

# The Freethinker

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Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

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THE tragi-comic episode of the recent royal matrimonial fiasco has brought to the front again, the anomalous position of "the Church of England by law established." That of the Church, or at least the officially recognised position accorded to it, is now the subject of controversy, and we may reasonably anticipate that such controversy is likely to increase rather than diminish in the near future.

The argument often used by the critics of the established church, that the Church of England was originally a mere creation of Tudor state-craft and of political expediency, is nowadays met by the confident assertion by Anglican "apologists"—in particular, by those of the High Church party—that the Church of England has always existed as an autonomous separate entity, and that the Tudors did but emphasise an already existing fact in their anti-papal legislation. How much truth is there in such an assertion?

## Rome and Canterbury

The known historical facts do not appear to lend much support to such an assertion. Whether or no Christianity during the Roman occupation came from Rome directly, it is a recognised fact that during the Anglo-Saxon invasions in the fifth and sixth centuries—the era of the legendary King Arthur—Christianity apparently died out in England altogether. The continuous history of Christianity in England dates from the Roman missionaries, headed by the Monk Augustine, who arrived at the beginning of the seventh century, and subsequently converted the Pagan Angles, Saxons and Jutes to Christianity; not, as it is added, to any form of Christianity but specifically to the one true Church of Rome. Of that, at least, there can be no doubt at all. The pioneer missionaries, including Augustine, the first Archbishop of Canterbury, were sent directly from Rome by the then Pope Gregory "the Great." A little later, another pope sent Theodore of Tarsus to become, perhaps, the first Archbishop of Canterbury to exercise effective jurisdiction over most of (what is now) England. As far as we are aware, the above elementary facts are not seriously disputed by any competent ecclesiastical historian of the period in question. It is, of course, true that the northern part of the island was originally converted by Irish monks, who do not appear to have recognised the jurisdiction of Rome; but at the famous synod of Whitby (664) the Irish converts transferred their allegiance to Rome, precisely we are told, because of the claim of the popes to be the spiritual heirs of St. Peter, to whom Christ had committed the Keys of Heaven and Hell. We can, in fact, say that no church has closer affinities with the Church of Rome than had the Church of England in both its origins and throughout the greater part of its long history.

## A Crusade Against England

It appears to be true that, in the last days of Anglo-Saxon rule, the English church, whilst still officially in

communion with Rome, lapsed into certain irregularities, at least from the point of view of the reforming Papacy of that period; but all that came to an end with the Norman Conquest (1066—"and all that"). For it is often forgotten that William of Normandy was not only a "Conqueror" but a "Crusader," blessed by the pope with a consecrated banner, and given *carte blanche* to make a root and branch reformation of church as well as state in England. More fortunate than his Spanish successor,

Philip of Spain, whose "invincible Armada" in 1588 also carried a consecrated banner blessed by the pope, William succeeded; and the Norman conquest was followed by a rigorous re-organisation of the church, equally with the state, on the strictest lines of Roman orthodoxy. Actually the

two most famous archbishops of the period, Lanfranc and Anselm, were both Italians, whilst the famous Archbishop Langton, of *Magna Carta* fame, was sent over directly from Rome. For the several centuries between the Norman Conquest and the English Reformation (1066 to 1530) there was no "Church of England" but only the branch of the Roman Church in England. When Medieval writers described the Archbishop of Canterbury as "the Pope of the Ultra-Montane world" this was merely a compliment: in no sense was the English Primate any more independent of Rome than were, and are, the Primates of other national churches such as, say, the sees of Toledo in Spain or Cologne in Germany to-day.

## The Famous Divorce of Henry the Eighth

It is a matter of common knowledge—or, if it is not, recent events are rapidly making it such!—that the above state of things ended with the royal "divorce" of Henry the Eighth in the 16th century; which set in motion that momentous chain of events commonly described as the English Reformation. However, the facts are not always accurately described. Henry did not ask the Pope to pronounce a *divorce*, in the modern sense of dissolving his previously legitimate marriage with the Spanish princess, Catherine of Aragon. He could not have made any such request, both because the Roman Catholic Church does not recognise any such thing as the dissolution of a legitimately constituted marriage and, also, because even had an intimidated corrupt pope been willing to pronounce such a divorce, Catholic theology gives him no power to do so. No pope nor anyone else can annul a *sacrament*, whether that of marriage or of Holy Orders. To take a recent example, the late Joseph McCabe in the eyes of the Church remained "Father Anthony," with the power to perform the miracle of the Mass and to forgive sins down to the day of his death, and the pope could do nothing about it. Similarly, Henry Tudor, a learned theologian and "Defender of the Faith" against Luther, knew all this perfectly well. What he wanted from the Pope was a decree stating that his marriage had never been valid, since his wife had been previously engaged to his deceased brother Arthur, and was

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

## Henry the Eighth AND Princess Margaret

By F. A. RIDLEY

accordingly within the "prohibited degrees." What, briefly, Henry required for domestic and political reasons was, not a divorce, but a papal declaration that he had never really been married at all. This decree the Pope refused to give him, also for political reasons. Henry accordingly transferred the papal jurisdiction to Canterbury and got his "annulment" from Archbishop Cranmer, who pronounced Catherine unmarried and her daughter, Mary, consequently illegitimate—a decision which sent him to the stake when eventually Mary did come to the throne. Theology was a dangerous business in those days!

### The Church of England

As a result of Henry's *los von Rome* (break with Rome) the church in England became the Church of England. Incidentally, it was not at first a Protestant church. Henry remained "Defender of the Faith" and he defended it by burning heretics to the day of his death. A recent Roman Catholic historian has given Henry a certificate of orthodoxy! Or in technical theological language Henry was a schismatic, but not a heretic! He broke with the ecclesiastical system, but not with the dogmas of the Catholic Church.

### Queen Elizabeth and Spain

It was not until the reign of Henry's daughter, the first Elizabeth, that the Church of England began to be considered as a Protestant church. What really converted

England to Protestantism was her long and bitter war against Spain, the militant champion of the Catholic counter-reformation. Since the failure of the Spanish Armada to conquer England and the failure of the English "Fifth column" of Spain to subvert the Protestant regime in "the gunpowder plot" (1605), England and the Church of England have ranked as Protestant in the estimation of the world and of the Vatican.

### Henry the Eighth and Princess Margaret

One thing emerges clearly from the foregoing narrative, Henry the Eighth did not believe in divorce, but, at least in the eyes of the Roman Catholic Church he was, nevertheless, a divorced person, since Rome had refused to annul his lawfully contracted marriage. Equally in the eyes of the Church of England, he must have been, since that church afterwards accepted his daughter, Queen Elizabeth, as the legitimate monarch, and Elizabeth was the daughter of Henry and Anne Boleyn, and was born during the lifetime of Catherine of Aragon. It is therefore accurate to state "no divorce, no Church of England." Accordingly, the attitude taken up by the Church of England and by its ecclesiastical head, the Archbishop of Canterbury, during the recent royal fiasco, actually represents a declaration by the Church of England that its original creation and its whole existence have been an immoral defiance of a fundamental Christian principle.

## Christmas, a Sham Antique

By MIMNERMUS SECUNDUS

AT this season of the year our thoughts turn to the Yuletide festival, and, incidentally, to what it means. Perhaps very few look beyond the purely festive nature of the event. Historical research has a queer way of turning the tables, ironically, on the preconceived ideas of the average man, and what we might almost term one of history's little jests is to be found in the story of the origins of Christmastide, which are not what the dear clergy pretend.

Yuletide means to some of us jovial feasts and dances held in homes, and even in clubs and hotels. To children it brings visions of Santa Claus and delightful presents. To all it means a cessation of ordinary work, and an atmosphere of conviviality and friendliness. The great annual festival meant much the same thing to the peoples of the old Roman Empire, long prior to the birth of Christianity and the invention of the Jesus legend.

It is a fantastic legend, but people who profess and call themselves Christians pretend to believe it.

A child with a ghost for its father is alleged to have been born in a stable at Bethlehem in Judea. This baby was considered to be of such importance that a wholesale massacre of children was said to have been carried out in the hope of getting rid of this infant phenomenon. Then follows one long string of marvellous happenings. He is alleged to have brought the dead to life, and restored the sight of the blind. He is said to have fed thousands with a few loaves and fishes, and turned water into wine. At his death the earth was enveloped in darkness for three days. After death he is said to have appeared again, and he finally ascended into the sky like an aeroplane, and, for what is known, may be careering in space to-day.

There has never been so astonishing a career. Yet, outside the Christian Scriptures there is no corroboration of this most sensational of all ghost stories. So far as sober historians are concerned, "the rest is silence."

This Oriental ghost-story is, obviously, Eastern fiction, but, unfortunately, the legend is associated with organized

Priestcraft. In order that fifty thousand Christian priests may make a comfortable living, this pretence and make-believe is treated with respect instead of with laughter. The clergy make millions out of this sacred sham, ranging from the £15,000 yearly of the Archbishop of Canterbury to the weekly £5 of the greenest and youngest curate. The clergy themselves are not deceived. They keep control of the machinery of education so as to ensure that their absurd abracadabra is treated with respect by the rising generation, and their own salaries and position are safeguarded. It is the sorriest form of trade protection known, for it implies the mental slavery of a whole nation in the interests of priestly profiteers.

Mistletoe and carol singing, both of which are Pagan in origin, are absorbed to play their part in the divine comedy of Christmas celebration of a man-god who never lived.

Christmas, Yuletide, or by whatever name the annual festival has been known, has survived many religions, and for purely secular reasons. It is a period of respite from daily cares, and it comes but once a year. It is a period of joviality, the giving of gifts, the union of rich and poor. It is the season of the warm heart and the open hand. It is thousands of years old, and reaches back to the twilight of human history. It antedates Christianity and will survive that Oriental religion just as it has survived other and older superstitions. Christmas, so far as Priestcraft is concerned, is an organized hypocrisy, a celebration of an event that never happened. But as a purely human institution it is a period of goodwill and happiness which the modern world will not willingly forego:—

"Life still hath one romance that nought can bury,  
For still will Christmas gild the year's mischances."

—NEXT WEEK—

A FREETHINKER ANTHOLOGY  
FOR 1955

## The Age of Paine and Cobbett

By VICTOR E. NEUBURG

RADICALISM has for the most part been unlucky with its historians. Until fairly recently there has been little detailed work available, and the student has had perforce to turn the solid and pedestrian, often unrewarding two volume "lives" which belong very properly to the last century. Useful as these may have been—and indeed occasionally still are—there is a very real need for a reassessment of Radicalism in its historical and social context. The work of Mark Hovell, whose *Chartism* is by any standards a major work, G. D. H. Cole and others has done much to indicate the lines of further research into this field. Nonetheless, there remains much work to be done; social history is as yet hardly recognised as a major study, and both economic and political history tend to be too concerned with theory and the major figures to descend into the cockpit of everyday political agitation where Radicalism first made itself felt as an effective force.

For many years Dr. Maccoby has been at work upon a history of English Radicalism, and at intervals over the course of the last twenty years, substantial volumes have appeared. The last of the five books which altogether cover the period from 1762 to 1914, has just been published. (*English Radicalism, 1786-1832*. By S. Maccoby. Allen & Unwin, 50s.) It is a work of over five hundred pages, with a detailed bibliography, long index, and garnished with many quotations from contemporary sources. Dr. Maccoby's achievement is unique, and his complete history will remain for many years the most available and authentic source book for the period covered. The book under review deals with the period in which the first claims on behalf of "the common man" were made, and in which the voices crying for radical reform of all "abuses" became louder and more insistent. It was moreover a period in which controversies produced some vivid and forceful, expression of views.

It is hardly surprising to find that Dr. Maccoby's canvas is a crowded one, and it is a measure of his detailed knowledge and grasp of the subject that he never allows himself to become swamped beneath a dead weight of material.

What emerges very clearly from the narrative is the enormous influence over the "labouring classes" exercised by the writings of Thomas Paine. When popular disorder and revolt was dreaded in 1812, 1816, 1817, 1819 and 1830, much of the blame was laid at his door; he had spread "infidelity among the lower orders." Two years after Paine's death, the following appeared in *The Times*, written by a correspondent who had his news direct from America:

He arrived at Baltimore on the 13th October, 1802, in company with a woman called Madam Bonneville, whom he had seduced from her husband, and afterwards cruelly treated. At the first inn he went to, he was principally visited by the lower class of emigrants from England, Scotland, and Ireland, no respectable person would suffer his approach. He drank grog in the tap-room with all . . . he was daily intoxicated . . . Mrs. Dean, with whom he afterwards lodged, says he was deliberately and disgustingly filthy.

Somewhat disingenuously, the correspondent adds:

. . . It may be thought by some a want of charity in me to expose the failings of a departed man. I should think so, too, were it not to serve a peculiar purpose—to set at rest the minds of those he has disturbed—to expel the poison of infidelity from the land.

In spite of such abuse, Paine's influence persisted for a long time. Richard Carlile, for example, writing of himself at the beginning of 1817, acknowledged his debt to the author of *The Age of Reason*.

On the other hand, as the author shows, Radicalism owed much to religious Dissent, and the camp meetings heard little of Thomas Paine except in the confessions of former atheists. To what extent these vast religious meetings diverted energy and passion which might have been used in uprising and revolt, it is hard to say, but it seems clear that there were two main strands apparent in popular radicalism: Methodism and religious unbelief. The Methodist and Dissenting element has already been the subject of some investigation, and Dr. Maccoby's work underlines and confirms what has already been stated, notably by R. F. Wearmouth.

This is the first book, however, so far as the present writer is aware, in which the complex relationship between Radicalism and infidelity is discussed, and it is clear that this phase of radicalism is one which will demand further detailed attention. Unfortunately many of those who agreed with Paine were inarticulate and it is hard to estimate the precise amount of his wide influence. One book, by an unbelieving radical, E. Skinner was very much in the style of Paine, and Carlile thought it worthwhile to reprint the title in 1819, some twenty years after its original appearance.

If Dr. Maccoby is stimulating and suggestive so far as this aspect of radicalism is concerned, his history of popular agitation is, in the main, complete and authoritative. The present volume completes a series which will be invaluable to any understanding of the complexity of the radical temper. It might perhaps be objected that a number of modern works are not cited in his bibliography, but this can hardly be an indication that he is unaware of them. Their inclusion would have added to the value of this major work on popular politics. This book is a lucid and comprehensive picture of the age of Paine and Cobbett.

### G. W. Foote on Faith

WHEN a man has plenty of faith he is ready to believe anything. However fantastic it may be, however childish, he can accept it with gaping wonder. His imagination is not necessarily strong but it is easily excited. Macaulay held that savages have stronger imaginations than civilized men, and that as the reason develops the imagination decays. In our opinion he was mistaken. The imagination does not wither under the growth of reason; on the contrary it flourishes more strongly. It is, however, disciplined by reason, and guided by knowledge; and it only appears to be weaker because the relation between it and the other faculties has changed.

When religion ministers to weakness, as it always does, men gravely discuss the most astonishing puerilities. Indeed, the history of religious thought—that is, of the infantile vagaries of the human mind is full of puerilities. There is hardly an absurdity which "learned" divines have not debated as seriously as scientists discuss the nebular hypothesis. They have argued how many angels could dance on the point of a needle; whether Adam had a navel; whether ghosts and demons could cohabit with women; whether animals could sin and what was to be done with a rat that devoured a holy wafer. We believe the decision of the last weighty problem, after a long debate, was that the rat, having the body of Christ in its body, was sanctified, and that it had to be eaten by the priest, by which the second person of the Holy Trinity was saved from desecration.

(Flowers of Freethought)

## This Believing World

A vigorous defence of the Bible, as the World's Supreme Book was broadcast the other Sunday by the Rev. Leslie Cooke in which he proclaimed a Fundamentalism which completely knocked out not only all nineteenth century Biblical criticism, but also all twentieth century "Secularism" (he used this word). The wicked days of doubts about the Bible have vanished. The modern scholars who have been studying it declare that it has withstood every criticism, and stands nobly proclaiming the truth of the Jews as God's Chosen People as well as the absolute historic certainty of the birth, life, and glorious Resurrection of Christ Jesus. In short, all Biblical scepticism these days has been completely annihilated by modern scholarship.

Even Billy Graham fans could never have heard anything so positive as Mr. Cooke's address, and if he had only emphasised Sin as vigorously as he defended the Bible, he might easily have ousted the American evangelist in popular favour. Unfortunately, Mr. Cooke did not actually give us any defence of selected Bible passages—quite rightly. It is so easy to vociferate the inerrancy of the Bible—but quite another thing to defend it in debate; a task which it is most unlikely Mr. Cooke would ever undertake against a competent Freethinker.

Believers in "spirit healing"—that is, healing performed by spirit doctors from Summerland—and in "faith healing"—that is, healing performed by Christ Jesus all the way from Heaven—will be hard put to explain a "Magic Box" fully described by the *Sunday Dispatch* which transmits "healing rays" to sick horses and completely cures them. This Magic Box knows nothing of spirit veterinary surgeons, and nothing about Jesus, and even nothing about electricity. But give it a hair of a sick horse and it immediately gives off "healing rays," and the sick horse is cured.

Under the law, however, only a fully qualified veterinary surgeon is allowed to practise, so it will have to be decided whether the Magic Box—though it always cures—comes under the law. Naturally there are those awful sceptical people who simply won't believe in anything, and ridicule the Magic Box. Just as two impudent doctors, discussing "spirit" healing with Mr. Harry Edwards the well known spirit healer, on TV, reduced him to a state of angry impotence quite unable to substantiate a single case of curing an incurable disease. For our part, we wonder what is the exact difference between a Magic Box and a Spirit Doctor from Summerland?

The Dean of St. Paul's following other reverend speakers, gave an "uplift" sermon on the radio the other week, dealing with "Christian Hope and Physical Evil." Exactly in what way this differed from the hundreds of thousands similar sermons we are all so familiar with was difficult to see. There was not an original idea in it. The "Hope" was Jesus Christ, or people coming to Jesus Christ, and the same dreary clichés followed one another as fast as they could be uttered. We thought that Dr. Matthews would give us some striking examples of Hope from the words of Jesus—but the only reference to the heavenly ethics of the Son of God was to repeat the well known "Love thy neighbour as thyself" as coming from

the Saviour, when, as any Biblical student could have told him, it comes from the Old Testament.

Not that Dr. Matthews believed literally in this saying—for he immediately insisted that it was generally misunderstood—except by himself—and then proceeded to tell us what it really meant. Soon we were involved in the usual exegetical sermon, and Hope was left abandoned high and dry in a welter of words. At least, that was the case until he remembered Christ Jesus again and there was your Hope. We could have told him this before he started.

## The "Category Mistake"

—a Mistake

By A. YATES

FOR some time now Mr. Gregory S. Smelters has been endeavouring in a series of articles in *The Freethinker* and other journals to supply Atheism with what he calls "The Category Mistake" argument which he says, "will make available to militant Freethinkers a revolutionary weapon of debunking "God" as a misuse of language." He fortifies his assertion with quotations from Prof. Susan Stebbing, A. J. Ayer and other logicians besides elaborate explanations of his own.

What is a "Category Mistake"? According to Mr. Smelters, the principle underlying it may be expressed thus—"There exists in addition to the set of individuals or objects and the property defining them as a class no one extra individual of the same type which is the class. In other words, there exists no one extra number called X over and above all the numbers of a class called X. There is thus no one extra god over and above all gods."

Mr. Smelter's mistake is in assuming that so-called gods can be classified like men, houses, etc.; but gods do not exist, and therefore cannot be members of a class. He cannot logically classify nonentities and then use that classification as a proof that a single god cannot exist. If there are no gods, as he believes, it is superfluous to tell us that there cannot be an extra god over and above all gods.

The monotheist would contend that the god he believes in, "The Creator and Ruler of the universe," cannot, as such, belong to any class; and Mr. Smelters meets his argument with a logical fallacy.

The atheist assumes nothing, but bases his unbelief on rational grounds. He contends that there not only is there no evidence of a god, but that such a being would be unnecessary. Nothing from the atom to the nebula could be other than it is. It is inevitable causation that rules out a divine creator. If things are what they must be, by what reasoning does the theist impel purpose? To prove purpose in Nature he must show that things could have been other than they are but for purpose. Nothing is static; action (change), is the rule of life and the erudition of existence. It is the result, not of divine decree but of natural forces; and a god that does nothing, is nothing.

## SCIENCE

Science ever brings the unknown into the realm of the known. In this process she is continually encroaching on the domain of religion, bringing things which seemed unearthly into the ordinary category of observation and experiment. Science will finally exterminate religion by explaining it. The conception of law will make the belief in miracles impossible.

—Mimnermus.

# THE FREETHINKER

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## 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.

## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### OUTDOOR

Central London Branch N.S.S. (Lincolns Inn Fields, Kingsway, W.C.1.)—Every Tuesday, 1 p.m.; (Tower Hill) Every Thursday, 1 p.m. Speakers: J. M. Alexander, W. Carlton, and others.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every weekday, 1.0 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK and CORSAIR.

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. ARTHUR, EBURY and WOOD. *The Freethinker* on sale at Marble Arch.

### INDOOR

West Ham Branch N.S.S. (Wanstead Community Centre).—Thursday, December 22, 8 p.m. Branch Meeting.

## Notes and News

The Annual Dinner of the N.S.S. will take place on Saturday, 4th February, 1956, in the Mecca Restaurant, 11/12 Blomfield Street, London, E.C.2, and, in response to many requests, will be followed by a Social and Dance. It will be the 50th Dinner and we are pleased to announce that Mrs. Margaret Knight has consented to be the Society's Guest of Honour. Tickets will be 16/- each and, as seating is limited, early application to the Secretary is advised.

In the Christchurch Press of New Zealand (Sept. 13) a biologist looks at religion in the following way:—

"Investigation of historical truths reveals the evil machinations of commercialised superstition in alliance with the forces of reaction in financial fisticuffs (war) and of having no connexion whatsoever with gods, divine creators or other mystical nonsense. According to pulpit-pounders, God created everything beautiful, but did not create scourges affecting mankind such as cancer, tuberculosis, poliomyelitis, earthquakes, ocean storms, floods drowning millions, babies born deformed and lunatic, vultures devouring little birds, lions killing defenceless zebras, big fish eating smaller ones, scientific achievements and remedies deliberately restrained by the God of Love. In war, religionists on both sides pray to the same God to murder and destroy as many humans as possible. Would they sit the pauper of Galilee in the millionaires' pew? An outbreak of Christianity would make short work of our present society! We prosecute teacup readers and fortune-tellers."—Melville B. Mitchell.

We welcome an official leading article in the I.L.P. *Socialist Leader* (10/12/55) headed 'The Opium of the People' and hope that it presages a growing resistance to the Catholic attempt to gain control of the Labour Movement in this country. The N.S.S. has long been aware of the Catholic menace to organised labour, and our speakers have continually drawn attention to it. It is gratifying to find

## The Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund

Previously acknowledged, £1,032 15s. 7d.; Mrs. A. Valance, £2; R. Gerrard, £1; F. E. Papps, 5/-; A. Hancock, 1/-; A. Stephenson £1; E.C.R., 5/-. Total to date, £1,037 6s. 7d.

the *Socialist Leader* condemning the Church in no uncertain terms.

The immediate provocation was the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Glasgow's interference in the Rolls-Royce strike through a pastoral letter read in all the Catholic churches in the city, which—says the *Socialist Leader*—must now convince non-Catholics that the R.C. Church is a political as well as a religious organisation which "has always sided with the oppressors, the landlords and the wealthy against the common people." "Today," it continues, "mindful of the fact that millions of Catholic working men and women are trade unionists, it is very active in the Labour Movement," aiming "to control the organisation for its own nefarious ends." And a warning is issued that unless the Church "is fought as relentlessly as it is fighting others, it will soon completely control the Labour Movement in two large cities Liverpool and Glasgow." The insidious work of Catholic Action inside the trade unions is also indicated.

Referring to "faithful" Catholics, the *Leader* wonders how anyone with "sufficient intelligence to think could believe the story that the Pope had exchanged confidences with Jesus," and asks "How conditioned can conditioned minds become?"

We repeat, it is encouraging to find an editorial of this kind in a left-wing periodical and, we feel sure, readers will join us in congratulating the *Socialist Leader*. Even those who do not share its political views must admire its clear and courageous exposure of the greatest danger to democracy in the world to-day.

### MANCHESTER BRANCH BULLETIN—NO. 13

At the Wheatsheaf Hotel, High Street, Manchester, on Sunday, 27th November, 1955, the Society's President, Mr. Ridley, lectured on "The Vatican and Ecclesiastical Fascism." Mr. Ridley, who has studied the methods of the Roman Catholic influence in politics from medieval times to the present day, said that the Roman Catholic Church is primarily a political and totalitarian organization and, being such, had many aspects other than religious. It was infinitely more dangerous in the political field than in the theological as was to be seen during the past 30 or 40 years when various totalitarian regimes, e.g.—Hitler's, Mussolini's and Franco's, had been influenced by the Vatican. The only complete form of totalitarianism is the Roman Catholic Church; it aims to control every aspect of human life and is responsible for putting Hitler, Mussolini and Franco into power. Not only is the Roman Catholic Church the first form of totalitarian fascism, but other forms of fascism have been based upon it.

On 18th July, 1870, a council of Roman Catholic ecclesiastics proclaimed Papal infallibility. In the political field this infallibility has been exercised in no uncertain measure. In 1870 the Church of Rome was an ultra-reactionary organization bitterly opposed to the French Revolution, but since then its point of view has changed many times and today it flourishes in left-wing parties. In some countries it is the church of the aristocracy and in others it is the church of the bourgeois, while Communist Russia is its principal enemy. In America, the Roman Catholic Church is making gigantic strides in a full-scale offensive and universally it is becoming more powerful than at any time since the Reformation. It is a flexible organization which changes its views as occasion requires. During the last war it was hand-in-glove with Hitler but upon the downfall of Nazi Germany it professed to be the great champion of democracy. This policy pays substantial dividends and in the economic sphere the Roman Catholic Church has immense experience. "It may not know anything about the next world but it knows a devil of a lot about this," said Mr. Ridley. The Vatican is playing an astute game, sitting on both sides of the fence at the same time and whichever side wins, the Roman Catholic Church will be on top.

## On Hell and Other Matters

By H. CUTNER

AS has been more than once pointed out in these columns, quite a number of readers who have since given up all belief, or perhaps are quite indifferent to religion, take a strong exception to the "levity" which marks some of our comments on religion. Christianity—or Buddhism or Islam or Judaism—are looked upon as "sacred" by their followers, and we really ought to respect their beliefs. Christianity may well be quite untrue, but think of the marvellous comfort it brings millions of people. If it were not for Christianity they might believe that "death ends all." This is a most pessimistic doctrine, and it is much better for them to believe that after dying they will at once awake in the arms of Jesus. Even if not true, is it not a beautiful thought?

Or you get the lady who does not like our allusions to a Flaming Hell. Almost with tears, she insists that we have got it all wrong. Don't you know, she asks, that the Greek word which we translate as Hell is "Hades," and the Hebrew word is "Sheol"? We ought to know that, as they mean "an enclosed place, tomb or grave," nobody can frizzle in them.

I am bound to say that the Judaism of the Bible—for there is a later Judaism mostly based on the Talmud—does not envisage a Hell where you frizzle. In fact, the same Judaism does not even envisage "eternal" life where you are either punished or rewarded. Both to punish and reward were brought in by Jesus and his followers and expanded by his Church. Whatever Hades may have meant to the Greeks, it was found to be a beautiful word for Christians, and they made the most of it. The lady to whom I am replying says that the idea of Hell came from Paganism, and never formed part of Christian doctrine. But quite a good part of Christianity including the Virgin Birth, and the Son of God idea, came from Paganism, and was utilised by Christians as part of their doctrine. So was the "Lord's Day," the day of the Sun—our Sunday. And what about that lovely ceremony—blatant Atheists call it cannibalism—of eating one's God? Is not that pure Paganism? Really, it is no excuse to say that the vivid doctrine of Hell, especially when so enthusiastically described by Fr. J. Furniss, S.J., in *The Sight of Hell is Pagan*. So it may have been, but it is sound Christian doctrine now.

Jesus himself had no doubt whatever of a fiery Hell. When he let himself go (as so often he did) against the Pharisees he always condemned them to Hell as the worst punishment he could think of. Fancy him attacking the laughing Pharisees with "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of 'an enclosed space'?" Where the Son of the Almighty God said, "It is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire," our lady correspondent insists that Jesus meant to be cast into an everlasting tomb. But surely when "our Lord" said "everlasting fire" he meant the good old Hell of General Booth, C. H. Spurgeon, Billy Graham, and the Pope? Surely these Men of God knew what they were talking about?

The truth is that most Christians who declare that Hell is "not taught in the Bible," like the lady referred to, know neither the Bible nor Christianity. In actual fact, the New Testament is packed with Hell and its Devils. Jesus could not get away from them. Hell is full of "the fire that is not quenched," it is "an everlasting punishment," Lazarus is "tormented in this flame," and so on. Christian ladies who do not like Hell should write to the Pope and the

Archbishop of Canterbury about it—not to *The Freethinker*. We know our Bible only too well.

Then there are the readers who for some reason are quite disturbed by Group-Captain Cheshire's magnificent defence of that hoary old fraud, the Turin Shroud. We can allow much to an enthusiastic convert to Roman Catholicism. He could not have gone over if he was not prepared to believe everything, no matter how revolting to our senses. But our own readers . . . !

In that "occult" journal, *Prediction* for October is an even more enthusiastic article on the Holy Shroud than that written by Group-Captain Cheshire. The writer, Mr. D. Canning, goes into raptures about the findings of many "noted" scientists who are all convinced that it was the veritable Shroud in which "our Lord" was wrapped in when put into his tomb. It had everything clearly marked on it—the scourgings, the wound in the side, blood and blood and water marks, the imprint of the nails, the crowning of thorns—in fact everything mentioned in the Gospels. And all absolutely confirmed by "noted" scientists.

Mr. Canning, it is true, gives us the names of one or two of them as for example Y. Delage and R. Vignon and the "reputable" Pierre Barbet, M.D. I am sure that Mr. Canning knows them all, knows their unimpeachable impartiality and veracity. For me, on such subjects, scientists are just as silly as religious laymen. In the voluminous Spiritualist literature, the biggest asses are our Crookes, Lodge, and Doyles. They were the last persons in the world who ought to have undertaken Spirit investigations. They were bamboozled right and left—and the "noted" scientists who vouch for the Shroud of Turin are similar fools.

If there had been the least reason to believe in the authenticity of the shroud, would not the Roman Church have said so in the clearest terms? They have expressed no opinion one way or the other. They are quite content to leave the matter in the—more or less—incompetent hands of laymen. But at least one priest has given up his opinion and he, Fr. H. Thurston, S.J., is definitely against its authenticity.

However, as in so many of our discussions, in come our reverent Rationalists (Humanists?). No one has shown more reverence for the Church and its theological teachings even when he does not agree with them than Mr. A. D. Howell Smith, and in an article in the *Literary Guide* he gives us a very carefully written account of it in his most reverent style. He does not go as far as Cheshire—but perhaps he would like to! "The historical evidence is irresistible that the figure of the crucified Christ has been partly, if not wholly, faked," he tells us. It must have been an awful wrench to write "wholly." He was much happier when he wrote:

If the authenticity of the shroud is finally put beyond dispute, this will not prove the truth of the resurrection of Jesus, though it will confirm the faith of believers; but the historicity of Jesus and his death by crucifixion can no longer be doubted by reasonable men.

Mr. Howell Smith is one of the modern Rationalists (Humanists?) who is a convinced believer in Jesus of Nazareth as a Man; and what a feather in his cap it would be for "unreasonable" Freethinkers (like myself) who ridicule the Shroud as a huge fraud, and are convinced that Jesus is a complete myth, to be thoroughly shown up. It is not just the B.B.C. which so cleverly perpetuates an ignorant Fundamentalism.

The Holy Shroud is as big a fake as the Holy Cross and the thousand and one "relics" put out by the Christian

Church. Anyone with the least idea of photography would know that.

But it is almost impossible ever to eliminate the two words, "sacred" and "reverent," from one's beliefs when religion still holds one in its thralls.

## News from America

### American Freethinkers break the Sound Barrier

THE Friendship Liberal League continued their radio offensive with a fifteen minute broadcast on Sunday morning of Oct. 11th, after an interval of two months. The subject was Thomas Paine. Working to a plan, the speaker (Mr. Alt, Secretary of the League), made no mention of Paine's anti-Christian writings, but posited the question, Why is Paine not given the recognition he merits? and promised the answer in a later talk. The League is prepared to give one talk per month, given permission, and finances permitting.

\* \* \* \*

### The Serpentine Route to Heaven

According to a report in *Liberal* (Philadelphia), "In Pineville, Ky., another snake-handling preacher was laid to rest recently while other mountain preachers prayed and preached and four singers whomped their guitars. A large crowd attended the shindig and some of them went into frenzies, rolling on the ground and 'speaking with tongues' as mentioned in the Bible. We in America frequently speak of the 'backward Balkan peasants' and their like in other countries, but it seems impossible that there could be people anywhere who could be culturally less advanced than these hill-billies of Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama and bordering states.

"In nearby south-western Virginia another group of these fanatics gathered to pay tribute to the departed brother mentioned above. Rev. Oscar Hutton, is quoted as saying they would have plenty of snakes on hand for the party. The Commonwealth Attorney of Lee County, Virginia, when asked what he was going to do about the matter said he was not going to do anything. 'They can eat snakes as far as I am concerned. All they want is publicity but we'll ignore them.'"

\* \* \* \*

### The Snake Serial

A whole Snake Serial, with a murder in every chapter, could be written on the religious antics of American sects recently.

One of the latest cases concerns a brother and sister, middle-aged, in Tennessee. The woman died, and the police tried to save the brother by rushing him to hospital. The man resisted, preferring to let the Almighty put him right. The police, however, would have none of this, and behaved like thoroughly sceptical materialists, which of course is characteristic of them in such circumstances.

\* \* \* \*

### American Revivals

How deep is the American revival of interest in religion, and what does it signify? Touring evangelists have exhorted their listeners to "come back to Jesus" (pushing aside such awkward questions as Where is he? Who was he? Did he live? and What can he do?), Ike has started going to church, which he never bothered about before he became a politician, and Congress, caught in the great upsurge has put religious mottoes on postage and paper money.

But does it really mean anything? In sermons delivered on Sunday, September 11th, three clergymen seem to think it does not. In N.Y. City, the Rev. Jos. D. Huntley, Broad-

way Congregational Church, says "with the aid of gospel hymns, brass bands and the magnetism of Billy Graham's preaching they manage to lose themselves for an hour or so and imagine that such detachment is the core of the religious life." He says that the emotional experience which Billy fosters seems to have more Freudian implications than religious. The Rev. C. Newman Hogle, Fifth Methodist Church of Jamaica says, "There are things being pulled out of the wastebasket that ought to be left there. One of these is the Bible-thumping circus of shirt-sleeve evangelism." And Rabbi William F. Rosenblum questioned whether the revival had a "real concern with moral and spiritual things, which is the basic purpose of religion, or is just a flight from fear." It must not be overlooked he asserted, that there has been an increase in the number of people who "crowd the offices and haunts of the Father Divine, the Prophet Joneses, or the hundreds of fakirs and charlatans who claim to have direct commissions from God to provide everyone with health, millions and fame." These, says *Liberal*, "seem to think that there is somewhere a line of demarcation which distinguishes 'real' religion from that of fakirs and charlatans, while to us there is no difference between the nonsense of a pope or a witch doctor. Mumbo-jumbo dressed in costly robes, or black cloth with reversed collar, or a leopard skin are just different facets of the same loaded dice."

G.H.T.

## The Christmas Tree

The persistence of the tree in Christmas and Christian religious festivities points to a much wider and deeper truth than that of their obvious affinity with pre-Christian beliefs. The whole structure of Christianity connects it with the world-wide belief in vegetation gods and solar gods, the two being, naturally, very closely related. The festivals of Christmas and Easter have no reasonable origin, other than their connection with the death and re-birth of vegetation. Both are, in the truest sense of the expression, nature festivals. And Frazer has proven to demonstration—to all whose minds are open to proof—that the sacrifice of Jesus is, not as orthodox Christianity has represented it, the sacrifice of one god to placate another, but the creation of a god by the act of killing, for the purpose of renewing vegetative life. . . .

The folk-lore of Europe is full of references to tree-deities, while with primitive peoples there often goes the custom of addressing an elaborate apology to the spirit of a tree before cutting it down. Grimm says, indeed, that in Teutonic mythology—

Temple means also wood. What we figure to ourselves as a built and walled house resolves itself, the further back we go, into a holy place, untouched by human hand, embowered and shut in by self-grown trees. There dwells the deity, veiling his form in the rustling foliage of the boughs.

(*Teutonic Mythology*, 1, 9.)

And Robertson Smith says the tree is not merely the symbol of the god but his embodiment:—

The god inhabits the tree or raised stone, not in the sense in which man inhabits a house, but in the sense in which his soul inhabits his body. In short, the whole conception belongs, in its origin, to a state of thought in which there was no more difficulty in ascribing living powers and personality to a stone, tree or animal than to a being of human or superhuman build.

(*Religion of the Semites*, p. 85.)

We can take the next step in searching for the origin of tree worship in the company of Mr. Grant Allen. In an essay on *The Attis* of Catullus, that extremely suggestive writer put forward a very probable reason why the ghosts, or gods, should have become peculiarly identified with vege-

tation. In the first place, the tumulus over a dead body is freshly-turned earth, and surface earth that has been collected from round about. Next, food is scattered over the grave to feed the ghost. Animals are killed on the grave, and their blood soaks into the grave. These, with other circumstances, give obvious reasons why vegetation should grow more richly on the grave in its neighbourhood than elsewhere. For example, it is still a custom in some of the Hebrides for milkmaids to pour a little of their milk, morning and evening on the fairy mounds. Naturally, these mounds are of a richer verdure than elsewhere. But the verdure is not attributed to the milk, but to the fairies. And when we note that these fairy mounds are, when examined, nearly always found to be primitive graves, we have a clear object lesson in the truth of what has been said. Using the same mode of reasoning, primitive man does not, then, attribute the better growth on the grave to the better-fed soil; it is due entirely to the ghost. It is the life of the ghost manifesting itself in vegetation. If a tree springs up and flourishes, it is the abode of the ghost; and this at once gives a simple explanation of the existence of sacred trees and of tree-worship all over the world.

(The late) CHAPMAN COHEN.

## Correspondence

### Mr. HARDING AND THE EMPIRE

I would like your comments on the following:

Recently, during a T.V. panel game—"Who Said That?" Gilbert Harding was asked for his views on the Empire, good or bad. Mr. Harding said that the Empire was an evil thing in his opinion, and he immediately quoted a story about one of his many tours. In this story, a coloured gentleman said to Mr. Harding:

"Before you came (meaning the white race) we had the land, and you had the Bible. Now, we've got the Bible, and you have got the land!" Harding then proceeded to show agreement with the statement, and disgust with the Empire, in the well-known Harding manner.

Now, knowing Harding to be a convert to the Roman Catholic Church (1929), I thought this to be rather strange behaviour, so I wrote him, asking him did he really agree with the coloured gent's statement, as his manner of speech so obviously implied.

His reply was brief and thus: "Your question is too much like the time honoured trap. Have you stopped beating your wife? and I decline to answer it, and beg to be excused from further correspondence."

It amazes me to find that these reputedly clever men always appear evasive and not so clever when occasions like this arise. Personally I am convinced that in this case Mr. Harding set his own trap. Should you require them, I have the letters to hand.

STEPHEN McGRATH.

### SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES

Subsequent to my article of Nov. 25, I would like to make it clear that I have no quarrel with spiritual principles, the observance of which can undoubtedly bring consolation to those who understand and co-operate with them. What I do object to is the Church's insistence that their doctrines are based on Divine Revelation, which I consider to be one of the worst forms of human conceit. Their assertion that Jesus was God himself is to my mind, a sheer assumption as proof of which I quote the first and last paragraphs of the twenty-second Psalm as follows:—"From the Cross He exclaimed "My God, My God why hast Thou forsaken me?" and just before He died His last words were "It is finished. Into Thy Hands, O Father, I commend my Spirit." From this are we to deduce that He was talking to Himself or that He was addressing the Deity?

The modern Clergy who glibly talk about following in the footsteps of the Master have erred and strayed from the pathway He trod, and are more concerned today with rituals, creeds and dogmas, none of which were in existence during the lifetime of Jesus, but have been built up through the ages of successive Scribes and Teachers. It is passing strange that so many different persons should have cognisance of events which had happened centuries before they were born. But that is one of the typical examples of religious mythology and allegorical interpretation. That numerous dissensions within the Church itself are the clearest indication

of inability to grasp essentials consonant with modern trends of thought. Archbishops and Bishops, clad in their medieval garb, and strutting the stage like peacocks at Coronations and other official functions, merely add to the public distrust of their sincerity.

LOUIS S. VERNON-WORSLEY.

### WAS JESUS "IDOLISED" ?

My whole point was that according to the Christian Church Jesus was idolised—that "the common people heard him gladly" which, according to Mr. Du Cann—and now, Mr. Gavel—is not true. Jesus was "all for the few." In this, I beg, not respectfully, to disagree. Whether Jesus did or did not feed more than once a "multitude" with rolls and kippers, I do not know. But the Sacred Record gives once, and that is enough to prove the church is right. For the rest, Mr. Gavel is quite irrelevant. J.R.

### OVERPOPULATION

Neither science nor any political or economic system can, or ever will, increase world food and necessities every generation and go on doing so in perpetuity. Humans can increase their numbers every generation and they will do so in perpetuity without contraception.

It is therefore manifest that these two factors must be taken into consideration no matter what political or economic system mankind elects to live under.

RUPERT L. HUMPHRIS.

### "REDNECK"

I have been trying for some time, unsuccessfully as yet, to discover the origin of the epithet *Redneck* applied to Roman Catholics. It is very old and popular in the district where I live, though no one seems to know how it originated. Can any Free-thinker help?

A. ALMOND.

### IS SCHOOLING EDUCATION ?

I should like to express hearty and complete agreement with C. N. Airey's letter on Education. As a school master's daughter who was never sent to school (because my own father had no belief in orthodox schooling) I can testify to the truth of all that Mr. Airey says. I am almost entirely home-educated and self-educated, and when I entered a university as a mature-age student I found that my knowledge was far in advance of that of the average school product; I had no difficulty whatever in obtaining a Degree. With no desire to boast, I simply wish to range myself on Mr. Airey's side in opposing all schools on many grounds, quite apart from religious ones. Our schools are hotbeds of all-round orthodoxy and conformity, and it is in them that robots are nurtured who will fit in and conform all their lives and never ask awkward questions. Not only that, but they rob the growing child of all margin to his life, of all "time to stand and stare." I can echo Wordsworth, and say, truthfully: "Fair seed-time had I . . ." and that I had it is due entirely to the fact that my wise and kindly parents kept me out of the hands of the educators.

E.S.B.

### OBITUARY

We regret to announce the death, on Monday, 12th December, of Mr. Henry Brown of Edgware, Middlesex, an old member of the N.S.S. and regular reader of *The Freethinker*. A secular service was read by the General Secretary at Golders Green Crematorium on the following Thursday. Mr. Brown, who was 73 years of age, leaves a wife and daughter, to whom we extend our deepest sympathy.

### Special Book Offer

While stocks last we can offer the following parcel containing: *Lift Up Your Heads* (Kent) published 3s. 6d.; *Thomas Paine* (Chapman Cohen) published 1s.; *Marriage, Sacerdotal or Secular* (Du Cann) published 1s.; *Rome or Reason* (Ingersoll) published 1s.; *Age of Reason* (Paine) published 2s. 6d.; *What is The Sabbath Day* (Cutner) published 1s. 3d. The whole parcel (valued 10s. 3d.) offered to readers of *The Freethinker* for 7s. 6d. post free. Cash with order. Strictly nett.

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