, Elhanan Winchester, who tried to establish something like an heretical Christian sect "associated with the name of Origen" called Universalism. This was in 1787—the heyday of Wesley and Whitefield and numerous other little sects, and was then probably considered just another one to add to the list. Winchester wrote a reply to Paine's *Age of Reason*—quite forgotten of course, and many hymns. When he returned to America, an Independent, William Vidler, took his place who soon changed to Unitarianism arousing "admiration and affection to an exceptional degree." When he died in 1816, the little Society was very lucky in his successor. This was William Johnson Fox (1786-1864) a brilliant preacher and writer who made a great name in his day and who virtually put South Place on the map. Mr. Ratcliffe describes Fox's ministry enthusiastically; and it is good to read that "before long he found himself at odds with the conservative elements in his congregation." The reason was that Fox "delivered from his pulpit an impassioned protest against the imprisonment of Richard Carlile for selling the *Age of Reason*."

W. J. Fox was a Unitarian and remained so all his life; and his chapel "took its place at once as a centre of liberal religion and intellectual activity." He was helped by the two gifted daughters of Benjamin Flower—Eliza and Sarah who, between them, were responsible for many hymns sung at South Place over the years. Fox edited the *Repository* with their help, and Browning, Mill, Crabb Robinson, Harriet Taylor, Harriet Martineau, all contributed. In his congregation were such notabilities as Leigh Hunt, Thomas Campbell, Hazlitt, John Forster, and many others. He became M.P. for Oldham, and remained in Parliament for many years.

When he died, South Place was again lucky in obtaining the services of Moncure Conway (1832-1907) who, as preacher and writer, was outstanding and who, with his charming wife, became South Place's "beloved pastor." It was Conway who wrote the authoritative *Life of Thomas Paine* which silenced, as far as it was possible to do so, the lies and libels which distinguished Christianity when faced with any heresy. Unable to reply to Paine, Christians ushered in a pæon of personal abuse in which even such a gentle Agnostic like Sir Leslie Stephen concurred. It was Conway's biography which rung from Stephen a grudging apology.

But Conway's literary output was remarkable, and his reputation as a great Freethinker is perpetuated in Conway Hall, built when South Place Chapel had to be demolished and which carries on as far as possible the work which made him so famous. Mr. Ratcliffe gives us an excellent résumé of Conway's great personality and work.

On his retirement, it was found impossible to replace him and a number of lecturers appeared in the pulpit,

among them the incomparable John M. Robertson, Joseph McCabe, Herbert Burrows, J. A. Hobson, C. Delisle Burns, and later, a number of other well-known speakers. It was my own good fortune to hear many of them, though for me—I never heard Conway—no one ever quite reached up to the standard of the great J.M.R. He stood in a class by himself, and even McCabe at his best never reached that standard. But both were great lecturers and it was a tragedy and a great personal loss to miss hearing them while I was in the army during World War I.

Apart from the gradual change from Unitarianism to Rationalism, South Place has always held a high place for its concerts and chamber music. Its Sunday concerts became the Mecca of music lovers from all parts of London. There is an excellent account of its musical activities reprinted from the *Monthly Musical Record* for April, 1953, in the book.

Just two minor criticisms. Mr. Ratcliffe refers to the famous collection of Addresses delivered at South Place in the '80's, first published in 1889 and reaching eight editions, under the title of *Religious Systems of the World*. (Incidentally Mr. Ratcliffe says, "It was in 1890" that these lectures were organised. My copy of the book says that the first edition of the series was published in 1889.) He gives the names of a few of the lecturers—Sir Alfred Lyell, Rhys Davids, Isabel Bird, F. C. Conybeare, and a few others; and of course he does not mention G. W. Foote whose lecture was "The Gospel of Secularism." Foote was doing the work towards the complete rejection of all supernatural creeds, including Christianity, to which most of the members of South Place had to come in their intellectual progress. He did it bluntly and aggressively, it is true, but he was right; and the timid conservatives in South Place who found it difficult to give up even an attenuated form of Theism had eventually to accept Foote's forthright rejection of the God-idea. They may not have liked his methods—but he was right and they were wrong.

I mention this especially because Mr. Ratcliffe rightly gave prominence to W. J. Fox's championship of Carlile—as I have pointed out above. Now why did he not point out as well that Moncure Conway championed G. W. Foote when he was, like Carlile, also imprisoned for the terrible crime of Blasphemy? Why did he not tell us about—and quote—Conway's manly protest (*Blasphemous Libels*) against the iniquitous sentence given by a rabid Roman Catholic judge for an imaginary crime? It was a protest which especially honoured Conway because his own methods were so different from Foote's.

The Story of South Place will interest all lovers of that home of Freethought. It is well printed and illustrated, and one can only hope that it will reach many people who are still in the fog of supernaturalism.

H. CUTNER

For Liberty

G. Bernard Shaw

Liberty means responsibility. That is why most men dread it.

A king nowadays is only a dummy put up to draw your fire off the real oppressors of society.

Every fool believes what his teachers tell him, and calls his credulity science or morality, as confidently as his father called it divine revelation.

A limited monarchy is a device combining the inertia of a wooden idol with the credibility of a flesh and blood one.

Tom Paine's Message to Our Day

By BAYARD SIMMONS

(Continued from page 58)

BEFORE going on to deal with Paine's unpopularity with the people of three great countries, I would like to make it clear that this was not on personal grounds. Although his books and pamphlets sold by scores of thousands, he never took one penny of royalties. And talking of *royalties* it is interesting to learn that King Louis XVI personally liked Paine the Republican, and was extremely pleasant to him. Paine was a most forgiving man and often helped his enemies. It is reported that when Paine was in the Luxembourg Prison in Paris one of his fellow-prisoners was released before Paine was. This was a General O'Hara, who had fought against America. When O'Hara was released Paine lent him £300. This sum, which was Paine's total capital at the time, had been hidden by him in the lock of his cell door.

One last testimonial to Paine's character. When Monroe, the American Ambassador in Paris, found to his horror that Paine was in prison, he tried to get him out. I will not quote his whole letter to Paine, but in it he wrote: "Of the sense which the President [that is, Washington] has always entertained of your merits, and of his friendly disposition towards you, you are too well assured to require any declaration of it from me." This James Monroe was afterwards to become President of the United States (he was the Monroe who declared the Monroe doctrine), and Washington was, of course, the first President. Another great friend of Paine was Thomas Jefferson, the man who drew up the Declaration of Independence. Another Thomas. No, on the score of personal likeability the gentle, generous Paine could not have incurred the odium that has almost buried him.

This odium was, and is, our old enemy the *odium theologicum*, that has had such an unenviable reputation during 2,000 years. How deeply Tom incurred this is well shown by the remark of a latter President of the U.S.A. This was Roosevelt, not Franklin Delano, but Theodore (him of the big teeth, rimless glasses, and the teddy bear). He once called Tom Paine a "filthy little Atheist." As the late Mr. Chapman Cohen has said, this expression deserves to be given a permanent place in history because it manages to express three lies in as many words. Paine was not an Atheist but a confirmed and fervent Theist (he was indeed that best kind of Christian, in my opinion, a Quaker). He was not filthy, and as he was 5 ft. 10 in. he could hardly be called little; 5 ft. 8 in. is stated to be the average height for a man in this country at the present day, and in Paine's time the average may well have been an inch or two shorter.

The next point I wish to make is that Paine's unpopularity dates from the time when he wrote his attack on the Bible, the book called the *Age of Reason*. Prior to this he had enjoyed a fair measure of praise and had received even substantial material rewards. Of course he was not popular with the British Government, but his new country did *something* (not so much as they could and should) to repay Paine's services to the new nation. Paine was at one time Foreign Secretary to the American Congress. The State of New York voted him a house and a farm of 277 acres at New Rochelle. The Pennsylvania Assembly voted him £500, and Congress of the U.S.A. made him a payment of \$3,000. These sums were relatively small, but they were before Paine wrote the *Age of Reason*. After that awful book it is safe to say he would not have received one dime. His earlier book, the *Rights of Man*, was immensely popular in wide circles in England and France, although, of course, hated and prosecuted by the

English Government. So popular was the book in its French translation that no less than three constituencies elected him to the Convention. The French National Assembly conferred on Paine the title of "French citizen," and the President of that Assembly wrote that "France called him to its bosom." On landing at Calais Paine was greeted with a salute of guns from the fort. There is not the slightest doubt that this man, who was to spend the best part of a year in a French gaol, and only just saved his neck from the guillotine, was intensely popular when he landed in France.

Now, why did this "man of the world," this able politician, do something that nearly all politicians avoid as a plague? This at any rate is true of our own country. As far as I can remember only one prominent Member of Parliament has dared in England to be anti-clerical. He was, of course, Charles Bradlaugh, and, as we all know, the House of Commons for years tried to gather its respectable skirts away from the contamination of his presence.

The answer to our question may be given by Paine himself. You will find this paragraph early in the first part of the *Age of Reason*. (As a matter of fact it is the eighth from the beginning). "All national institutions of Churches . . . appear to me no other than human inventions set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolise power and profit." He also says that early on he saw that "a revolution in the system of Government would be followed by a revolution in the system of Religion." He dwells on the fact that the spirit of intolerance bred by the persecutions of the Church transfers itself to politics. "The tribunals, styled Revolutionary," says he, speaking of France, "supplied the place of an Inquisition, and the Guillotine of the State outdid the fire and faggot of the Church."

Can we, looking around the world of our day doubt the truth that Religion, or if you find that too strong a claim, at any rate Organised Religion (the Churches) is the tap-root of Reaction? People who have never given much attention to the influence of the Churches in politics and governments may be surprised at such a statement. I do not say it is the only root—for it is not—but I do claim that it is the chief, or tap-root.

Let us consider for a few moments some modern instances of the power wielded by prominent clericals in the interests of reaction. Take first, Germany. The priest (Catholic, of course), Bruening, prepared the way, with the help of the pious von Papen, for the dictatorship of Hitler by a dictatorial government. He ruled, if I remember aright, for over a year without parliament. In Austria Monseignor Seipel prepared the way for the pious Dolfuss (the pocket dictator) who by attacking the working-class in Austria so weakened that State that Hitler walked in without opposition. Schuschnigg also was deeply religious.

In Czechoslovakia the Slovak Premier Tiso was a Jesuit, and Voloshin, a Premier of Carpathan Ukraine (lately Ruthenia) also was a Catholic priest. Both were hand-in-glove with Hitler. The Hlinka Guard in Slovakia was a species of Nazi Brown Shirts or Storm Trooper. Their founder was Father Hlinka, a Catholic priest. Father Mironas, Prime Minister of Lithuania, surrendered the Memelland to Hitler without a struggle.

(To be concluded)

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

CHOSEN QUESTION

By G. H. TAYLOR

WHILE wishing *The Freethinker* all the best for the New Year a young Scottish reader (who would have been dealt with before but for pressure of other matters) says: *I can go a long way with you. God is dead; religion is dead. But can Freethought supply youth with a code of conduct? The code supplied by Christianity is rotten, granted, but Freethought hasn't even got one.*

And I hope it never will have. To the person who tells us he *must* have some sort of ethical code to base conduct on, we might answer: "Surely you are not such a black-guard that you cannot behave yourself without a book of rules. We refuse to accept you at your own estimate; we think better of you. We reject the idea that you are a moral cripple. We do not accept the implication that you are incapable of decent conduct without having it written down for you. We do not believe you only act decently according to formulæ. And if by nature you *are* a black-guard, then we don't see how a code of rules is going to alter you."

Naturally decent social behaviour is surely independent of any formulated ethical scheme which has to be digested like the multiplication table.

A code of ethical behaviour is really a hangover from religion. A code is binding, and so is religion—etymologically as well as historically. What is bound up does not change. The Christian scheme of things is something settled and established by Biblical revelation for all time. In its fundamentals, therefore, it cannot develop; it can only decompose. And what cannot develop cannot endure, except there be no development in its environment capable of affecting it. Like a clinging barnacle Christianity endured throughout the Dark Ages of Faith. When external forces were strong enough to affect it, then began the process of decomposition. The external forces were the Renaissance, the invention of printing and the advance of science in its various directions. The Reformation itself was an important subsidiary effect of these. The process of decomposition is illustrated in the fact that the Church which could once send men to the stake for denying the Virgin Birth can now make them high Church dignitaries. Its doctrines are smashed; its political privileges largely remain.

What has happened to Christian doctrine could happen to a set code of ethical behaviour. Are there ethical precepts of such a nature as to carry within them the promise of eternal application? Is there any conceivable code which could hope to escape disruption by social changes?

Standards of social behaviour are as much a part of evolution as anything else. A society of murderers, for example, would have no survival value; a society of thieves would not long remain a society. There is a definable limit to the percentage of homosexuals a society could have and still survive. Hence, the vast majority are not murderers or thieves or homosexuals. Standards of behaviour, whether they please or displease this person or that, are products of social evolution, and any attempt at final codification is a mere intellectual exercise, label it Positivism, Ethicism or what you will.

Correspondence

THE INQUISITION

Surely Mr. Ridley is wrong in calling the Inquisition "a purely Spanish institution?" Everyone else knows of its activities in Italy, France, the Netherlands and South America. Again, when he says that it "was effectively independent of the Vatican and closely linked with the Spanish Monarchy," he overlooks the fact

that the appointment by the sovereign of an Inquisitor-General in Spain was subject to papal confirmation. As for his assertion that "many of the prosecutions were really more *political* in character than religious," this echoes an old Catholic excuse, but it is not true. The prosecution of Antonio Perez, leading to the suppression of liberty in Aragon, was an exception. Everywhere the Inquisition was, as Lecky puts it, "an essentially ecclesiastical institution, created, modified and sanctioned by the Pope." Why, moreover, bother to suggest that the Inquisition was morally superior to the Gestapo and more rational than Protestant witch-hunters? The heretic under torture or in the flames would scarcely appreciate the distinctions.—Yours, etc., "VERITAS."

A WORLD FREETHOUGHT STATE

I think the decision to give the front page to Rev. John L. Broom was proved quite sound. Actually I see no reason for assuming that a Freethinker must necessarily come down on the side of atheism. I feel that the essential feature of a Freethinker is that he should question all the agencies which are advanced as sources of authority in matters of belief and keep his mind firmly fixed upon the ideas rather than the agencies.

I look forward to the establishment of a Freethinker World State in which the vast majority of the people of the world will positively accept the scientific and freethinking attitudes which can stand as a positive link between men like Mr. Broom and other Freethinkers. I would suggest that whilst our speculations concerning the nature of the Ultimate Reality or the destiny of the human race as a whole may differ we can feel tied to each other by our acceptance of personal responsibility and rational methods of working and exposition of our conclusions on these fundamental matters.—Yours, etc., E. G. MACFARLANE.

REV. J. L. BROOM'S ARTICLE

Kindly convey to the Rev. J. L. Broom my very warm thanks for his article on the Censorship of Literature. It was so delightful to read that I read it several times and handed it to some friends, all of whom enjoyed it.

With men like him in the Church I would attend myself when he preached on such subjects, to have the pleasure of hearing one who can think out the matter for himself.

Kindly seek further articles from him from time to time. I shall be delighted to read him on any subject.—Yours, etc., WM. C. SLATER.

RELIGION NEEDED BY SOME?

Reader A. N. Evans implies that religion is needed by some and goes on to tell us why.

"Beliefs are merely the outward manifestation of our attempts to fulfil basic needs," she tells us and "the religious man believes in God because he wants to."

But what *are* the "basic needs" apart from food, clothing, love, security and shelter? It is not Belief, but Knowledge that secures human needs.

No one ever believes in God because he "wants to." His belief is merely an unquestioning acceptance from parents and Church. The "stage is set" from birth, and we take on the customary beliefs, traditions and ways of life "until (if we ever do) we begin to think for ourselves.

A. N. Evans may look for grateful thanks from the rich. "Even in this life we are told that an empty pocket makes for a happy heart, and that rich men have next to no chance of entering the Kingdom of Heaven."

I have never noticed any sudden rush on the part of the wealthy to dispose of all they possess so as to secure "everlasting life." The owners of the Church's invested millions are "out of the running" for a place in the Kingdom of Heaven!

And she calls the poverty-stricken's contemplation of the unhappy rich "comforting thoughts!"

The only thing that helps the sick and the aged is material comfort, love and attention, something that Christian society overlooks when it provides them with a miserly pittance and puts tea and coal out of their reach as luxuries, apparently thinking, like reader Evans, that their "basic needs" are supplied by their contemplation of a sure seat in the "Kingdom of Heaven!"

If this is the best that Christianity has to offer, then it's time Freethought had a chance. Yes, it has something to offer for the only life we know. It offers the chance of ridding oneself of the degrading superstition which allows unequal distribution of Nature's bounty, and which allows a parasitical minority in society, with the aid of their religious henchmen, to perpetuate a system of want, despair, insecurity, war and lack of freedom, under the pretence that there is a better life hereafter.—Yours, etc., GEORGE HILBINGER.