

The Freethinker

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Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

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Morals without Religion and Other Essays, by Margaret Knight; 124 pp., 6/-; published by Dennis Dobson Ltd., obtainable also from the Pioneer Press, 41 Grays Inn Road, London, W.C.1, postage 3d.

BEFORE reading this book there was already one sound reason for recommending it and wishing to possess it. The broadcasts of Mrs. Knight on the B.B.C. in January were a very important landmark in the history of Freethought propaganda. The book which follows, and contains them as part of its matter may therefore be regarded as an essential addition to the personal libraries of freethinkers as permanent reminder and record of an outstanding event.

The book however, carries its own recommendation. In it will be found (1) the broadcast talks themselves, (2) the background to them, and (3) four essays by Margaret Knight on other subjects of relevance to freethought.

The Background of the Talks

Many questions have been asked about the background to the broadcasts. How did it happen that an individual repressing nobody but herself gained such profitable access to the air, when the efforts of both Secularist and Humanist organizations have so far had negligible reward in this direction? Was her script cut or self-censored? What would she have said in the third talk, given greater freedom? Why did the discussion with Mrs. Morton become such an insipid patball affair? What were her own reactions to the sudden and overwhelming publicity? What happened in those ever-to-be-remembered hours following the second talks? All these things are told in the book.

We read of the amiable young reporter whose paper described her as going for Christianity with a razor and bicycle chain. What would newspapers of this kind have paid for some such headline as "Mrs. Knight repents. Infidel woman goes back to Jesus," etc., *ad nauseam*. But there was no turning back. Alone, and pin-pointed as the enemy of society by savage and vindictive Christian abuse, the hand that turned the pages of hate on January 13th may have shaken for a minute, but the heart and mind were steadfast. She patiently assembled these evidences of Christian reaction, hideous headlines and all, and calmly analysed them as a doctor would diagnose his patient.

Classified Reactions

At the time of writing she had received some 1,600 personal letters following the broadcasts, apart from the 900 received by the B.B.C., and a detailed classification is made of the first 1,150 in the categories of favourable, tolerant, neutral, unfavourable, abusive and psychotic (deranged).

Press reactions were widespread throughout the English-speaking world, western Europe, and as far afield as Egypt

and Burma. It is quite apparent that the B.B.C. got more than they bargained for, and were undoubtedly surprised by their own success. Would it be unkind to suggest they were even *frightened* by it? Dare they again risk the screaming of Bishops and the belligerent brawling of a section of the "popular" press?

"There was a time when the Church leaders would have besieged the B.B.C. and forced their way to the microphone," said the *Sketch*. "There is sore need of the old fighting spirit in the palaces of the Bishops."

This "fighting spirit" (i.e. rack, thumb-screw, etc.) is at present in abeyance, and the Freethought movement has done its share in keeping it at bay, but here is a reminder of its potency if only the Churches had their former power. In the fifth century Hypatia was murdered by the monks of St. Cyril for possessing dangerous knowledge. In the 1880's Mrs. Besant was stoned for saying the same things as Mrs. Knight. Let Christianity be judged by the period of its strength, not by the days of its decline. Even the usually pre-occupied *Financial Times* threw its brickbat at Mrs. Knight, comparing her with "Bradlaugh, Goebbels [!] and Ingersoll" in a trite and worthless comment.

The Other Essays

In the second half of her book Mrs. Knight brings her scientific thinking to bear on a variety of subjects. Every judgment is disinterested and penetrative, with something of the temper of the late Prof. Susan Stebbing, whose mantle she would appear eminently fitted to wear.

The question of the existence of a God is a well-worn topic which perhaps cannot now be discussed from any new angle, but Mrs. Knight discusses it with a new charm, in dealing with the infrequently used Aesthetic Argument. As Chapman Cohen often said, such arguments as this are not reasons for holding the God-belief, but excuses for not giving it up.

The fascinating topic of "Extra-Sensory Perception" also claims her attention and is dealt with in typically objective fashion. Mrs. Knight is concerned more with the results obtained by Dr. Soal than with the previous ones of Rhine. The latter's methods and results have been rather damagingly criticised by the American magicians. (Messrs. Cutner and McCall wrote on this some time ago in these columns.)

Insight and Intuition

References to the famous experiments by Kohler and the Gestalt psychologists are made, and Mrs. Knight argues most effectively that what is known as intuition is a form of insight, based on data not fully present to the conscious mind. "Neither insight nor intuition," she concludes, "involves any mysterious tapping of super-rational sources of knowledge; both are familiar types of cognitive process,

VIEWS and OPINIONS

Margaret Knight's
New Book

By G. H. TAYLOR

which can be described in psychological, though not yet in physiological, terms."

Another essay deals with the use and misuse of statistics, with some recognisable examples.

This, then, is a book in two halves, or two books in one. The first part does something to satisfy our desire to know more about the background to the January broadcasts, told by the principal figure, and the second may perhaps be called a freethinking exploration of realms which religionists would dearly love to claim.

REVIEW

Homosexuality and the Home Office

By REV. JOHN L. BROOM, M.A.

Evidence submitted by the Progressive League to the Home Office Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution (Progressive League, 1s., March, 1955).

THE Progressive League exists to promote and encourage a rational approach to social and economic problems, and in its attitude to the vexed question of homosexuality as revealed by the present excellent report, it has fulfilled this aim admirably. From the outset we are left in no doubt as to the League's viewpoint: Homosexual acts between consenting adults carried out in private should cease to be criminal. The enlightened conscience of each individual and not fear and ignorance should control sexual conduct.

In support of this liberal outlook, the report proceeds to set forth the main arguments against the present laws governing homosexuality cogently and clearly. These include the turning of homosexuals into martyrs in the eyes of adolescents, the incitement afforded to homosexuals to adopt the role of informer against one another, which the League rightly considers is worse than the act itself, and the unhealthy encouragement of a "freemasonry" among homosexuals, united against the oppressions of the law. These points seem quite conclusive and an appendix rounds them off by showing that in France where homosexuality between consenting adults is not criminal, the attitude of the general public towards the subject is much healthier than in this country.

The League sent out a questionnaire to a number of responsible persons (including its own members and subscribers to such bodies as the Ethical Union and the R.P.A.) on the subject. This (which is reproduced in full in another appendix) was divided into a general section asking for the recipients' opinions on the law, etc. and an individual section enquiring about homosexual activities they have themselves indulged in, or of which they have first-hand knowledge. The results are clearly tabulated, and show, on the whole, a liberal outlook. Only three for example, support the law as it exists at present. But the League admits that those questioned were unrepresentative of the population as a whole, being drawn as they were mostly from the professions, and whose very membership of such societies as the League itself the R.P.A., etc., is an indication that their opinions must be generally of a progressive character. Several of the individual replies are analysed and make interesting reading—e.g. the homosexual who says he suffered no harm by his abnormality, and the physiotherapist who points out that the law brings an increased sense of guilt which is itself the unconscious origin of the practice.

In one respect only the report seems to the present reviewer to adopt a mistaken attitude. This relates to the seduction of minors by homosexuals. The League admits that there is very little evidence to support the almost universally accepted idea that great psychological harm results to children from homosexual experiences. Indeed it points out that the Kinsey Report, which showed that 60% of pre-adolescent boys in the U.S.A. have had such experience, lends support to the theory that they are simply a normal phase of development. Moreover, the pamphlet quotes from the editorial columns of the "Lancet," a statement that in most cases of this kind the legal proceedings are more damaging to the child than the homosexual act itself, and in the League's own questionnaire, out of 73 who have had personal experience of the seduction of children, only seven maintained definitely that the child concerned had suffered any ill effects. In spite of these facts, however, the League recognises that the present state of public opinion demands the penalisation of interference with boys and youths by homosexuals and recommends that it should continue. The League's outlook here seems strangely inconsistent as well as unenlightened, for it is almost certain that "public opinion" (if by this nebulous term is meant the opinion of the average citizen) also demands the continued punishment of homosexual acts between consenting adults which the League nevertheless condemns. If a thing is wrong, it should be attacked irrespective of the "state of public opinion" and the imprisonment of homosexuals who interfere with juveniles seems to accomplish nothing but harm both to the seducer and the seduced. There is no evidence that it deters, and it therefore seems a purely retributive act of vengeance.

Finally, there is a very brief but sensible section on female prostitution which points out that the snobbish, legal category of the "common prostitute" should be abandoned, and that all women charged should be treated on an equal basis irrespective of their antecedents. Persons who provide accommodation for irregular sexual intercourse should not be punished—indeed as the League rightly stresses it is highly desirable that such intercourse, if it must take place, should be indulged in under hygienic conditions. The report, no doubt because of the lack of space, does not deal with the question of the ethics of prostitution and state brothels.

There is no doubt that this pamphlet contains within its brief compass one of the most powerful attacks on the present laws relating to homosexuality yet published. All lovers of justice and humanity should read it, and it is to be devoutly hoped that the very persuasive arguments advanced therein, will have the desired effect on the Home Office Committee.

THE SECURITY OF ANGELS

Thus in a moment
the security of angels
(one, the foremost and brightest among them,
hurled from heaven)
ended, with a tumult of wings.

No wand henceforth
rebellion burns through time,
all kingdoms in eclipse,
the power and glory broken.

The Morning Star over him,
man, past Eden (that fool's paradise),
moves with light,
a singing in him.

While God, a myth,
stumbles, like Oedipus blind,
into exile and death.

W. GORDON DRAKE.

Catholic Power

By F. A. RIDLEY

THE classical definition of the Roman Catholic Church is still that given three centuries ago by the great English political philosopher Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury, when he wrote "The papacy is the ghost of the Roman Empire sitting crowned on the grave thereof. For so did first start up that great ecclesiastical power." It is the *political totalitarian* character of modern Catholicism, which it has inherited from earlier times, that so sharply differentiates the Church of Rome from all other Christian Churches. The Roman Catholic Church represents *ecclesiastical Fascism*, whilst the papacy, which officially declared its own infallibility in 1870, represents the prototype of all subsequent secular Fascist regimes. It is this essentially *political* character of the Catholic Church and of its "infallible" leader, the papacy, that we wish to examine.

In a famous historical comparison, the Protestant theologian Adolf von Harnack, compared the "spiritual" Roman empire of the papacy with the earlier political empire of the Roman Caesars. "It is an empire," concluded Harnack, "that this priestly Caesar rules." Our German historian proceeded to fill in the appropriate details in the composition of these two powerful organisations of power politics. The Pope is, of course, the equivalent of Caesar, of the Roman emperor in the earlier Roman polity. The bishops are the successors of the Roman Governors, the cardinals represent the Senate of the ecclesiastical Roman empire, and so on. The actual word for an ecclesiastical province, the "diocese" of the bishop, is taken directly from the secular Roman administration. It was, for example, as the secular administrator of a Roman "diocese" that Pontius Pilate, Procurator of Judea, is alleged to have ordered the execution of the titular Founder of Christianity.

Whilst, however, the Roman empire retained its power, the Bishops of Rome and their Church dwelt obscurely in its shadow. It was only after the effective collapse of the Empire in the West that the Church of Rome was able to take its place. Throughout the millenium which corresponded with the "dark" and "middle" ages (500—1500) the Catholic Church was, if not all-powerful, at least, as near to it as makes no difference throughout Western Europe. This was the precise era when as the accurate saying went "all roads led to Rome." This, incidentally, represents one of those phrases of genius that effectively summarize the essential character of a civilization.

The "age of Faith" was ended by that formidable "spiritual" revolution to which the collective designation of "Reformation" is specifically attached. Actually, however, it would appear to be a mistake to confine this term purely to the *religious* revolution of the 16th century. From the point of view of the Vatican the "Reformation" has continued from that day to this and still continues today. Used in this, perhaps more precise sense, the term "Reformation" can be held to describe the sum total of the revolutionary forces of many kinds which have ended the totalitarian sway which the Catholic Church successively exercised in mediaeval Europe and in "Latin" America, whose Spanish conquerors in the 16th century reproduced the conditions of mediaeval Europe in the "New World." When used in this sense the "Reformation" still continues today, even if in political and philosophical forms that would certainly have surprised the original Protestant reformers, Luther, Calvin, etc., who began it. The same also would appear to apply to the *counter* Reformation of the Catholic Church

begun by the Jesuits in the 16th century. The "political Catholicism" of modern times, which largely owes its inspiration to the Jesuits still effectively wages its "counter Reformation" against modern secular society at the present time. To be sure the present writer has elsewhere defined the Jesuits as, preeminently "the genius of counter-revolution" and like its opposite number, the Reformation—of which the French Revolution may be regarded as the *political* continuation—the *counter* Reformation, *political* Catholicism, the embodiment of Catholic power, also continues—in the present year of grace, very much so, indeed!

What Mr. Avro Manhattan has so aptly described as *The Catholic Church Against the 20th Century* in his well known book of that name has actually assumed a number of forms. Mr. Manhattan, as also the late Mr. Joseph McCabe before him, has dealt mainly with the Catholic-Fascist alliance, with which the reign and policy of that ultra-reactionary pope, Pius the Eleventh (1922-39) will always be associated. However, if one may, as befits a *free-thinker*, venture to criticise these eminent writers they appear to concentrate *excessively* on the *Fascist* connections of the 20th century papacy. Actually the Roman Catholic Church is a worldly-wise body which, incidentally, knows much more about *this* world than about the next! It *never* puts all its eggs in *one* basket as both Manhattan and McCabe at times appear to suggest. Even Pius the eleventh, despite his evident pro-fascist proclivities, kept on excellent terms with the democratic U.S.A., whilst actively encouraging Catholic Action in its by no means unsuccessful efforts to "permeate" the British and Australian *Labour* parties. Whilst the present pope, though probably at heart, as pro-fascist as his predecessor, has known how to drop Fascism like the proverbial "hot brick" after 1945, when the "new order" of Hitler and Mussolini, finally crumbled into ruin, the Vatican today is the "number one" ally of the "Free World" of Anglo-American democracy in its present "cold war" with totalitarian Communism.

Will this last orientation of the Vatican be its final one, or has the ancient chameleon by the Tiber yet further changes in store? It would, we imagine, be rash to affirm it. That "nothing is constant except change" was recognised and explicitly stated a century ago by Cardinal Newman, one of the outstanding intellectual leaders of the Church. *Politically*, one can add, the Catholic Church had illustrated this principle long prior to Newman. For example, Rome pursued implacable war against the idea of democracy, as expounded by the French Revolution, right up to the end of the last century. Now, we are all democrats nowadays, even, indeed especially, the Pope. As the present writer has indicated previously in this column it will not be at all surprising if similarly the Church of Rome eventually comes to some kind of a working agreement with the rival Moscow and Peking regimes. Ultimately, the sole viable alternative would appear to be an atomic "crusade." But modern atomic wars are likely to be double-edged weapons, boomerangs which are apt to recoil on the heads of those who start them. A good many people now appear to be realising this, amongst them the "Infallible Pope." In the present writer's opinion we may soon see Rome become, perhaps, more Communist than the present Communists. Equally strange things have transpired in the long and chequered evolution of Catholic power politics.

(concluded on page 221)

This Believing World

A fervent Spiritualist roundly told the readers of *Psychic News* that he has noted "with growing dismay, the tiny congregations, the dingy meeting-rooms, and the almost complete lack of intelligent presentation of the Spiritualist case" in Spiritualist churches. Well, well. When we have made similar protests (though we have been forced to add that it was impossible to give any intelligent presentation of Spiritualism) we have been bitterly attacked with the accusation of ignorance and prejudice. But surely that must be the general experience of all unbiassed investigators? The babbling of Chinese and India "spirit guides" even makes believers in the miracles of Christ indulge in jeering laughter.

All those Christians who were converted to Christianity by the ever-glamorous Billy Graham, and who spurn everything but the Bible, will no doubt get the shock of their lives when they read the latest work by Fred Hoyle, the eminent astro-physicist. In his *Frontiers of Astronomy* he foresees the coming of another Ice-age—the last one having departed somewhere about 10,000 years ago. And he also insists that though God's Precious Word claims our World was created about 4,004 years ago, the truth is that it is more likely to be 4,000 million years old.

The one thing Mr. Hoyle does not see anywhere is the "Hand of God"—and, as broadcasting this scientific truth is strictly barred by the religious masters of the B.B.C., anyone who would like to know what the latest discoveries in science has to say about the Universe and its origins must read him for themselves. Let it never be forgotten that the Roman Catholic World vainly did its best to suppress Galileo, and the B.B.C. will find it equally vain to suppress Mr. Hoyle.

One would never think, listening to the numerous B.B.C. religious broadcasts packed full with God Almighty and his Son Jesus Christ, that any person could possibly chuck—to quote the Rev. D. Wilkinson-Fox—the Church because the Church "has chucked God." That a parson does on occasion chuck God or, to be more precise, find out that he can no longer believe in the God of the Church, is quite true. The case of Robert Taylor is the classic one, and there may be many thousands in the pulpit to-day who cannot for economic reasons but would like to chuck God. But that the Church has done so is just nonsense.

In an article in the "Sunday Pictorial" Mr. Wilkinson-Fox is very angry with the Church, but he does not prove that it has chucked God—only that he is in complete disagreement with its methods. The Church of England "has got itself involved in red tape," and the Bishops haven't time to be "Fathers in God." But this is no evidence that the Church has chucked God or, for that matter, that anyone knows any more about God than any Bishop, unspiritual or not. Mr. Wilkinson-Fox is now going to do "a real job of work" and "spiritual work too." Well, he had better catch his God before talking about him. And that is some job—in fact, a job no one has succeeded so far in doing.

Without taking sides in the Vivisection controversy we found it interesting to note the result of one of the Anti-vivisection Societies sending out a "Manifesto to the Clergy." 26,500 Manifestos were sent out, and 166 replies were received. Only 117 were in favour of the Society's objects. The point to note, however, is that not only the Society but all the clergy are constantly using "the teach-

ing of Christ" as the supreme "guide of conduct" and his "law of love and compassion" as its "highest expression." In actual fact, of course, there is nothing whatever in the so-called teaching of Christ which shows the slightest interest in animals or animal welfare.

Thousands of good, earnest, church-going Christians have to be implored by the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals not to tie up dogs in an open yard for weeks or months, or leave them to starve while they go away on holiday. Even more thousands of Christians are constantly and often heavily fined or imprisoned or both for the grossest cruelty to animals—just as they are so often for the foulest cruelty to children. But we shall always have Jesus put up as the Greatest Lover of Animals that ever lived even if it is literally untrue.

FACTS FOR FREETHINKERS — IV

Language

One would hardly think the subject of language would afford much scope for the cruelty of the bigot or the ingenuity of the apologist. Yet even here we find the race suffering from the vagaries of its religious teachers. The false notion that human speech, or rather its numerous varieties, originated as described in the Book of Genesis, has greatly retarded linguistic studies. The idea prevailed that, the power of speech was a direct gift to man from God, to save him the trouble of evolving his own mode of Communication.

The absurd story of the Tower of Babel has most peculiar implications.

If the "confusion of tongues" was a punishment on man for attempting to scale the ramparts of heaven, its futility and injustice are obvious enough. A tower of some sort was built, of which the remains still exist; but its purpose, partly astronomical, partly religious, seems to have been transformed by the pious imagination of the writer of the story in Genesis, which was a myth invented to explain the inevitable divergences of human speech. The earlier form of the legend is found in the Assyrian inscriptions, but orthodox writers knew nothing of comparative philology, and were satisfied of the truth of a story guaranteed by Divine inspiration. Eminent scholars in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries maintained, not without the customary heat, that Hebrew was a Divinely inspired language, even in its vowel-points and punctuation, and undoubtedly spoken by God himself. Only about the close of the seventeenth century did saner views begin to prevail. One of their most influential advocates was Leibnitz, while a Spanish Jesuit named Hervas and a German scholar, Adelung, devoted their enormous industry to the cause of enlightenment. The various editions of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* issued between 1771 and 1842 show a gradual weakening of the support accorded in the first edition to the old dogmatic views as to the priority of Hebrew, and the issue of 1885 dispensed with the sacred theory altogether. It is hardly necessary to add that during a period of about three centuries almost every scholar who ventured to oppose or modify that theory was elaborately "answered," and often soundly abused for his pains. So late as the nineteenth century the traditional view of the Divine origin of language was, as against the "infidels," strenuously defended by the godly. G.H.T.

NEXT WEEK

GOD AND THE STATE

By F. A. RIDLEY

THE FREETHINKER

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Telephone: Holborn 2601.

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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 17. 11 a.m.: A. ROBERTSON, M.A., "How Honest are Christians?"

A DISCLAIMER

HOLborn 2601.

P. VICTOR MORRIS,
"Business Promotion"

41, Grays Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

There has come into the possession of the Board of the G. W. Foote Co. Ltd., a copy of a circular letter headed as above. We desire to make it known to all concerned that we are in no way connected with the above "Business Promotion" which has apparently been operating from this address and using our telephone number.

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For G. W. Foote & Co. Ltd.,
Wm. Griffiths,
Managing Director.

Notes and News

It would greatly assist the secretarial work of the National Secular Society if any members who have not yet renewed subscriptions for 1955 would do so at their earliest convenience, either to their Branches or to Headquarters.

Readers who have not already done so should take advantage of our Special Book Offer. Some of the items are almost sold out and for that reason will become very scarce.

In view of Joseph McCabe's connection with the Freethought movement it is gratifying to record that his two sons consulted *The Freethinker* when deciding on the inscrip-

The Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund

Previously acknowledged, £886 18s. 8d.; J. Scarlett, 5s.; W.H.D., 2s. 6d.; A. Hancock, 1s.; L. Ebury, £2; E. Hardacre, 5s.; Mr. & Mrs. C. Little, £1; Total to date, £890 12s. 6d.

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

The Memorial Fund

AS the Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund draws near to its close our first thought here must be one of thanks to those who have already contributed. Their names will endure as a roll of honour marking an important event in the history of the movement, the passing of one of its greatest champions. It would therefore be fitting to anticipate that in the closing weeks the Fund could, by a final effort, reach the four figure mark.

Not all who read the *Freethinker*, of course, are fully identified with the freethought position. That is as it should be. The paper is aiming at making converts. But for the purposes of the Fund it means that the brunt has been borne by the solid core of wholehearted supporters. It may be mentioned that Mr. A. Hancock and W. H. D. have between them subscribed over 60 times to the present fund alone.

Stringent economies are being made in production costs and the business side is operating with the bare minimum of staff. If all readers became regular subscribers, and each subscriber could make one more reader, our financial worries would be well-nigh at an end. And if the efforts of Mr. Cleaver and his helpers in selling the *Freethinker* outdoors on Saturdays and Sundays could be followed in more large cities than at present, that would be an immense step forward.

Meanwhile, on to the Thousand.

F. A. HORNIBROOK and G. H. TAYLOR,
Editorial Committee.

tion for his Memorial Tablet. The Tablet is to be of Hopton Wood Stone, and the inscription cut and leaded. It will read as follows:—

JOSEPH MARTIN McCABE

11 November, 1867 — 10 January, 1955

Philosopher, Historian,
Protagonist of Freethought
and rebel against hypocrisy

He survives upon the

World's bookshelves

CATHOLIC POWER

(concluded from page 219)

One thing can, at least, be certain. Whether Fascist or Democrat, Catholic or Communist, the Vatican, in the future as in the past, will continue to put the *permanent* interests of Catholicism first. For, throughout the centuries, the Papacy has steadily pursued the *permanent* goal of "Catholic power," world-power, a world ascendancy as absolute as the given conditions will permit. Adaptable and flexible in its *means*, Rome remains rigid and inflexible in pursuing its final *end*, world power. As that shrewd critic, the late Dean Inge, wrote long ago "other Internationals come and go, but the 'Black International' remains." In, and through our adolescent world, "the ghost of the Roman Empire" still inflexibly pursues the goal of "Catholic power" which it has now steadily pursued for 19 centuries.

Freethought in India

By S. RAMANATHAN

(from the Presidential Address to the 4th Convention of Indian Rationalists, 1955)

THE rationalist approach to religion is empirical. Taking a broad view of the evolution of humanity as revealed in recorded history and through anthropological investigations, we find that religion as a social phenomenon appeared in various and conflicting forms and gradually grew into those giant organisations we see to-day. Religion is a fact in history and served a purpose in the past. It no longer serves any purpose to-day and is in fact a hindrance and an impediment to human progress. Throughout its long history, religion has fought a kind of rearguard action against the growth of human knowledge. Originally, when man was a helpless creature of his environment little better than the animals and the vegetation with which he shared his life, he was inclined to attribute his misfortunes as well as his joys to supernatural agencies which were either angry with him and punished him or were pleased with him and blessed him. Every event and every element which he recognised with his dim vision was either a god or a goddess. The sun was a god, so were the mountain, the rains, the sea, the rivers, the trees, the animals, in fact every natural phenomenon with which he had to deal. His reaction towards the supernatural behind these phenomena was one of fear and he was therefore inclined to fall down on his knees and pray for mercy before these unseen forces and he attempted to propitiate them by bribery. He offered food, drink, flowers and flattery by prayer. This need for elaborate propitiation created a class of intermediaries who made it their business to interpret the desires of the gods and to devise the means for satisfying those desires. But as man became more intelligent and his knowledge and control over his environment increased, he was enabled to dispense with not only the supernatural beings but also the intermediaries who pretended to interpret the supernatural. But vested interests die hard, in ancient as well as in modern times, and the priests fought for the preservation of the supernatural which gave them their means of livelihood even though man had outgrown the need for that fiction. Hence the conflict between religion and science. While in primitive times religion embodied the whole of man's outlook on life, its territory shrank in size owing to the growth of scientific knowledge. Originally astronomy, geography, etc., were the field of religion and the priests laid down what to believe about the stars, the sun and the moon, the change in the seasons, the shape of the earth, etc. But when scientists took a hand at these interpretations, the priests fought for the preservation of their monopoly and by the exercise of their political domination over the people burnt the scientists at the stakes and subjected them to tortures of all kinds. The scientific spirit was inexorable, it progressed over the dead bones of its martyrs and produced results whose brilliance struck down the pretensions of the priests. But the exploiters organised their counter-attack against scientific progress, relying upon the ignorance and the craze for the supernatural of the illiterate masses, but more especially upon their political dominance and the immense wealth they accumulated through the centuries.

Votaries of religion are never tired of asserting that whatever progress rationalism might achieve in other parts of the world, it would never thrive in India, the spiritual fatherland of religion, inhabited by the descendants of the Rishis who wrote the Vedas. In spite of this interested propaganda that has gone on for centuries that India is the

home of religion in contradistinction to Europe which is said to have a degenerate materialistic civilisation and that the special mission of India is to spread spiritualism in the world, I venture to assert that our country is essentially materialistic and the vast majority of our people care only for their secular prosperity and bestow little or no thought on how to get on in the next world after their death. It may be that there are in India big temples and mammoth gatherings at the religious festivals.

The temples are survivals of the ancient citadels built by our ancestors who lived in tribes and practised a kind of primitive communism. The lay-out of our temples with their enormous kitchen, their phallic idols, their high walls, and their soaring watch towers bespeak a civilisation in which people herded together in eating and mating as well as in fighting and defence against hostile tribes. The fact that our temples have in recent years grown in size and in numbers merely indicates that in our mental make-up we have not progressed much further from that of our ancestors in the jungles in spite of the material progress we have achieved and that we suffer from a nostalgic reversion to our historic past.

The millions who gather at Melas are not drawn thither by the religious motive, but are urged by the festive spirit, the need for outing and excursion, to mix in the crowd and to participate in social enjoyment. People with experience know why the youth of both sexes love to decorate themselves and crowd into temples and jostle against each other at the festivals. The powerful priestly class cleverly exploits this human frailty and sets a wide net to catch the ignorant and pick their pockets.

Religious institutions own half the national wealth. The bulk of our cultivable lands belong to them. They dominate and exploit the peasants. They possess mountains of gold and precious stones in the shape of jewels. They extract a constant revenue by imposing costly ceremonials at births, marriages and deaths besides the recurring anniversaries. Huge subsidies are paid to them out of public funds. They enjoy tax exemptions which enable them to accumulate enormous properties in a manner not open to lay individuals. All this immense wealth is at the disposal of the priestly class which exercises a sway over educational, medical and other institutions as well. The main forte of the priests is their pre-eminent social status before which high Government officers, Judges, Ministers, Governors, Presidents and Kings quail and abase themselves on bended knees. Our propaganda machinery, the Press, the Cinema and the Radio are attuned to the spread of religion.

So long as the priestly class enjoys these exceptional privileges it will continue its strangle-hold and rule over the people whatever be the make up of the political administration. It will succeed in drawing crowds into the temples and at the Melas. We cannot judge the innate longing of a people by their outward acts which are circumscribed by the force of this socio-religious tyranny. Even as Germans under Hitler voted 99% Nazi, even as Russians under Communist rule vote for the Communist Party, even so in countries dominated by religion, the people submit to religious rites and ceremonial whenever the priests call upon them to do so.

(to be concluded)

Miserable Sinners All

By G. I. BENNETT

IT is impossible to read much Christian literature without encountering and re-encountering *ad nauseam* the word "sin". If after delving into Christian writings you don't presently feel that you are a grovelling, incorrigible sinner, then these writings are not for you, and you are without the Christian temperament. Every true Christian knows he is deeply dyed in sin, even though the grace of God (curious phrase!) be with him.

It all apparently goes back to our first parents—that delectable couple, Adam and Eve. Or at least, they *were* delectable before they fulfilled their function as male and female. That was their undoing. Poor wretches, they ate the Forbidden Fruit—to use the metaphorical language of the Bible—and from that time forward human nature has been tainted, and we are fallen beings all. Although allegory, of which the Christian Holy Book contains a great deal, tends to obfuscation, what actually happened in the Garden of Eden seems clear enough. Adam and Eve, being man and woman, gained a carnal knowledge of each other. Not being world-wise, as are we, who know that sensual gratification is out of harmony with the higher spiritual life, they doubtless yielded, with every animal innocence, to a mutual, seductive passion.

Now God had made them man and woman, with the distinctive attributes and impulses of man and woman, but when He caught them out he was nevertheless shocked. He was also angry, very angry. And, by way of punishment, He cast a curse upon them, and upon their sons and daughters to be, and all the sons and daughters of man.

We have all been miserable sinners ever since. If by some miracle we had not been—that is, had we somehow at some stage of our story risen superior to the weakness that Adam had for Eve, and Eve for Adam—we should have stopped propagating our kind, and our children would have ceased being born in sin. Perhaps they would have ceased being born at all—which might have been a good thing, considering the chaotic world we live in, and the vexations, anxieties, and pains that abound along life's highway from birth to death. Or perhaps God would have found some other, cleaner, and more aesthetic means of procreation; it would surely not be beyond His mighty ingenuity. Why, the Blessed Mary—married notwithstanding—was a virgin, was she not? Yet God 'breathed' on her, and lo! she conceived a son—a son who for almost two thousand years has been a Saviour with a capital 'S' to all sorts and conditions of men and women.

And we need saving, every one of us—though the Lord knows the task is a daunting one, even for a son so phenomenal as His. Born in sin we inherit sin. Endowed with strong sexual feelings and propensities, life for us is one long struggle, with the odds heavily against us, from puberty to decrepitude. Winning that struggle means, in effect, abjuring our birthright as men and women to be men and women—means becoming, in fact, neuter beings.

Celibacy may be a higher and purer state than the wedded. We have the Roman Catholic Church's solemn assurance on that—and we *know* her saints and priests don't marry. But even the canonised saint (who is a very holy man) retains some trace of Original Sin. In him, even, Adam doesn't die completely. He leads a model life of earthly rectitude and sanctity; but a lascivious thought occasionally breaks the surface of his conscious-

ness, and for a brief moment he looks on the fair form of woman with the eyes of a man, as Jerome must have done when he retired to the desert so that—let us quote him—"the eyes of wantons may not lead me captive, and beauty may not engender lust. You say, 'This is not to fight but to run away!' I confess my weakness . . . Flight makes it impossible for me to win the victory; but at least it ensures me against defeat."

So Christian writers and preachers are quite right, after all—by their criterion. We are all sinners. But wise to the world as she is, the Church has recognised the ineluctable attraction that the majority of men and women, as men and women, have for each other. With St. Paul she has ruled that, for them, it is indeed "better to marry than burn." And so we have the condition of Holy Matrimony: a licence to sexual expression, supremely distinguished from every other sort of licence or furtive liaison in that it has the blessing of the Church. A concession to sin just the same, maybe; but *sin sanctified*.

Somehow this makes it qualitatively different. But not understanding fully the subtleties of the ecclesiastical mind, you may be puzzled as to how it is qualitatively different. And you may also wonder at the ambivalence of a Church which, while pointing to the lusts of the flesh as evidence of the sin inherent in our fallen human nature, unctuously bestows its benediction upon the marriage that is solemnises as though they were innocent of such lusts.

CHAPMAN COHEN said:

As a moulder of opinion the popular press has almost ceased to count. As a creator of prejudice it was never so powerful. It makes the most of a huge public able to read but with very little thinking capacity.

An advanced clergyman is one who safely gives voice to heresies for which men of earlier generations were stoned.

It is not correct to say certain unbelievers are afraid of Atheism. They are afraid of Christians who are afraid of Atheism.

A religion that prepares for the "next world" is of no earthly use.

A man who started a business for selling land on the other side of the moon would soon find himself in an asylum. A more profitable line is to sell plots on the other side of the grave.

There are no mysteries in the universe, only things not understood, problems waiting to be solved.

There are said to be over 3,000 gods in India, and the missionary expects the natives to thank him for bringing another one.

To understand God is to commit deicide.

I do not think that nearly so many young ladies would give their hearts to Jesus if there were desirable earthly applicants for that organ.

There is one good thing about a travelling evangelist. There must always be a number of places which are able to enjoy his absence.

In a civilized state religion is not forced on an adult. He can resist. It is forced on the child; he cannot resist.

To the Christian morality is not a product of human society, but something imposed on men by the "will of God." It is to be enforced by penalties and backed up by a system of deferred payments in the next world. Without the assurance of these dividends the Christian sees no reason for the existence of morality. It is the ethics of the Stock Exchange plus the intellectual outlook of the savage.

Correspondence

MARGARET KNIGHT'S BOOK

I have just finished reading *Morals Without Religion and Other Essays*. It was quite absorbing and put my pipe out in ten minutes. It is fascinating to follow her acute critical mind into the subjects other than the main one. The "Other Essays" deal splendidly with important subjects.

WM. H. HOPKIN.

FROM A NEW READER

After reading *The Freethinker* for a few months I must say that, while I cannot "go the whole hog" with you in your attitude to religion, I certainly admire many of the articles, particularly the recent ones on Einstein and also those by the Rev. J. L. Broom on Billy Graham. Your Science Front is also to my liking. *The Freethinker* has recently been criticised by Sir A. Lunn in the *Catholic Universe*, and I suggest this merits your attention.

A. MACANDREW.

WHICH THREE BOOKS?

I was interested in Mr. McCall's choice of the three books which have most influenced him as a Freethinker. After much whittling down and elimination process the list I am personally left with, as being most indebted to, includes McCabe's *Evolution of Mind*, Vivian Philip's *Churches and Modern Thought* and Chapman Cohen's *Theism or Atheism*. The first is a masterpiece in its way, the second covers an enormous amount of freethought ground and is fully documented, and the third is a model of clear thinking.

A. J. BANNER.

[Which Three Books? Short letters are invited on the subject.—ED.]

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

"Hibernicus" omits to mention the most important fact about "The Problem of Evil"; that it is purely imaginary. The arbitrary division of existence into "good" and "evil" manifestations is based on the fallacy that the Universe is subject to "moral government" along the lines of our human notions of what is "right" and "wrong." Once we have outgrown the notion of an "Almighty Judge" sitting in session over an everlasting Assize Court, the "problem" disappears.

Moral and ethical ideas, the feeling that things "ought" to be arranged in one way rather than another, a sense that some things are "unjust" or "unfitting"; these are peculiar to human beings living in association with one another; they are "social phenomena."

We have no evidence whatever that there is any objective basis for such ideas; we have no evidence that they are supported by "supernatural" sanction. Because human beings find that A is a source of pleasure and self-aggrandisement, while B is a source of pain and frustration, we are not justified in saying that therefore A is absolutely and ternally "good" and B is absolutely and eternally "evil." Only human beings know or care about "morality" and "ethics," and the science of Astronomy shows us that in relation to the incalculably vast Cosmos, human beings are of no particular importance to the scheme of things.

Why, then, should we expect to find an ethical Universe waiting to receive us?

S. W. BROOKS.

THE GOSPELS

I have been much interested by the letter of M. Baker (24/6/55), having often wondered how the birth of Christ could be B.C. 4!

I have read the article in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* on the life of Herod the Great. The events of his career and reign are related in some detail, but there is no mention whatever of the "massacre of the innocents"! This event would be so remarkable that it is impossible to believe that it could have escaped the notice of the several contemporary historians. Moreover, Mark, Luke and John know nothing about it. In the face of such a hotch-potch of lies and contradictions, what reliance can be placed in any uncorroborated statement in the Bible?

JOHN R. DUNCANSON.

SAVING JESUS

Exactly why we Freethinkers should want to *save* Jesus is not at all clear in Mr. Du Cann's article. The only Jesus we know is the one described for us in the Gospels—Canonical and Apocryphal. We know nothing else. Yet Mr. Du Cann wishes us to know what Jesus might have thought of Billy Graham, the Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury. Personally, I would not be in the least interested—nor would it matter one way or other. Mr. Du Cann would perhaps like to put Jesus on the Freethought map. Most of us, however, feel with Carlyle, it would be better to write, "Exeunt Jesus"—for good.

J.R.

N.S.S. Executive Committee

Present: Mr. F. A. Ridley (in the Chair), Mrs. Venton. Messrs. Griffiths, Ebury, Taylor, Hornibrook, Shaw, Johnson, Barker, Cleaver, Draper and the Secretary.

Ten new members were admitted to the Dagenham, Birmingham, Merseyside, Manchester and Nottingham Branches. The newly-appointed Secretary was introduced by the President. Decision was reached regarding the forthcoming visit of the President—with Mr. Bradlaugh Bonner—to Brussels in connection with the World Union of Freethinkers. The Secretary reported on the request for speakers from a Mr. James Gibson who anticipated the formation of a branch in Dumfriesshire. He also reported the gift of a speaker's stand from an anonymous donor. This was accepted with thanks on behalf of the West London Branch by Messrs. Cleaver and Ebury. A sub-committee consisting of Messrs. F. A. Ridley, Wm. Griffiths, R. Johnson and G. H. Taylor was chosen to consider the revision of the Society's rules and the preparation of Standing Orders.

DAVID FRANCIS, *Secretary*.

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