

The Freethinker

Vol. LXXVI — No. 4

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Fourpence

THE MODERN international Freethought Movement may be said to date from the French Revolution (1789-94). There were, of course, individual freethinking writers before that date such as Spinoza, Bruno and Hume, but these men and their kind wrote for a narrow circle, drawn mainly from the cultivated aristocracy, and their critical writings passed over the heads of the illiterate masses. It was only with the French Revolution, which, so to speak, put political democracy and "the century of the common man" on the map of History, that free thought and anti-religious criticism obtained a *mass* basis. For it is too often forgotten that the French Revolution was by no means confined to politics in its iconoclastic breach with the "dead hand" of the past.

The French Revolution and Religion

The French Revolution was, of course, first and foremost, a *political* revolution. It effectively abolished the absolute monarchy and the feudal proprietors of land, who dominated what since 1789 it has become fashionable to style, the *Ancient Regime*. One does not make omelettes without breaking eggs and similarly, one does not revolutionise society without breaking, or removing heads. But this sensational and, in general, exaggerated aspect of the French Revolution must not be permitted to obscure its more permanent *constructive* tasks. The whole evolution of modern democracy was foreshadowed in and by, "the ideas of 1789", even including such political creeds as Socialism and Communism, both of which were actively represented during the French Revolution. Nor were the iconoclastic activities of the French Republic confined to the political sphere. Under the old regime, the King of France was "the Most Christian King", and the Roman Catholic church was linked with the French state in an almost totalitarian fashion. The blows of the revolution were necessarily directed nearly as much against the church as against the state. In any case, most of the revolutionary leaders had learned from the great Freethinking philosophers of the 18th century.

Deists and Materialists

Few, if any, of the active participants in the French Revolution were orthodox Christians. They had suffered too much from the tyranny of church and state under the old regime. Beyond occasionally describing Jesus as "a good *sans-culotte*", the then equivalent of the good Republican, the spokesmen of the people did not worship, had little respect for dogmas, and none at all for priests — for the "black carrion who prey on the misery of the poor", as the Radical anti-clerical journal, *Le Père Du Chesne* was never tired of reminding its vast audience of "*sans-culottes*", the "shirtless ones", the "storm troops" of the revolution. However, the Republicans were not unanimous on the subject of religion, some of them were readers of Diderot

and the great manual of 18th century materialism, Baron D'Holbach's *System of nature*. But most of them did not go as far as open Atheism and Materialism. They were Deists who followed Rousseau in believing that faith in some god was a prime necessity of the social order, and Voltaire, to whom a god was its necessary adjunct, a kind of moral policeman, and who summed up this belief in the famous epigram, "If god did not exist, it would be *necessary* (my italics, F.A.R.) to invent him".

"The Feast of Reason"

In the first flush of the revolution, the radical view appeared at first likely to prevail. All over France churches were secularised,

often forcibly, and the priests were suspended from their functions. The unpatriotic attitude of many of the higher clergy, allied by birth and interest with the old aristocracy, now in open insurrection against the new Republican regime, proved a major cause of the startling collapse of French Catholicism in the year 1793, after an uninterrupted ascendancy that dated from the Dark Ages. Both the Freemasons, who seemed to have played a major role in the French Revolution, and the more radical republicans, were behind this apparently organised movement of "de-christianisation". The movement culminated in the famous "Feast of Reason" in Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, the traditional headquarters of French Catholicism. The famous "feast", a virtual manifestation of Atheism, was soon repeated all over France. In the annals of Free Thought, we suggest, this movement occupies a deeply significant place, for despite its ephemeral, and often high emotional character, the multitude who flocked to enthrone "The Goddess Reason" in the very temples of the ancient faith, represented in fact the *first* mass movement against Christianity that Europe had known since the Roman Emperor, Julian the Apostate (361-3), made his final stand, and that of Paganism, against Christianity.

Robespierre and "The Cult of the Supreme Being"

At the end of 1793, when the "de-christianising" cult reached its height, Christianity in France appeared to be finally on the way out. The American Ambassador wrote to George Washington that "France has ceased to be a Christian land", but this opinion proved to be premature. At this precise point there began a sharp swing backwards, which installed, first Deism, then finally restored Catholicism as the State-Church of the French People. The guiding spirit of the Deistic dispensation was the famous "Sea Green Incorruptible", the austere "Tribune of the People", the Jacobin orator Maximilian Robespierre, then at the height of his power. Robespierre was a disciple of Rousseau, and as such, a fanatical Deist. "Atheism", he declared, "is aristocratic. The idea of a Supreme Being who avenges outraged innocence and punishes triumphant crime, is essentially the idea of the people". Pursuant on which opinion, Robespierre closed down the "Temples of

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

Christianity and the French Revolution

— By F. A. RIDLEY —

Reason", executed the anti-clerical leaders as "aristocratic" (sic), and, finally (June 14th, 1794) proclaimed the public "Feast of the Supreme Being", with himself as the High Priest of the cult, Sovereign Pontiff and Dictator, simultaneously! A few weeks later, Robespierre was hurried from supreme power to the guillotine on the dramatic day of the ninth *Thermidor* (July 27th), but the movement towards the restoration of religion continued to gather momentum.

"The Mystery of the Social Order"

After Robespierre's fall, the government of the French "Directory", officially tolerated Catholicism as a recognised cult. In 1801 the wheel came full circle. The then "First Consul", Napoleon Buonaparte, made an official *concordat* with Rome, by which Catholicism was again recognised as the state religion, on condition that it recognised the new regime set up by the revolution. This implied the recognition by the church of the confiscation of much of its former property. Napoleon was the arch exponent of the "Moral Policeman" theory of Voltaire and Rousseau, which he expressed with brutal lucidity. "I regard religion not as the mystery of the Incarnation, but as the mystery of the Social Order. If, in a society founded on unequal fortunes, the poor did not believe in *equality in Heaven*

(my italics, F.A.R.), they would rise in revolution and cut the throats of the rich", "The opium of the people" — *sans phrase!*

"To Point the Moral"

Why did Christianity, after all, manage to survive the French Revolution? Upon this precise theme, the eminent French social historian, Monsieur Daniel Guérin, makes some striking comments in a recently published study. The failure of the revolution to abolish religion, represented, he suggests, the effective failure of that revolution to implement fully the original programme of "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity". From the moment that the revolutionary regime found it necessary to compromise with "The Opium of the People", the revolutionary government admitted its incapacity to produce the social and intellectual conditions in which human beings would no longer require such "opium" to reconcile them to the miseries of existence. By this impressive demonstration, the intellectual struggle against religion becomes inseparably linked with the social struggle for a society in which human happiness will be the rule, and not as was said at the time of the French Revolution, "a new idea in Europe". For in such an atmosphere alone religion would effectively cease to be "The Mystery of the Social Order".

AN OPEN LETTER

[The radio programme, "Questioning the Bible", on the North Regional, proved to be yet another running to type, and the following protest was sent to the Regional Director by the President of the Bradford Branch of the N.S.S.]

SIR — As a licence holder, I feel entitled to register the strongest possible protest at the paltry and privileged prank played on North Regional listeners. The title of this was, I suggest, deliberately misleading and the item proved to be yet another of the "stooged" frame-ups so beloved of the religious fraternity, wherein professional apologists conduct "debates" and "discussions" with protagonists of similar persuasion and privilege, who set up the Aunt Sallies to be as readily knocked down, or bowl the innocent lobs which are so easily hit for six.

"Questioning the Bible" as a title for this programme was a gross misnomer and to me an obvious swindle. The professional apologists knew very well that the many really searching questions as to the authority, authenticity and accuracy of the Bible which could have been put to them were never even hinted at.

As it is proposed to hold a series of these travesties, it is to be hoped that some really relevant questions will be asked, and that some qualified unbeliever will be brought into the programme to provide authentic opposition. If we can have conflict of political opinion, why not conflict of religious opinion? Religion is as much a matter of opinion as is politics. The professional politician is no more able to prove his contentions than is the professional religionist.

I offer the following suggestions for subsequent programmes in this series:

1. That the parsons be confronted with a bona-fide unbeliever, who shall only be allowed to postulate precise questions about the Bible. Such a one could easily be obtained by contacting the Secretary of the National Secular Society.
2. If a "stooge" is used, he should be provided with a copy of the Bible Handbook published by the N.S.S. and allowed to put up "real" questions.

3. That real and pertinent questions be solicited from listeners and that the parsons be not allowed to make their own choice.

Meantime I append a few questions which the parsons might get their teeth into:

1. Who *did* write the various books of the Old and New Testaments?
2. What were their precise qualifications?
3. What happened to the original documents?
4. In the absence of original documents and in view of the multifarious revisions and translations, how can the meaning, or the implications, or the veracity of the documents be checked?
5. When were the originals written?
6. When the originals were written, what was the circulation of such and what proportion of the then population would be able to read?
7. What opportunity would, even then, exist for the incredulous to challenge the writings, or to bring them into debate?
8. On what ground are the Jewish and/or Christian Holy Scriptures to be regarded as superior to the "seered" writings of other and older religious theories?
9. What precisely differentiates the "inspiration" of "authorised" scripture from "apocryphal" scripture?
10. What were the exact and precise qualifications of those who selected the "inspired" writings?
11. What exactly and precisely is "inspiration" and what constitutes "divine inspiration"?
12. How is an "inspired" writing cognised as such?
13. It is freely admitted today by most professional parsons and theologians that much of the Bible is to be regarded as allegorical, parabolical, mythological and symbolical, and as such, *not* factual, *not* historical, *not* veridical. Who, then, is to pronounce as to what portions of such scriptures are true, or false, mythological, or historical, allegorical, or actual?

Yours truly, H. DAY

“Conceived in Liberty”

By COLIN McCALL

A MONTH AGO I took the opportunity of a Sunday performance to see again that fine American film, *Born Yesterday*, in which, it will be remembered, a “dumb blonde” — delightfully played by Miss Judy Holliday — is introduced to American culture, so that she will not be a hindrance in political and society life. Reluctant at first, she later imbibes the great liberal tradition of the United States, disseminates some of it for our benefit and, incidentally, marries her mentor.

Born Yesterday is of particular interest to Freethinkers because it mentions — in addition to Thomas Jefferson — Thomas Paine (who, says Miss Holliday, “practically started this whole country”) and his books *The Age of Reason* and *Rights of Man*, and Robert G. Ingersoll, whose passage evoked by the tomb of Napoleon (from *The Liberty of Man, Woman and Child*) is recited. This film is of singular importance today because of its warning against forgetting “the principles on which America was founded”. The warning is terribly necessary because many Americans seem to have forgotten those principles and others are deliberately ignoring them.

Is it conceivable that a Jefferson would expel Mr. Cedric Belfrage; that a Lincoln would deny a visa to Mr. Paul Robeson? Would either have tolerated an Un-American Activities Committee or the widespread use of “loyalty oaths”? I cannot believe so. Panic has gripped many aspects of American life, as numerous observers testify. It even affects American tourists abroad, as I know from personal experience, and it has not ended with the eclipse of Senator McCarthy, gratifying though that is. Mr. Cedric Belfrage has referred to a “calculated campaign of intimidation”, saying that he is sure the number of people jailed, financially-ruined or deported must run into tens of thousands, adding — most terrible of all — “they could have saved themselves if they had turned informers”.

This near-insanity which regards everybody left of the Republican party as a Communist, a “red” or, perhaps worse, an atheist, must be viewed, I suggest, as part of a systematic attempt to destroy the foundations of American democracy, trading always upon fear. It is accompanied by a powerful effort to end the separation of church and state. For, in fact, the U.S.A. is godless. Article I of the Bill of Rights (Amendments of the Constitution, 1789) reads: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances”. And Article XI of the U.S. Treaty with Tripoli (1796/7), accepted as an authoritative statement, begins: “As the government of the United States of America is not in any sense founded on the Christian religion . . .”; while the decision of the Supreme Court in the *Zorach* case (1952) was that the U.S. Government “may not finance religious groups nor undertake religious instruction nor blend secular and sectarian education nor use secular institutions to force one or some religion on any person”.

Like other lovers of liberty, Freethinkers are doing their best to combat the threat to all that they — and the U.S.A. as originally conceived — stand for. As noted in THE FREETHINKER (6/1/56), twelve independent bodies met last November and formed the “American Rationalist Federation” to “co-ordinate on a national scale the efforts of

local, autonomous Rationalist, Secularist, Freethought and like-minded organisations in preserving the principles of separation of church and state, and to promote Rationalism . . .” And Freethought periodicals in many states are helping to keep liberal democracy alive. *Progressive World* (New Jersey), organ of the United Secularists of America, *The Liberal* (Pennsylvania), bulletin of the Friendship Liberal League, *The Age of Reason* (New York) and *Voice of Freedom* (Wisconsin) are among the foremost of these. But one should not overlook duplicated papers like *Secular Subjects* of the Rationalist Society of St. Louis or *The Ripsaw*, edited by Mr. Virgil McClain in South Bend, Indiana, where even the civic-owned library is considerably influenced by the Roman Catholic University of Notre Dame.

The November issue of the *Voice of Freedom* (published in English and German) contains an article on the “loyalty oath” which calls attention to the “growing tendency to inaugurate a system of thought control and conformity in the best totalitarian fashion”. “Prospective government and state civilian employees, all military personnel, including college or university R.O.T.C. students and many private job applicants, are required to take such an oath”. “In view of these requirements”, it continues, “in a few years nearly all the citizens of this country will have their personal data and beliefs on file in some government agency”. Lest this should seem extravagant, I remind readers of Chief Justice Earl Warren’s computation that 8,000,000 American people have already had to sign “loyalty oaths”. And consider the irony when the same Chief Justice tells graduates of the University of Michigan: “Have no fear of taking a stand on public questions whether your reasoning conforms to the majority or not. You will be eventually respected for your independence. Conformity is no special virtue. Sometimes nonconformity is exactly the antidote needed to remedy a condition”. “Eventually” is the operative word here. As *Voice of Freedom* notes, President Harlan Hatcher was dismissed from the same university a year ago for publicly standing on his rights under the fifth amendment of the U.S. constitution. More recently, a \$75,000 offer by the Thomas Paine Foundation of New York to erect a memorial in Providence, Rhode Island, was rejected because Paine — in the words of the Mayor — “was and remains so controversial a character”.

There can be little doubt that the Federal Bureau of Investigation (F.B.I.) is a form of secret police and that it is violating the Articles of the Bill of Rights. Article IV guarantees “The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures . . .”; Article V states that “No person shall be held to answer for a capital, or otherwise infamous crime, unless on a presentment or indictment of a grand jury, except in cases arising in the land or naval forces, or in the militia, when in actual service in time of war or public danger . . .” There can be no doubt that religion — and particularly Catholicism — is making a strong bid to end the traditional separation of church and state. In fact, the essential bases of American civil liberties are in danger.

I asked above how Jefferson and Lincoln would have reacted to such situations. They, like Paine, Washington, Ingersoll, like all who helped to build the great liberal democracy, would utterly have condemned the current

[Continued on next page

The Divinity of Blunders

—reputed to be a suppressed poem of Robert Burns (born January 25th, 1759)

To gull the mob and keep them under,
The ancients told their tales of wonder:
A pious fraud, a holy blunder,
 A rainbow sign,
An earthquake, or a blast o' thunder,
 Were held divine.

By those who've faith to swallow doses,
A wondrous story nothing loses,
The dext'rous feats ascribed to Moses
 Are proof as plain
O' slight o' hand, as Herman Bose's
 Legerdemain.

Believe the stories o' tradition,
Let sense tak' place o' superstition,
The royal magic competition —
 Oh! sacred fountain
Which can a midge, by faith's volition,
 Swell to a mountain.

A God of mercy, just and good,
Held forth as in an angry mood,
Droonin' the world in flood,
 To punish Hymen;
And turnin' water into blood
 Just like a demon.

He murdered thousands in a trice,
Made Egypt swarm wi' frogs and lice;
Had he made coos, and sheep, and rice,
 His hungry hordes then
Might ilka yin hae got a slice
 An' praise their Lord then.

Wi' hocus-pocus rod in hand,
Like Mother Goose's magic wand,
They could the elements command.
 As legends run —
Divide the sea, or burn the land,
 Or stop the Sun.

Their prodigies bombast surpasses,
Like dykes the ocean stood in masses,
They'd flying Prophets, speaking Asses,
 Besides a saut Wife,
Their am'rous ghosts o'ercame the lasses,
 Wha lived that life.

Their Samson's strength lay in his hair,
Their jealous waters sterling were.
Showers o' fire cam' thro' the air,
 Like brimstone danders;
Saints lived in fire, by virtue rare,
 Like salamanders.

The Apostle Paul, by fancy's whim,
Soar'd up to heaven as in a dream,
An' Satan brought him back, 'twould seem,
 Sosays himsel;
But how could Nick to heaven climb,
 Wha's chained in Hell?

This damn'd an' wily serpent Nick,
Was promised lang a mighty kick,
But turned the chase, and played the trick
 Wi' God's first-born,
He got him scourg'd, nailed on a stick,
 An' crowned wi' thorn.

First search the subject through the piece:
'Tis fraught wi' blunders such as these,
That rev'rend priests their flocks may fleece
 Wi' wily conscience —
Teach human being by degrees
 To swallow nonsense.

The sovereign leaders of each faction
Join hand in hand in close compaction
To set God's kingdom up for auction,
 A lumpin' bargain!
Drive silly mortals to destruction,
 Wi' their damn'd jargon.

Yet mortal truth shall gain the day
Illum'd by Nature's glorious ray,
Anathemas shall flee away,
 Wi' priests and de'ils;
Sound reason shall her sceptre sway
 Hard at their heels.

"CONCEIVED IN LIBERTY"

Concluded from page 27

trend as being completely opposed to "the principles on which America was founded". *Progressive World* (November 1955) recalled that, in the Virginia statute for religious freedom, Jefferson wrote: "That the opinions of men are not the subject of civil government nor under its jurisdiction; that to suffer the civil magistrate to intrude his powers into the field of opinion and to restrain the profession of propaganda of principles on supposition of their ill tendency is a dangerous fallacy because he, being of course judge of that tendency, will make his opinions the rule of judgment and approve or condemn the sentiments of others only as they shall square or differ from his own". It was a timely revocation. Mr. Charles Chaplin recently said that he wouldn't return to America "if Jesus Christ were President". No! But he might if Thomas Jefferson were.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY 50th ANNUAL DINNER

followed by Social and Dance

All Welcome SATURDAY, 4th FEBRUARY, 1956
at the MECCA RESTAURANT
11 - 12 BLOMFIELD STREET, E.C.2
(Near Liverpool St. and Broad St. Stations)

RECEPTION 6.30 P.M. DINNER 7.0 P.M.

Vegetarians Catered for Evening Dress Optional

Guest of Honour: MRS. MARGARET KNIGHT
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THE FREETHINKER

41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

Telephone: Holborn 2601.

THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, £1 4s. (in U.S.A., \$3.50); half-year, 12s.; three months, 6s.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

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

Notes and News

ALL WHO intend coming to the Jubilee Dinner of the N.S.S. should notify the General Secretary *at once*. This will help the work "behind the scenes". In more ways than one, this Dinner will be unique, and a record attendance is expected. In addition to the principal guest, Mrs. Margaret Knight, Mr. J. Henry Lloyd will represent the Humanist Council, and that mystifying magician, Mr. John Brearley, should prove a great attraction. There will be a band for dancing and every opportunity for members and guests to get together for talks and exchange of views. But send at once for your tickets, please.

★

WE ARE always more than pleased to hear of the part taken by Freethinkers in local press controversies. This is an excellent way of bringing the Freethought case to the notice of the public, and particularly to the notice of the younger members of that public, many of whom are by this means brought into contact with Freethought for the first time. Mention of the National Secular Society and of THE FREETHINKER, when possible, is also a help.

★

OF MANY recent successes in this direction, Mr. J. L. Shepherd, a new member of the N.S.S. Executive, was during December and January conducting a highly successful epistolary combat in the *Express and Independent* (Essex), in which both Mr. Shepherd and his opponents were given a most generous allowance of space week after week. Not only Mr. Shepherd, but also the Editor of this paper, is to be complimented. It was an example of fair play which, we are glad to note, is becoming more and more common these days. The discussion turned on the Bible, Christian morality and Christianity's social record in

Special Notice

Owing to difficulties caused by the Printing Trade dispute, this issue of THE FREETHINKER has been hurriedly prepared and certain items have had to be unavoidably excluded. In particular, *This Believing World*, *Lecture Notices* and acknowledgements for the Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund. We hope to be "back to normal" next week; meanwhile we ask your forbearance.

various spheres, and one of Mr. Shepherd's letters ran to some 1,300 words. Among his opponents, it is gratifying to note that he drew clerical blood. Mr. Shepherd answered his opponents point by point, and skilfully exploited their admissions. A plurality of opponents was also turned to his advantage, as he was thus able to exploit their differences. The whole controversy cannot have failed to have made its mark in many places.

★

READERS in London are asked to note in advance that the young but active Central London Branch are organising a MacCabe-Cohen Commemoration Meeting, at Holborn Hall on Thursday, March 1st. Amongst speakers will be the author of the best-seller — *Catholic Church against the Twentieth Century*—Avro Manhattan. Further particulars, and reserved seats (stamped addressed envelope, please), may be obtained from the Branch Secretary, Mr. J. M. Alexander, 249 Caledonian Road, London, N.1, 'phone Terminus 6930. It is hoped all will endeavour to make this meeting as widely known as possible.

Whenever I meet with scoundrelism, though captured by ever so great a name, my pen shall have all the liberty of my sentiments.
—*Iolo Morganwg* (precursor of Chartism, 1786).

TITLES

If fame require a handle
To give a great name girth,
A title's worth the candle,
But what's the candle worth?

A.E.C.

Norfolk and Cornwall

Two N.S.S. members living in Norfolk and Cornwall respectively, would like to hear from other members in their districts with a view to forming branches. They are: Mr. C. E. Boughton, "Blakesware", 16, Lady Betty Road, Norwich (Tel. No. Norwich 20147) and Mr. D. J. Crowle, of 29, Parc-an-Dower, Helston, Cornwall.

We hope that Secularists in these two areas will cooperate with Mr. Boughton and Mr. Crowle, and we wish every success to the ventures.

Wishful Thinking?

Bishop Fulton J. Sheen told a congregation of worshippers in Boston recently that one day he would celebrate mass in Moscow's Kremlin. Dire threat indeed, and certainly unbecoming in one who preaches peace. —*Progressive World*. (U.S.A., January 1956).

OBITUARY

ALFRED FLETCHER

We learn with regret of the death, at the age of 70, of a very solid Freethinker of Bolton, Mr. Alfred Fletcher, who was a railwayman for some 40 years. He served in the first World War and was in the thick of the Somme battle. A secular service was conducted by Mr. Poulden at Bolton Crematorium on January 12th.

NEXT WEEK

THE FOURTH GOSPEL

By F. A. RIDLEY

Ask at your Library

"**The Day Before Yesterday**" by J. W. ROBERTSON SCOTT.
Published by Methuen & Co., 36, Essex Street, London, W.C.2.
Price 21s.

ROBERTSON SCOTT is well-known in reading circles as the founder and editor for over 20 years of *The Countrymen*. In addition he has written many books on Japan, China and many other subjects and is an authority on rural England.

This book was published in 1951 when the author was 85 years old but he has kept pace with the times. It is not the nostalgic lamentations of a past age that interest him but rather what can be learned from the mistakes of our forebears.

What an interesting life the author has led, numbering amongst his friends and acquaintances people from all walks of life. He knew Charles Bradlaugh, Mrs. Besant, George J. Holyoake and G. W. Foote, whom he describes as "a robust reformer who went to gaol as editor of THE FREETHINKER, but had his high and constant courage proclaimed by George Meredith".

"Some 70 to 80 years ago", Mr. Scott says, "the shudder that accompanied the name of Bradlaugh or Ingersoll is something difficult to imagine today".

The Day Before Yesterday is really a history and a story of 76 years in Britain. He also paints a vivid picture of religion, slums, drunkenness, malnutrition, during the age that was declared to be the time of England's greatness, and yet we are told that what the world needs today is a return to the faith of our fathers.

In the days about which the author writes, miners worked naked in the pits; their wives, stripped to the waist, harnessed like animals, to pull coal tubs; and little children of five and six years employed as watchers were kept in the pits from 16 to 18 hours a day.

Every phase of life in the industrial age is touched on in this book, but the terrible—yes, terrible—effects of a religion that preached about and believed in the reality of hell must be read to be believed, especially by the younger generation.

The author says "Biblical inspiration was verbal and Heaven and Hell were as real as the House of Commons . . . time was short, the wrath of God was real, and the young were taught as in a sampler worked by a child of eight years,

Religion should our thoughts engage,
Amidst our youthful bloom;
It fits us for declining age
And for the awful tomb.

Decent people, not a few of whom had been to universities, believed in eternal punishment".

Continuing in the same strain, Mr. Scott says "Zoology of the panting worm, in the following verse, bothered me too:

Pardon a worm that would draw near,
That would to Thee his heart resign;
A worm by self and sin oppressed,
That pants to reach the promised rest!"

The Christian of today who would like to forget what his religion taught less than 70 years ago, has to thank the unbelievers and the Freethinkers who helped to civilise his God.

There never were "good old days". Certainly there were good days for a few wealthy people, with income tax 4d. in the £; but for the great majority life was sordid and brutal; the only hope given to millions was the "home in the sky", where Jesus was getting ready for them.

Here is another sample of the criminal doctrine preached by a Church that bleated about a God of Love:

My thoughts on awful subjects roll:
Damnation and the dead;
What horrors seize a guilty soul
Upon a dying bed!

And this savage, brutal belief is held by millions of Christians today, notably those of the R.C. Church and the Salvation Army, who firmly hold these primitive views and pride themselves on being true Christians in doing so.

Evidently Robertson Scott did his own thinking as a boy, as he has apparently done all his life, for he says: "I was quite young, however, when I took refuge in the lines familiar to Scots:

Here lie I, Martin Elginbrodde;
Have mercy on my soul, Lord God,
As I wad dae, were I Lord God
And Ye were Martin Elginbrodde".

Mr. Scott's chapter on "Damnation and the Dead" puts Christianity in the dock, and the verdict must be "guilty".

Before finishing with Hell, let us quote from genial Ralph Erskine on this place, where even the Esquimaux would object to the heat—"What a bed is there, not feathers but fire, no friends but furies, no ease but fetters, no daylight but darkness, endless eternity, fire not quenched, the smoke going up for ever and ever, the wicked crowded like bricks in a fiery furnace".

It was much easier for people to believe any fantastic yarn they were told when, as we read, in 1859 the National Grant for education was no more than £840,000; John Morley records that in 1850-60 the education of England was in the hands of the clergy and that in 1841-1845 it was estimated that 32.5% of men and 48.9% of the women in the country could not read.

Mr. Scott tells us that every fourth house in Glasgow was a public house and it was estimated that every Saturday night over 15,000 people got drunk. In 1869, when the population of England was half what it is now, 20,769 women were convicted of drunkenness. In 1947 the number was 6,170; and it is probably much less today.

When Billy Graham and every leather-lunged Evangelist tell us that this is an age of gross materialism, and that we must return to the days when England was really Christian England, we know that they are either liars or fools—probably a mixture of both.

F. A. HORNIBROOK

The French Elections

THE conflict about Catholic and State-supported schools is in itself of great importance; moreover, it raises the question of the State's secularism. We are many, over here, who are perfectly aware that the totalitarian-minded Roman Catholic Church will never limit its demands unless compelled to. By no means should we welcome anything like a camouflaged theocracy, on the Spanish or Irish model, to say nothing of other countries. Suspicious of the Radicals, and even of certain Socialists, concerning this particular point, many voters, though non-Communist themselves, did in fact give their votes to Communists, by way of a counterweight.

Similarly, the unnecessary Catholic bias assumed by the defunct Plan for European Reorganisation roused suspicion among circles that were not unfavourable to this Plan on a purely political and economic plane.

Too often, here and abroad, the Rightists hypocritically professed that non-religious or anti-clerical persons are necessarily ethically inferior and of a Communist trend. If they meant to push more people towards Communism, they could not have done better.

JEAN FOURNEL (Oullins, France)

Smog, Drought and Religious Neurosis

By R. READER

SMOG AND CHRISTIANITY — what is the "tie-up"?

To suggest there is any necessary connection may appear, at first sight, far-fetched. But let us look a little more closely into the matter.

It is the long-standing and time-honoured Christian practice to "increase and multiply", apparently without thought for the morrow. This implies towns, small at first, then gradually bulging as their occupants increase and multiply in Christian fashion. The surrounding woods and grass are bulldozered into built-up areas. Cement pours over the earth: toxic substances pour into the atmosphere. Vegetation disappears and atmospheric oxygen decreases. The friendly rain, however, washes out dangerous substances, with weak solutions running away underfoot. And so nothing startling happens at first.

Then suddenly — the lethal blanket of 1952, toxic gases from concentrated solutions in suspended moisture droplets, drawn into human lungs . . .

The remedies? A whiffling, bustling activity in power station stacks, plus a new stream of gas in the form of official jabbering to make coal consumers "smoke-conscious". But the conditions for smog are too numerous and too complicated to be treated in such naïve ways. They include wind force and direction, temperature, humidity, pressure, the Thames Estuary and tides; and smoke from houses, factories and vehicles. Nor is it known whether a slight variation in any one factor might not have produced far worse results. The "remedy" for smog, in fact, reminds one forcibly of the "beacon-and-crossing solution" of traffic accidents.

The truth — that we are so numerous that we are literally poisoning one another — looms mountains high. "Ssh! Let's break up large towns by dispersing their populations". "What happens when the little towns grow into big towns?" "My dear boy, you're jumping too far ahead". (Thinks: "I shan't be here to worry about that".)

So each generation builds the misery of the next. So the 19th century bequeathed us the present world malaise. Scientific advance, guided by religious neurosis, then produced 14 children per family, 10 of whom often survived to beget another 60. Parents and grandparents luxuriated in the illusion that they were thus cheating death. Today, couples no longer have 14 offsprings, but the mischief has been done: *there are far too many couples*, all struggling for ever-rarer gratifications, and all becoming ever more irritable, frustrated, jaded, and divorce-prone. And death itself, in spite of teeming millions and medical science, hits back ever harder with poliomyelitis, cancer, heart disease, war, extermination camps, mental disease, and the threat of nuclear bombardment.

In England, free to some extent from the medieval scourge of Catholicism, enlightened priests no longer advise couples to have large families unless they can afford them. But finance alone is a completely artificial and untrustworthy guide, fundamental criteria being, first, biological desirability, and secondly, the balance between *actual* (not possible) world production of material goods; *actual* (not possible) means of distribution; and *actual* (not future) population trends. Furthermore, although priests counsel fewer children, they always counsel *some* children, it being apparently axiomatic that childless couples are desperately unhappy. So widespread is this notion that it is also supported by medical men with financial fingers in the population pie. The country, however, that imposes crushing fines

for large families, at the same time opening birth control clinics free to all, has nothing to fear. It is making an appeal to the intelligence, decision, and sense of responsibility of its people, and not their cupidity. There will be fewer young arms to defend such a country, and an increasing percentage of older people. What of it? There will also be rising physical and mental standards, a unity, cohesion, and personal awareness of values to be defended which are tragically lacking today. Such a country will be an invincible opponent. The enemy are breeding faster? Let them. Physical and mental degenerates, military zeros, economic chaos, strife, discord and lack of unity will defeat them more surely than any military operation. Certain pious "patriots" smirk over large families. But are they not playing the enemy's game — and, moreover, playing it in a country where the evils of overpopulation are felt more universally and acutely than in a land of steppes and tundra and vast distances?

Religious neurosis, as ever, stands in the way. As an example — quite a gem — we may quote the leading article of a daily newspaper. The subject is the Durham drought. After being told that more and more water is needed for the growing Durham area population, the R.A.F.'s reply to Durham — that clouds cannot be provided to produce rain — is likened to Augustus' unsatisfactory reply to the wine-thirsty Romans, that he had given them plenty of water. Having thus established an historical (and, by suggestion, religious) atmosphere, the article concludes: "It is a sobering reflection for proud man that, though he can blow up the world, he can do little or nothing about a drought, and must rely, as his ancestors did, on an answer to prayer". Of course. Whatever else happens, neurotic delirium, seeking safety, consolation and immunity from death in more of everything — especially young life — must not be impeded. It must be left to work out to its final conclusion — the descent of Man below a beast, terminating in a pile of stinking radioactive corpses.

Is your conviction in bliss after death so strong that this doesn't matter? If so, you don't need to worry about wars, housing, finance, rent, smog, or, indeed, anything else. Until, of course, you bump up against the paradoxically material laws of this spiritual community. But if, at that juncture, some lingering doubt then assails you, would it not be more prudent to start freethinking? Or, better still, to avoid the whole thing by freethinking now?

LECTURE REPORT

Mr. F. A. Ridley, President of the National Secular Society, addressed the Bradford Branch on the subject "Henry VIII and Princess Margaret", on January 8th. Mr. Ridley was very cordially received by a friendly audience of 36 to 40, and produced a lecture much to their liking. Mr. Ridley expressed himself as being highly delighted with the general atmosphere of the meeting and with the quality of the free and healthy discussion which followed it.

LECTURE TO CHRISTIANS

The gathering attending the Upminster Men's Forum in the Methodist Church Parlour on Monday, January 9th, went away well informed about "Atheism and Secularism", which was the title of a lecture given by Mr. P. Victor Morris to that group. It was evident from the questions put to the speaker afterwards that his audience had been stimulated by the information put forward; indeed, the Forum's members, the majority of whom were Non-conformists, were discussing the subject so vigorously that the Chairman did not find it easy to close the meeting. Eventually, however, he succeeded, thanking Mr. Morris warmly for his address. As a parting gesture a member invoked the blessing of God Almighty on all present.

CORRESPONDENCE

THE LORD'S DECISION

Your article in *THE FREETHINKER* of November 22nd, 1955 (Atheists v. Catholics) had my full attention, and, though I quite agree with its contents, I'm really at a loss to know why the Dublin Archbishop and his fellow-clergymen did not pray to their "Lord" or to any of the heavenly saints to prevent the football match, Eire v. Yugoslavia. And, if they did, no doubt it was the "Lord's" decision—in His incomprehensible Plan—to have the match played! The Eireann clergy ought to be obedient and accept this "Lord's" decision. Moreover, it's obvious that it was "God's" intention that the Yugoslavs won this match 4—1. Otherwise those Yugoslav Communists would have been defeated, for, is the "God" of the Catholics not an Almighty God?

It seems to me that these Catholics do not show much faith in the omnipotence of their own "Lord". Perhaps they are right.
Holland. J. LIEDERMOOY.

"WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR"

May I be allowed to add a word or two to your excellent review of *Without Fear or Favour*, for after a careful perusal the first thing that struck me was what a mine of good matter for our speakers to extract from. The first thing is to get it into our local libraries and if our lecturers will quote and advise those interested to obtain and read it, I feel sure that the problem posed by a friend of mine when referring to it, i.e., how to get it to the people who need the information contained in it, will in part be solved. Especially interesting are the chapters on "The Puritan of Wowser", "The Menace of V.D.", "On Alcohol", and that on "frustration". Greatly in its favour is the fact that it is not a dry or difficult book to read. It is written in a bright and taking style, interspersed with witty and racy anecdotes. (Mrs.) G. MATSON.

MONARCHY OR REPUBLIC

The excellent and important article by E. G. Macfarlane on the above subject should be supported by all Freethinkers.

Mr. Corrick, whose letters I always find interesting, would discover his solution as difficult to effect as a President of a Republic elected by the people. He seems to think that a President in this country would be a dictator and says our Monarchs are peaceful. Does he realise the power behind the throne which Sir Stafford Cripps referred to some years ago as the "Buckingham Palace gang", and for which he was promptly pounced upon by the press? Are not such types behind the refusal of the B.B.C. to allow the late Chapman Cohen and other Freethinkers to broadcast? Do they not perpetuate the snobbery rampant in the country, preventing the setting up, in Mr. Macfarlane's words, of a "true single-class republic"? Surely, if we found a President to be a dictator we could deal with him at the next election. The expense of Royalty does not seem to concern most people. Even when the Labour Party gained power in 1945, £50,000 was spent on reconditioning the palatial Clarence House for Princess Elizabeth and her husband, and this at a time when the housing of the people was at its most distressing stage.

Since then another £6,000 has been spent on the same building in order to meet the wishes of the Queen Mother and Princess Margaret, and this without the slightest protest from any M.P.

W. MORRIS.

MONARCHY OR REPUBLIC?

In reply to Mr. Corrick, I wish to see the formation of a movement directly aimed at changing the constitutions of all the nations in the world so as to make them ripe for inclusion in a world-wide free-democratic state. This movement, which must of course be political (i.e., putting up candidates for Parliament as against all nationalist or totalitarian parties) will be inspired by general principles which might be acceptable to persons of all colours and traditions.

The continuation of the Christian monarchic line is obviously unsuited for this purpose, and it is for this reason that I am opposed to the present British version of monarchy. As a "worldist" I recognise that the hereditary principle brings us into conflict with the monarchic lines in other countries. Solution: abandon the hereditary principle. As a Freethinker I see that a Christian tradition is logically bound to arouse the opposition of those who have been reared in the Moslem, Buddhist and Atheist, etc., traditions. Solution: keep the state neutral to religion.

As a democrat, I am prepared to accept the majority feeling of the world-state movement as to the best way of substituting for the monarch as we know it in Britain. My personal feeling on the subject is that the function of the monarch could be fulfilled by

an elected President who could be constitutionally prevented from creating "strife, trouble and political purges". I think we do need a person who can make executive decisions in times of stress when governments are changing and who can represent the whole people on state occasions. The fact that the present monarch is chosen by heredity and is obliged to take vows to uphold Christian doctrine is, however, anathema to me and thus I cannot agree that she "represents" me at any time. I could give my support to a popularly elected state leader who was not committed to acting as a mouthpiece for any particular positive faith. E. G. MACFARLANE.

"FREETHOUGHT"

Seeing that the death penalty is officially opposed by the N.S.S. in its Aims and Objects, I am one who after over 50 years of being an ATHEIST, think that it should be retained.

Murders, rapes, and other serious crimes are increasing every day, due to the sloppy sentimentality of a decadent "civilisation". Almost every day we see reports of yet another murder. About one in four murderers is not discovered, and of the few that are sentenced to death—a very small proportion—most are deemed to be "insane".

The trials of murderers last for months and the public revel in them, with crowded courts and morbid spectators, just like those who revel in the pantomimical shows of Billy Graham, and the ritual of the House of Lords and Royal spectacles.

Those who compile the crime and murder offences astutely hide the real facts by pointing out that there are fewer cases since the sloppy legislation of recent years that has encouraged all criminals.

These figures say nothing about the 75% of murders that are never found out, and after many thousands of pounds have been spent on trials, and a verdict of guilty is returned—any sentimental Home Secretary can rescind it. What a farce it all is. Our juvenile courts are choked with serious cases, so many that I opine the police find it is useless to charge them, as the "delinquents" are told to "go home and be good". Hence we have created a nation of decadent people, by removing the deterrents, and this is called "enlightenment". If murderers are made into heroes, civilisation must inevitably destroy itself. FRANK BURGESS.

Few people seem to realise that Capital Punishment does not necessarily involve the bestial business of hanging. What is wrong with the hypodermic needle? Perhaps opponents of C.P. would tell us what can be done with the man who assaulted five-year-old Susan Cadieux and left her to freeze to death, with the tears frozen to her face. MOLLY ROCHE.

FROM ASTRONOMY TO ATHEISM

It appears, taking into consideration an astronomer's recent television series, that it is now quite in order to say there is no conceivable evidence of any purpose or design in the running and maintenance of that gigantic machine, our universe. Few Freethinkers would doubt, however, that if the same speaker had dared to maintain that there is no evidence of a God or creator, which after all amounts to the same thing, the howling heretics of reason would, once again, be storming the B.B.C.'s portals demanding the annihilation of such freethought.

Or is it, perhaps, that the Christian protectionists, having learnt their lesson over the Mrs. Knight controversy, do not now wish to enter into a battle with Reason in the full view of an interested general public? J. R. POTHECARY.

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