

The Freethinker

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Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

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IT was one of Thomas Jefferson's firmest principles that men should be free to hold and express whatever beliefs they liked on religious and other matters. For his own part, he declared, "I have never submitted the whole system of my opinions to the creed of any part of men, in religion, in philosophy, in politics, or in anything else where I was capable of thinking for myself." He also said, "I tolerate with the utmost latitude the right of others to differ from me in opinion. . . . I know too well the weakness and uncertainty of human reason to wonder at its different results."

In Jefferson's life there were three things of which he was proud, and he left instructions that on the stone marking his last resting-place they should be recorded in just these words:—

"Here was buried
Thomas Jefferson

Author of the Declaration of American Independence,
of the statute of Virginia for religious freedom,
and Father of the University of Virginia."

Now in his respect for the sovereignty of the mind, Jefferson had a worthy follower in Abraham Lincoln. Although both men are celebrated to-day as two of America's greatest national figures, Lincoln's background was completely different from Jefferson's. True, they each practised law before being elected to the office of President of U.S.A. But whereas Jefferson, coming of well-to-do parents, received an education befitting a member of the cultured class, Lincoln, born in a log cabin in Kentucky, and doing rough farm work till he was 19, had virtually no education—except that which he gave himself. So he actually resembled Jefferson only in his robust independence of mind, and in his refusal to submit his thinking to the authority of any Church.

Jefferson may have been, and Lincoln has certainly been, referred to as a freethinker in religion. But unless by "freethinker" is understood one who simply thinks for himself in religious questions, the term may be misleading. Lincoln undoubtedly thought for himself, as did Jefferson; but his rejection of Christianity did not make him an Agnostic or an Atheist. Like Jefferson, he was a Deist; and he had been helped to that position—if not decisively influenced—by reading in his early manhood Volney's *Ruins of Empires* and Paine's *Age of Reason*.

That Lincoln did reject Christianity there can be no doubt at all. Towards the end of his life he avowed, "I have never united myself to any Church, because I have found difficulty in giving my assent without mental reservations to the long and complicated statements of Christian doctrine which characterise their articles of belief and confessions of faith." Then there is the testimony of Jesse W. Fell, "a true son of the Quakers," who knew Abraham Lincoln well in his earlier years: "On the innate depravity of man, the character and office of the great head of the Church, the Atonement, the infallibility of the written revelation, the performance of miracles, the nature and design of present and future rewards and punishments

(as they are popularly called), and many other subjects, he held opinions utterly at variance with what are usually taught in the Church. I should say that his expressed views on these and kindred subjects were such as, in the estimation of most believers, would place him entirely outside the Christian pale."

So far so good. But Fell himself, I think, trespasses beyond a fair statement of the case when he goes on to add that Lincoln's "principles and practices and the spirit of his whole life were of the very kind we universally agree to call Christian." It is interesting to record that the President's wife, while describing him as "a religious man" whose

religion "was a kind of poetry in his nature," attested that he was "never a technical Christian." "His only philosophy," she is quoted as saying, "was, 'What is to be will be,' and no prayers of ours can reverse the decree."

Whatever God Lincoln believed in, clearly was not the kind of God that existed merely to grant human wishes, and even in the darkest and most harrowing days of the Civil War, when the outcome seemed much in doubt, he never presumed to ask for or expect the assistance of an Almighty. When at that time he was urged by the Christian faithful to place more reliance in the efficacy of prayer, he replied, "The rebel soldiers are praying with a great deal more earnestness, I fear, than our own troops." And in a private fragment that has survived, so characteristic of Honest Abe, we have this: "In great contests each party claims to act in accordance with the will of God. Both may be, and one must be, wrong. God cannot be for and against the same thing at the same time. In the present civil war it is quite possible that God's purpose is something different from the purpose of either party. . . ."

To the White House in 1862 came a deputation of Christian ministers to acquaint Lincoln with what they felt to be his duty, in the sight of God, concerning the emancipation of the Southern slaves. Telling them that he had been approached, with the most opposite opinions and advice, by religious men all equally certain that they knew the Divine Will, and that he hoped it would not strike them as irreverent if he ventured the view that, were God to reveal to anyone what the President's duty was, he would reveal it to the President himself, he went on: "These are not, however, the days of miracles, and I suppose it will be granted that I am not to expect a direct revelation. I must study the plain physical facts of the case, ascertain what is possible, and learn what appears to be wise and right."

Two years earlier—in 1860—Lincoln had said, "I know there is a God, and that he hates injustices and slavery. . . . If he has a place and work for me I believe I am ready." But as Herbert Agar in his brief life of Lincoln has written, "This was a more confident statement than he could normally make," and "it worried him to be asked to define his beliefs." Fond of the Bible as he was, it was the fondness of a man who found its literary qualities to his taste rather than of one who regarded it in any way as the

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

Lincoln's Attitude to Religion

By G. I. BENNETT

source of supernatural truth. Yet despite his homely jests, his simple good humour, his warm humanity, the gaunt giant from the backwoods was a lonely figure, often aloof and withdrawn from those about him, sunk in his own sombre thoughts. "Everybody knew him and nobody knew him," wrote one biographer. "Such a man is doomed to melancholy unless he is upheld by faith," observed Agar, adding, "And Lincoln seems never to have found such consolation."

One who in his heart is a sceptic is, as a rule, always a sceptic. Lincoln once wryly said, "Probably it is my lot to go on in a twilight, feeling and reasoning my way through life, as questioning, doubting Thomas did." In later life—especially after he had assumed leadership of his nation in its fratricidal struggle—he had no time or occasion for the raillery against religion in which he had been wont to indulge in his early political days. But his personal outlook had not changed, and he remained—to quote his own words—"a questioning, doubting Thomas" up to the time of his tragic death from an assassin's bullet in 1865.

A Whitman Centenary

BY COLIN MCCALL

ON American Independence Day (4th July) 1855, a thin volume of twelve poems was published in Brooklyn, New York, under the title *Leaves of Grass*. Later editions appeared during the author's lifetime with more and more poems included, and some modern reprints contain well over 500 pages of text alone. Like all such large collections of poetry, it is rather uneven in quality; but it seldom fails to make a powerful impact upon the sensitive reader. How great the impact must have been when that first little book of 94 pages made its appearance one hundred years ago!

Walt Whitman was then 36. He had left school when eleven to work as a printer then, after a brief spell as a schoolteacher, had become a journalist and, later, editor of the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*. He lost this post due to political differences and laziness and made a trip to New Orleans in 1848, returning again to Brooklyn where he worked at his father's trade of carpentry and wrote the poems whose publication we are now celebrating. During the Civil War he was mostly in Washington and devoted much of his time to tending and comforting the wounded soldiers. In 1873 he suffered a paralytic stroke and became a partial invalid for the rest of his life. He died in 1892, revered by a coterie of disciples but little known by the general public for whom he claimed to speak.

Whitman was a strange mixture of manliness and femininity. It has been suggested that he was under-sexed; some of his work sounds distinctly homosexual but he denied knowledge of this implication and boasted that he was the father of many illegitimate children. Whether this be true or not, Whitman's "manly friendship, fond and loving, pure and sweet, strong and life-long" has a curious and not altogether healthy flavour. Yet Ingersoll called him the poet of life, of love, of the natural, of the human race; and he was all of these—in a superficial way. As George Santayana remarked, "Whitman's insight into man did not go beyond a sensuous sympathy" and "never approached a scientific or imaginative knowledge" of men's hearts. For that reason, continued Santayana, Whitman could never be "a poet of the people."

But, for all his limitations, Whitman was an impressive figure in life and literature. He was passionately sincere in extolling democracy and the brotherhood of man, following in the tradition of Paine and Jefferson, both of whom he admired tremendously. (Of Paine he once said: "The tree with the best apples gets the worst clubbing.")

In his poetry he tried "to discard all conventional poetic phrases, and every touch of or reference to ancient or medieval images, metaphors, subjects, styles" and to use, instead, everyday speech. This was a significant step which has influenced most poetic writing since his time.

Ingersoll's admiration for Whitman was reciprocated. The poet thought that "Ingersoll and Huxley without any others could unhorse the whole Christian giant." "They are," he said, "master-pilgrims with a fighting gift that would appal me if I was in the opposition." He described himself as never having any "views," as being "always free," making "no pledges," adopting "no creeds" and never joining parties. But he had *some* views, of course, and Ingersoll was right in regarding the God belief as the weakest part of them. It was not a belief in the Christian god but a sort of mystical pantheism, a transcendentalism which was also specifically condemned by D. H. Lawrence.

What cannot be denied are Whitman's fine character and love of liberty; and a grandeur that somehow epitomises the new nation he spoke for and the international fellowship he envisaged. The centenary of *Leaves of Grass* deserves to be commemorated by those who share his aspirations.

REVIEW

THE FALL OF EL DORADO by William Rittenour. Exposition Press, New York, 1955. Price 3 dollars.

Mr. Rittenour has contributed many articles to this and other journals and therefore his first novel will no doubt appeal to those who enjoyed reading them. He has tried to continue the vein of Voltaire's most celebrated romance, *Candide*—in fact, he has placed his characters in El Dorado, Voltaire's imaginary Paradise and, instead of Pangloss and Candide, we get a kind of modern version—a sceptical philosopher named Youn Vek and his young follower Gil who discourse on modern progress and what it entails as compared with the simple life of the inhabitants of El Dorado.

Candide is one of the world's greatest books—unforgettable in its savage satire, the work of a great mind; and, written when Voltaire was over sixty, it has the wit of his genius and the wisdom of his age. It was a scathing indictment of the optimism of Leibnitz—that everything is for the best in this best of all possible worlds. The characters of Voltaire go through a terrible time in his own age of slavery, torture and massacre which meant for him what the H-Bomb and war means to us.

Mr. Rittenour contrasts the simple life in El Dorado with that which a gang of revolutionaries want to impose with their wars, bombs, and other horrors; but one is obliged to say that it is no more possible to imitate Voltaire than it is to imitate Dickens or Shakespeare. Voltaire's dialogue, for instance, is remarkable, as were his powers of description. *Candide* is unforgettable, and like nearly all great works it can be read again and again.

Mr. Rittenour makes a valiant attempt to do for his novel what Voltaire did for *Candide* and, as far as it goes, he has written an interesting first novel which shows promise; and no doubt with far more experience he will do better. One cannot help but think that with such a subject as modern society to satirise—its "political hatreds and fanaticisms, its scientific wars, its commercialism" and so on—he could have done a great deal better.

H. CUTNER.

THE BIBLE HANDBOOK. By G. W. Foote and W. P. Ball. Price 4s. 6d.; postage 3d. (Tenth edition.)

INFIDEL DEATHBEDS. By G. W. Foote. Revised and enlarged by A. D. McLaren. Price 3s.; postage 3d.

Let Us Save Jesus

BY C. G. L. DU CANN

WHEN I was a child, I thought as a child, I spoke as a child, just as the Apostle declared that he did. In those early days, my elders and betters told me that Jesus had saved me. It may be true: I have no more means of knowing than I had then; and what people tell children is not always and entirely untrue. But if it be true, one certainly ought to reciprocate. Let us then in common decency as well as common gratitude, do something towards the saving of Jesus in return; or if he has not entirely saved us, let us still do what we can to save him.

Indeed Jesus badly needs saving from his friends, both ancient and modern. They indeed, have been worse to him than his ostensible enemies. More treacherous than Judas, more hostile than Pilate, more envenomed than Satan ever was to him are the Christians of to-day who proclaim him with their lips while denying him in their hearts and lives!

But first: consider how those four evangelists, Saints Matthew, Mark, Luke and John treated him. Like the Apocryphal writers (of whom more hereafter) who from the best of motives depicted Jesus as a boy-murderer, they credited their hero with more histrionic weakness than good sense. All these miracles are a plain reliance on hearsay and a playing to the gallery in a primitive age of ignorance. If Jesus so behaved, the modern mind can only exclaim, impatiently, the less Jesus he! In modern eyes all this cheap wonder-stuff only denigrates and degrades the God-Man it is intended to honour and glorify. Of course it has been invented by childish minds from the most pious motives, but how can our age, educated and sophisticated as it is, accept such oriental stuff except as symbolism?

To the 1955 person, to the mind familiar with the aeroplane, the telephone, the radio, the television set, radar, and the rest, these lesser miracles attributed to Jesus carry no conviction. They are of no importance than the fulfilment of prophecies in the Old Testament on which these writers laid such mistaken stress. For even if they took place, they are conclusive evidence of nothing at all, except that Jesus was a foolish and wasteful person to expend a miraculous power on such silly trifling as wine-making from water at a wedding; water-walking on the so-called Sea of Galilee; fish-getting in the same small lake; and free catering after sermons. And upon what principle of ethics, were one or two blind, deaf and dumb, a few palsied, one or two lunatics selected by Jesus for healing out of many thousands in the grievously-afflicted world? It would be flagrantly immoral so to confine one's beneficent activities if one had the power attributed to Jesus by these credulous historians.

Unkind as the Gospels are to the unfortunate Jesus, they are of course no worse than the Apocryphal Gospels which the Church has suppressed. It is safe to say that not one English Christian in a thousand, I might almost say not one in fifty-thousand has ever read these Gospels or even heard of their existence. Not for the vulgar ordinary English folk, whatever their Church, is the Gospel of Mary, the Gospel of Nicodemus, the Gospel of Pilate or the Epistles of Barnabas, Clement, Tecla, and the other books. These from the best of motives, desiring to honour Jesus in their zeal, so grossly overdo it, as to make a wicked monster of him in some cases, and the Christian Churches wisely perhaps, suppresses these famous books.

It would shock even fundamentalists to read of the boy-Jesus cursing a serpent (not the Serpent of Eden but an ordinary one) for infusing poison into little Simon so that

this unfortunate animal burst asunder. Or to read of the parental charge against him of having thrown down another boy from a roof so that he, in self-exculpation, caused the dead boy to rise again and acquit him. Or his carrying water in his cloak. Or his killing a play-fellow for running into him, or his schoolmaster when about to whip him. Or about his abilities in law—which he studied up to the age of thirty—not to speak of physics, astronomy, and metaphysics, as we are told in the Gospel of the Infancy.

The average English Christian is quite sure that there are only the Four Gospels about Jesus in existence, and more than three-quarters of the clergy of all denominations are so unscholarly as to think the same thing. But what can they know of Jesus who only know a part of the stories about him and then only at third or fourth hand? Perhaps the most successful miracle ever worked in religion is the Church's miracle in suppressing the Apocryphal New Testament!

If these early writers traduced Jesus from pious motives, so do modern English Christians with equal determination; for the Jesus of the Bible is no drawing-room character. Look at that wicked falsification of the stark, and often unpleasant, Jesus into "Gentle Jesus meek and mild," a sweetstuff Christ for little children. Neither in word or deed was the Jesus of the Gospel meek or mild. In word, he was very like Aneurin Bevan, who called his opponents "vermin" while Jesus called his, "vipers"; and his vitriolic denunciations of the religious were impolite and in the worst possible taste by to-day's standards. No modern English newspaper would print some of his speeches. His threats of everlasting torment were truly frightful.

Nor were his actions free from violence if we may believe his historians. He was capable of destroying other people's property, driving harmless pigs like the unfortunate Gadarene swine to suicide for no better reason than that they were pigs, and overturning financiers' tables and committing assault and battery within the precincts of the Temple. He had no pity for the pigeons and doves that were to be slaughtered for the supposed delectation of their Creator; his indignation was reserved for the mere desecration of the bricks and mortar of a building.

For my part, I would credit Jesus, judging him on the rest of his character, with more sense than he is sometimes given by his chroniclers. Jesus may well be too much a character to be entirely an invention. But to attribute impossible deeds and incredible words to any remarkable person who impressed his contemporaries is the characteristic of primitive writers.

There seems to me to be no reason why sensible people should not believe in Jesus either as an interesting and significant book-character like Hamlet, or even as one of ourselves, each of whom can equally claim to be the Son of Man and the Son of God. But why should we accept what either the dead or the living falsely and foolishly invent about him? To distinguish between the facts and the fictions may be difficult at times; but in some cases it is easy enough as for example, in the case of his supposed Virgin Birth, which dishonours human procreation, and every human mother.

Therefore surely it is right to try to save Jesus from his self-styled religious friends whom it is pretty certain he would regard as a blasphemous lot and no whit different from those highly-religious Pharisees and Sadducees to whom he so often gave the rough, and unrestrained, edge

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This Believing World

The Lord's Day Observance Society must have had the shock of its life when Mr. Gilbert Harding on the T.V. bluntly told its Secretary recently that he didn't agree with their objects. But what was particularly noticeable was that the Secretary did not claim this time that the Lord's Day was the Sabbath Day. He merely said it should be kept in memory of Christ "rising" that day—in memory of the Resurrection. What a come down! The L.D.O.S. used always to insist that the Lord's Day should be kept because it was the *Sabbath* Day of the Ten Commandments. They dare not say that now.

Once again the lecturer on archaeology at the University of London, Miss Kenyon, broadcast on the results obtained from archaeology—this time, however, on "Palestine in the time of the New Testament." And what did she tell us? Any discoveries about the New Testament heroes—Jesus, Peter, Paul, and the rest? Not a word. She spent most of her time describing *modern* Palestine and its streets, churches, etc. The truth is of course that not a brick has been discovered in any way associated with Jesus or his Apostles, and only the Faithful could hope for such discoveries. History knows nothing whatever about them.

That popular radio programme, "Any Questions," was responsible for the biggest and most angry correspondence it has ever had because, the other evening, all the members of the panel said they did not believe in either the Genesis Creation story or in Adam and Eve. If the Christian writers of some of the protesting letters had had their way, the fires of Smithfield would be splendidly roaring again for the rack and the stake have almost always been Christianity's crushing reply to blasphemy and unbelief.

Mr. Freddy Grisewood must have chuckled as he read out the beefy bits from furiously angry people who were beside themselves with rage that anybody these days no longer believed in Adam, Eve, and the Creation. How dare anyone question the power of the Almighty? Why could he not easily create the world in six days when he created the infinitely bigger Universe? And so on. Some of the letters could have made even Billy Graham look like a Higher Critic—if that were possible. And yet we are asked to meet these Fundamentalists with literary articles!

It hardly seems worth while to comment on the quarrel between a Dictator like Peron and those who support him, and the Roman Church which has always presumed to dictate to everybody and, when in power, blandly suppressed everything and everybody with the stake and the rack. A Dictatorship, whether of the Right or the Left, or supremely religious, has no place in any society which believes in freedom. Freethought stands for Tolerance above everything—but this does not mean that we should tolerate the suppression of freedom to think or write—or even "worship."

It must never be forgotten that Peron (exactly like Hitler) is a Catholic, and that such Dictators need never go further than their Church for all they want to know in the way of "suppression." And just as the Roman Church can brook no rival, so even Roman Catholic Dictators object to other dictators. But it is religion which is really the source of almost all Dictatorships.

A teacher at a Staffordshire School was taking a mixed class of infants five to six years of age in Scripture and

told them the story of Samson slaying the Philistines with the jaw-bone of an ass.

She had the attention of the class, but noticing a little boy smiling, she asked him the reason.

Pointing to a little girl next to him, he replied: "Please, teacher, her thinks it's true."

Chosen Question

BY G. H. TAYLOR

A recently acquired reader, describing himself as a Free Churchman, after expressing admiration of *Freethinker* articles, goes on to say, ". . . but at the same time you must surely acknowledge that while there is a place for Reason, there is also a place for Faith. Faith is just as much a part of the human make-up as Reason and if you use the one you must use the other too. Each has its function. But lol! you have cast out Faith. Is it not irrational to use only what suits your purpose and forget the rest? Tell me, what is the purpose of Faith if not to supplement Reason? Anyone can believe what has been proved. But Religion is essentially a venture."

In the first place let us, for the sake of argument, grant our friend his premise, namely, that faith is a part of human make-up and must be reckoned with in the search for truth. If that is granted, then the Christian faith is no better than any other, and takes its place with the Moslem, Hindu, Jewish and all other faiths. The result, in fact, is a motley of *conflicting* faiths, with no external criterion to decide between them. If the Christian's faith tells him there is life after death, and the Buddhist's faith tells him there is not, then what is the validity of faith as a guide? If Smith's faith tells him there is a God, Brown by the same token can claim there is no such animal. The whole argument from faith puts all religions, all beliefs, into a common melting pot, and our Free Churchman's faith has gained nothing.

In the second place, there is no valid parallel between reason and faith, because faith is removable by knowledge. If Faith is an essential part of human make-up why should it disappear in the face of a few facts? The faiths of millions of people have melted when mixed with knowledge. If Faith is some kind of inborn structure, why cannot it compete with acquired experience? Why is the ineradicable so frequently eradicated?

The plain fact is that Faith is not something innate, but something pumped in while the subject is young and impressionable. It is later outgrown—assuming the subject grows sufficiently.

In the third place, a Free Churchman is one who has fewer superstitions than his brother Christians. He has himself probably outgrown the vulgar beliefs of the Christian multitude. In other words he has already rejected many of the faiths of the Christian majority. Beliefs now abandoned by Free Churchmen and Liberal Christians have been held by their ancestors. And the more primitive Christian could make the same complaint against our Free Churchman that the latter makes against freethinkers.

We are told that "religion is a venture." But surely, to believe in a fraud is not dignified. Are we to grant the fundamentalist his scorching Hell because religion is a venture? Was it wrong for science to disprove the faiths of believers because religion is a venture? Was it wrong for freethinkers to expose the absurdities of the Bible because religion is a venture? To what sorry standards of criticism are we here reduced? To say religion is true because it is a venture is to say that the test of a proposition is something unrelated to its truth. It is to say that error is virtuous when it results from the will to believe, the essential "venture" of religion.

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.

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. D. CORRICK.—Yes. We postmarked copies in such cases.
- S. W. BROOKS, MOLLY ROCHE and E. R. DEAN.—Thanks for appreciative comments. We are not in a position to divulge the particular circumstances of the contributor mentioned.
- AMOS MALKIN.—If anyone thinks the use of "A.D." proves Christ lived, he is beyond argument. Our present chronology was not adopted until the 6th century.
- A. BARLOW.—So long as religion is in the schools, the way is paved for "unofficial" and clandestine religious tests for teachers seeking appointments.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

- Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Every Sunday, 7 p.m.: F. ROTHWELL.
 - Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Every Sunday at 8 p.m.: J. W. BARKER and E. MILLS.
 - Manchester Branch N.S.S.—Every Sunday, 3 p.m., Platt Fields: 7-30 p.m., St. Mary's Blitzed Site: Speakers, Messrs. McCALL, MILLS, or WOODCOCK. Every weekday, Deansgate Blitzed Site, 1 p.m.: G. A. WOODCOCK.
 - Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Pierhead).—Every Wednesday and Sunday at 8 p.m. Messrs. PARRY, THOMPSON, and other speakers.
 - Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Every Friday at 1 p.m.; T. M. MOSLEY.
 - North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Every Sunday, noon: L. EBURY and H. ARTHUR.
 - West London Branch N.S.S.—Every Sunday at the Marble Arch from 4 p.m.: Messrs. RIDLEY, EBURY, O'NEILL and WOOD.
- The Freethinker on sale at Marble Arch.

INDOOR

- South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1.—Sunday, July 3, 11 a.m.: D. G. MAC-REA, M.A., "The Ethics of the Strike".

Notes and News

According to reports, Billy Graham's six week crusade in Scotland, costing £47,500, brought in only 253 people who were not attached to a church. Never in the history of cackling did so much noise announce so few eggs.

In all, just over 2,000 persons made "decisions" for Jesus, mostly women and girls—nearly 70 per cent. "I do hope," writes Mr. R. M. Hamilton to us from Glasgow, "that our Chief Constable does not contemplate reducing the Police Force as a result of the Rev. Billy's efforts to make us better citizens."

Blessed

Here, in this corner of the old green earth,
I sit and sing
Of ages gone, of aeons yet of worth,
Of "every blessed thing."
Blessed, no cant and vulgar term,
But word denoting joy; which all men learn
Full speedily takes wing:
Blessed, as the welcome flowers that come
In the cold early Spring:
That Resurrection leaves no poet dumb.

STEPHEN YORKE.

The Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund

Previously acknowledged, £877 6s. 2d.; J. March, £1; W.H.D., 7s. 6d.; R. Brownlee, £1; J. Quinn, £1; W. J. Davies, £1; A. J. Wood, 3s.; A. Hancock, 1s.; W. Morris, £1; J. A. Nicolas, 5s.; J. Hart, 10s.; Total, £883 12s. 8d.

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

MAN'S ADVANCE

"IN the comparatively short evolutionary history documented by fossil remains, man has not improved his inherited equipment by bodily changes detectable in his skeleton. Yet he has been able to adjust himself to a greater range of environments than almost any other creature, to multiply infinitely faster than any near relative among the higher mammals, and to beat the polar bear, the hare, the hawk, and the tiger at their special tricks. Through his control of fire and the skill to make clothes and houses, man can, and does, live and thrive from the Arctic Circle to the Equator. In the trains and cars he builds man can outstrip the fleetest hare or ostrich. In airplanes he can mount higher than the eagle, and with telescopes see farther than the hawk. With firearms he can lay low animals that a tiger dare not tackle. . . . Man's compensation for his relatively poor bodily endowment has been the possession of a large and complex brain, forming the centre of an extensive and delicate nervous system. These permit a great variety of accurately controlled movements being adjusted exactly to the impulses received by keen organs of sense. It is only so that man has been enabled to make himself protections against climate and weather, arms and weapons of attack and defence that, because they can be adapted and adjusted, are really superior to furs, or teeth, or claws." (Man Makes Himself, pp. 27-28, by V. Gordon Childe, London, 1939.)

Let Us Save Jesus

(Concluded from page 203)

of his tongue. We often hear such modern characters as the Pope of Rome, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the Yankee Billy Graham talking to their fellow-men about Jesus. One only wishes one could hear Jesus talk about them in return, for we may be certain that whatever he had to say about these prelates and this popinjay would have both point and pith.

Yes, let us try to save poor Jesus from his friends. To a man of the world and an ordinary sinner like myself, there is no doubt that the Church's doctrine of Apostolic Succession is absolutely true. For plainly enough, most of our modern Christian clerics are in lineal succession from Judas Iscariot, except that they have not the virtues of Judas, namely that he slung down the silver price of betrayal and went and hanged himself. These hirelings keep hold of the dirty paper-money of betrayal, and let their poor sheep go hang. Besides Judas only betrayed his Master once, while these do it all day long and every day.

—NEXT WEEK—

WHICH THREE BOOKS ?

By C. McCALL

CAN MATERIALISM EXPLAIN MIND? By G. H. Taylor, M.R.S.T. Materialism stated and defended. Price 4s.; postage 3d.

The Astronomy of the Renaissance

By F. A. RIDLEY

THE *Almagest* of Ptolemy—2nd century A.D.—represented the swan-song of ancient astronomy. Neither the Pagan nor the Christian Romans added anything to its fundamental teachings. Down to the “Copernican Revolution” of the sixteenth century, the “Ptolemaic” system, as the astronomical system evolved from the researches of Aristotle, Hipparchus, and Ptolemy came to be called, remained without a rival. Ptolemy, along with Aristotle and St. Augustine, was regarded as having said the last word in science by the men of the Middle Ages. The heliocentric theory of Aristarchus appears to have been completely forgotten. For a new pseudo-science, Christian Theology, now allied itself with the Ptolemaic astronomy.

The ancient Jews were the reverse of scientific in outlook; they regarded most secular knowledge as coming from the Devil! In the case of astronomy, sun-and-star-worship, common amongst the peoples of Canaan, were fiercely denounced by the Hebrew prophets. The only book in the Old Testament which shows any interest in the stars, the *Book of Job*, appears to have been an Arabic, not a Jewish book, and its references to the stars are poetic rather than scientific. The Christian Church which began as a Jewish sect, showed from the start a spirit of hostility to science. St. Ambrose of Milan—c. 400—expressed the official view of the Christian Church when he stated that “the motions of the Earth are of no value for our salvation.” A little later Cosmas Indicopleustes advanced his famous theory that the Antipodes could not exist, since, otherwise, the inhabitants of the other side of the world could not see the Lord return in glory, whereas the Scriptures distinctly say “Every eye shall see him!” Such a point of view was scarcely favourable to the progress of science. Such interest in astronomy as existed during the Christian Middle Ages, was concerned with ecclesiastical events, such as the chronology of the Christian Era and the fixing of the date of moveable festivals like Easter.

In the Muslim East, however, there was more astronomical activity. As we have already indicated, the Arabs assimilated much of the classical Greek philosophy and science. For example, the works of Aristotle and Ptolemy were translated into Arabic—hence the title, *Almagest*, applied to the originally Greek book of Ptolemy. The Arabic astronomers diligently surveyed the clear skies of Mesopotamia, as the Chaldean founders of astronomy had done before them. They compiled star lists, to which the Arabic names of such stars as Aldebaran, Algol, Betelgeuse, etc., still testify. They further assisted the progress of astronomy by various technical devices useful in the pre-telescopic era. It appears, however, that none of the Arabic “wise men of the East” ever challenged the *fundamental* concepts of the Ptolemaic system, nor made any advance on the *fundamental* concepts of Greek astronomy.

The great cultural movement known collectively as the *Renaissance*—or Rebirth—of classical learning, was particularly noteworthy in relation to the “rebirth” of astronomical science. To be sure, it is common knowledge that the outstanding intellectual achievement of the Renaissance was presented by the “Copernican Revolution” of Copernicus and Galileo. The revival of the almost forgotten heliocentric theory of Aristarchus was now actually proved, as the Greeks were never able to do. This was done by direct telescopic *observation*. A century before Galileo first turned his newly-discovered glasses on the Heavens (1609), the great Leonardo Da Vinci had already laid his finger unerringly on the major weakness of Greek science, its inability to *prove* its daring theories by direct *observa-*

tion. At the end of the 15th century, the contemporary Voyages of Discovery both *proved* empirically that the world was round, and gave the up-and-coming commercial classes of the period a direct interest in astronomy as a practical adjunct to the fast-developing science of navigation.

At the end of the 15th century, in the same decade that witnessed the epoch-making sea-voyages of Columbus westward and of Vasco Da Gama eastward, a Polish student, Nicholas Copernicus (1473-1543), came to Italy to study mathematics and astronomy. Here, in the hey-day of the classical Renaissance, he came upon the heliocentric theory, and, perhaps, the actual works of Aristarchus of Samos. Copernicus became convinced of the superiority of the heliocentric theory to the prevailing Ptolemaic system, buttressed by irrelevant theological documents. It was not, however, until the year of his death in 1543, that Copernicus was finally able to publish his *magnum opus*—“*On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Bodies*.” This book marked the dawn of a new era both in astronomy and in human thought.

Unfortunately a timid, or treacherous, editor, the Lutheran theologian, Osiander, inserted a weak-kneed preface to Copernicus' book, in which the “Copernican” theory was reduced to the level of a mere hypothesis, which, certainly was not the view of Copernicus. At first, the Protestant Reformers showed more hostility to the Copernican theories. Luther denounced Copernicus fiercely. The Catholic Church does not appear to have regarded at first the heliocentric theory as actually heretical. One of the leading theologians of the day, Cardinal De Bérulle, described the Copernican theory as a scientific eccentricity, but he did not accuse it of being heretical. Giordano Bruno, it is true, was burned alive in Rome in 1600, but, though he was an active Copernican, he appears to have died for his theological, rather than for his astronomical heresies. Incidentally, it is rather curious to find that the Catholic Church, nowadays, accepts the possibility of life in other worlds, which precisely, was one of the speculations for which Bruno suffered martyrdom! Since the Papal ban on Copernican astronomy was lifted, the Catholic Church has produced some eminent astronomers. We will not embarrass these learned Fathers by asking how long it took the Virgin Mary to fly to Heaven and how many “light-years” her lengthy journey took.

The most important single figure in the long history of astronomy was, probably, Galileo (1564-1642), and the most important single year in its history was the year 1609. The latter year definitely inaugurated what has been termed “the second era” in the evolution of the science of astronomy: the era of direct telescopic *observation* of the heavenly bodies. For in 1609, a red-letter year, we repeat, in the annals of both Humanity and astronomy, Galileo turned his recently invented telescope on the Heavens, and thus brought the long era in which *speculation* had priority over *observation*, to its end. It appears that the original discovery of the telescope had already been made by an anonymous navigator in Holland, then the leading maritime-power, but Galileo improved the original, and was the first to turn it to astronomic uses. The magnifying power of his original glasses was about twenty times that of the human eye. Incidentally, the eminent Italian historian of Astronomy, Professor G. Abetti, informs us that Galileo's original glasses have been preserved and that he himself has observed through Galileo's instrument the same phenomena as did Galileo with it.

It is a matter of common knowledge how revolutionary to then established modes of both scientific and theological thought were Galileo's first telescopic observations. A new era had dawned with a vengeance! How the Church was roused to action against the new theories, and how Galileo was forced to abjure under threats of torture and death is also common knowledge. The classic reply of a contemporary theologian is well known: "My son, I have read through Aristotle three times, and he says nothing about spots on the Sun. You can be sure that either your eyes or your glasses have deceived you!" All astronomical books advocating the heliocentric theories remained on *The Index of Prohibited Books* down to the year 1834, when the Pope at long last reluctantly recognised that Papal Infallibility does not extend to questions of Science!

The discovery of the telescope may be said to have ended the "great man" era in the history of astronomy. From that time on *collective* research assumed priority over

individual speculations. For one must never allow oneself to forget the difference between ancient and modern astronomy. Ancient astronomy could only *guess*, whilst modern astronomy has been increasingly able to *prove* its theories. The dividing point between the two epochs lies in the "Copernican Revolution." However, theory, later to be translated into fact by direct observation, must always play an important part in the evolution of astronomy. The "Copernican Revolution" of Renaissance astronomy ended with the mathematical theories of Kepler and of Sir Isaac Newton. The *Principia* of Newton (1687), which established the "Law of Gravity," may be said to have ended the transitional era of Renaissance astronomy. In the following era of modern astronomy "appetite came with eating": the direct observation of the Heavens led at an ever-accelerating pace to an ever-augmenting series of discoveries. For not only the Sun goes on moving: knowledge has moved along with it, despite the increasingly ineffectual ban of the Church.

A Catholic Setback in Australia

BY J. Y. ANDERONEY (SIDNEY)

SO the vicious Catholic growth in the political life of Australia has been more or less completely extirpated!

I refer to what had become known as the industrial groups in Labour unions. These consisted of Catholics who infiltrated the unions with the object of first influencing the unions, and eventually capturing the Labour Party. The utmost secrecy was preserved. Prime mover in the matter was an Italian outside the movement by the name of Santamaria. The groups first made their appearance about ten years ago, and events had developed to the extent that the Leader of the Federal Parliament, Dr. Evatt, felt that the time had come when he was forced to demand a show-down.

The groups operated under the guise of eliminating Communism from the Labour unions.

All who differed in any way from the groupers were smeared as Communists or fellow-travellers. Even Dr. Evatt himself was persistently represented as a Communist sympathiser and supporter. More particularly was this allegation made by the groupers following Dr. Evatt's exposure in the House of Representatives of the Catholic device in getting the Menzies (Federal) Government to remove from the coinage the letters D.F. (Defender of the Faith). Through the matter being brought up in the House of Representatives the letters were restored.

Plainer and plainer had it become that the groups were a direct movement by the Catholic Church.

The outcome was that Dr. Evatt had the conduct of the groups investigated by Labour's official bodies, with the result that the groupers were faced with the alternative of disassociating themselves from the groups or refusal of Labour endorsement. Consternation thereupon ensued among the groupers. Seven among the more daring and defiant of their number in the House of Representatives, together with twelve members of the State House of Victoria, resigned from the official Labour Party. In both cases they set themselves up in opposition to the official Labour Party as "The Anti-Communist Labour Party."

A further development was that in Victoria, where Labour was in power, the twelve so-called anti-Communist Labour members precipitated a general election by transferring their votes to the Opposition.

The poll for a new Parliament took place on May 28. The twelve renegade Labour members went to the electors, heading a party—"The Anti-Communist Labour Party"—that was going, they were sure, to sweep into power.

Little did they realise what awaited them. Of the twelve, only one regained his seat; and of the many other candidates, nominated in the interests of this new party, not one was elected. Is it necessary to say that the seven members of the Federal Party, forming "The Anti-Communist Labour Party" in the House of Representatives, have now the pallor of death—at the next Federal election—in their faces? Clearly it's a lesson to groupers, shattering and devastating, throughout all six States of the Commonwealth.

As *The Sydney Morning Herald* (May 30) truly says, "The result of the Victorian election certainly showed that there is no room in Australia for a Catholic Labour Party, or for any other kind of sectarian party."

If further proof were wanted as to the "sectarianism" of the groupers, it is more than supplied by Australia's Cardinal Gilroy, who in a pastoral to all the Catholic churches in his diocese, a few weeks before the Victorian election, commended the groupers for their "loyalty and courage," and practically implied that they alone were responsible for the fight against Communism in Australia!

The intended effect of this pastoral, of course, was to have the priests in every Victorian parish quietly working for the group candidates—with the farcical result already noted.

Dr. Evatt's political opponents eagerly joined with all the groupers and their supporters in declaring him to be a sectarian-monger and the splitter of the Labour Party. But the plain fact is that his conduct was (1) that of bringing to the surface the sectarianism already within the Labour Party and (2) saving the party from becoming, in reality, the secret instrument of the Catholic Church. Even Prime Minister Menzies publicly declared that Dr. Evatt had "deliberately raised the sectarian issue." Such a statement on his part would appear to show that political enmity has no limits when it becomes a matter of misrepresenting and maligning an opponent.

Let it be said, too, that *The Herald*—a political supporter of Menzies—has not hesitated to say that Mr. Menzies himself would not have put up with "a quarter of the intrigue and insurgency to which Dr. Evatt was subjected without kicking."

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Correspondence

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

Might I draw the attention of your philosophically-minded readers to an excellent article in the current issue of *Mind*. It has some relevance to discussions on Atheism v. Agnosticism, since it deals with "the problem of evil." Briefly, the author says that the Christian has to defend three propositions:—

- (1) God is all-powerful.
- (2) God is all-good and all-loving.
- (3) Evil exists (in some form).

He says that these three propositions cannot be reconciled, and that all answers to "the problem of evil" water-down one of the three, until, if the apologists thought clearly, they would have to drop it completely. The author also deals with many Christian arguments, and concludes that the existence of evil makes the existence of any being like the Christian God "extremely unlikely." I, personally, think that this is the best argument for Atheism.

HIBERNICUS.

W.U.F. AND ESPERANTO

I agree with Mr. G. Swan when he suggests that more use could be made of the Esperanto language in international Freethought circles.

Whilst, of course, the ideal would be for everyone to speak a common language at the conference of the World Union of Freethinkers, I do not think that, in a non-Esperantist organisation, the general adoption of Esperanto is a practical suggestion at the present time. This would mean that, of necessity, every participant would be forced to learn Esperanto. In principle, this is as undesirable as that everyone should be forced to learn, say, English or French.

It should be made clear that Esperantists have no wish to impose their language on anyone. We simply think it is a good idea and worthy of support—certainly by Freethinkers.

It seems to me, however, that more encouragement *could* be given by the W.U.F. For instance, by providing facilities within the framework of its international conferences for Freethinker Esperantists to meet together to discuss common problems and how best they may use their knowledge of Esperanto in the service of Freethought. As it is, the W.U.F. continues blithely on its way in linguistic blinkers as if Esperanto had never been heard of.—Yours, etc.,

"LIBERPENSULO."

SUNDAY RECREATION

A few months ago the Wimborne Council decided to allow games to be played in the Recreation Ground on Sundays. There were vigorous protests from Churches and Chapels, and a petition was organised against the decision. Only about 400 signatures were secured and the regulation remained in force.

Now the cry is being raised that Sunday games do not pay and should be discontinued.

When I visited the Rec. yesterday, none of the grass (tennis) courts was in use and only one of the hard courts, so it may be that week-day games do not pay either.

However, players holidaying in the Poole-Bournemouth area might like to support the liberal-minded Council of Wimborne by organising Sunday tennis parties there. There is a good bus service through the delightful Dorset roads.

This would be a very pleasant way of helping to break the religious stranglehold.—Yours, etc.,

W. E. HUXLEY.

NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY

Perhaps I may be permitted to define my position with regard to national sovereignty, in reply to Mr. Macfarlane's suggestion in your issue of 10th June. In my opinion the rational policy of the N.S.S. on the above issue can only be, neither "internationalist" nor "federalist," but "non-nationalist."

The concept of nationality is, I take it, an imprecise and artificial idea, representing a stage in man's social development. I know of no satisfactory definition of a nation: it is, at any given moment, neither a political or geographical unit (the Scottish and English "nations" do not enjoy national sovereignty, neither do the Serb and Croat "nations"); nor a linguistic one (French-speaking Belgians do not include themselves in the French "nation," while the Belgian "nation" is made up of two quite distinct linguistic communities); nor a cultural one (the Swiss "nation" is compounded of four totally separate cultural traditions); nor, obviously, a racial one (whatever one's definition of "race"). Nor is it, in the twentieth century, an economic unit in practice, though the attempt is made by interested parties to create the illusion that it is. But we can say that the nation-unit does represent a stage in the social and economic development of modern man, and that the concept of nationality lingers after the disappearance of the nation as an

economic unit. We can say further that the concept of nationality is of very recent development, being unknown in Western Europe 500 years ago, and in Germany, Italy and Eastern Europe 150 years ago. And finally we can say that the concept of nationality to-day is anachronistic in relation to the true economic and social unit, which is the world. There is no single community in the world, with the possible exception of some few isolated islands in the South Pacific, which is or can be self-supporting, or which is unaffected by economic conditions in another part of the globe. In our era of easy communications, air transport and radio, the only barriers to social unity are the purely political and artificial ones of passport and fiscal restrictions, which are themselves evidently anachronistic.

As tribal and regional "patriotism" disappeared, as active forces, with the economic circumstances that created them, so must national "patriotism" disappear to make way for a world-wide community enjoying the loyalty of all human beings. National sovereignty must be recognised for the evil and anachronistic thing it is, before it brings the world and humanity to destruction. As the necessary preliminary to this desirable state of affairs, all rational men must press for the abolition of those few artificial barriers which render the communication of man with man so difficult—for the abolition of all restrictions on travel, fiscal restrictions and restrictions on the exchange of currency. And, perhaps, most important of all, for the abolition of the language barrier through an international language.

"Internationalism" and "federalism" can never solve the urgent problems of our age, because both explicitly accept the illusion of nationality.—Yours, etc.

W. AULD.

ROME ON THE RATES

Mention in your column "This Believing World" (27th May) of the Education Act of 1944 which makes the Bible compulsory in schools does not refer to Scotland. The following is almost unbelievable, and for the truth of the Scottish position your readers only need to consult the Act of 1946 from H.M. Stationery Office. Since 1918 the child of the State religion attends an undenominational school open to all, R.C.'s included. The Bible is only given as "a custom" and is not guaranteed any hour of the day or week. Ratepayers who surround this form of school and dislike the above curriculum can dispense with it by a majority vote. On the other hand, though the R.C. hierarchy allows teachers to be in such schools provision is guaranteed by Section 18 for segregated schools for R.C. children.

In Bonnybridge, Stirlingshire, some years ago the Education Committee were held by the House of Lords to be responsible for taking over a new school built by the R.C. authorities who adduced Section 18 as the ground of their claim.

Since that date they have made demand after demand with tacit threats. They said, "If you refuse then we will build as we did in Bonnybridge and you will have to pay." One public figure described this as "Nazism and Fascism in bonnie Scotland with a vengeance."—Yours, etc.

Glasgow.

W.S.

OBITUARY

After a short illness, Manchester Branch member Mr. John Bloom, passed away on 25th May, 1955. Sincere sympathy is extended to Mrs. Bloom and the family.

H.M.R.

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