

The Freethinker

Vol. LXXVI—No. 23

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Fivepence

IN RESPONSE to many requests, and in the interests of freedom, we are devoting the opening pages of this issue to a small matter of two or three minutes that never materialised. Are we making a mountain out of a molehill? That is for you to decide. We think, on the contrary, that the mountain-stronghold of Christianity known as the BBC has to be stormed, and, as always, Freethinkers must lead the charge. This, then, is a battle-call, but, unlike most commanders, we think that the troops should know what they are fighting for and the incident which provoked the battle. We, therefore, lay the facts before you—and hope you will enlist.

Just before Easter, the National Secular Society was approached by the BBC to provide a speaker who would be willing to present, briefly and simply, the case for atheism. At first they asked for half-a-dozen but, when we requested that these should be allowed to give reasons for their unbelief, the number was reduced to one. We still accepted, and, as General Secretary, Mr. Colin McCall was chosen as the single representative. In response to a telephone call on April 11th, he attended at Lime Grove that same evening and his brief, unscripted talk was filmed there and then. A week later he received a letter from the Television Booking Department.

Promise
The letter was as follows:

Ref.: 35/DEK
Dear Mr. McCall,

17th April, 1956.

“BRITAIN IN DECLINE?” — 22nd May

I am writing to confirm our telephone conversation regarding the 3½ minute talk which you gave in the film sequence on the 11th April, which will form part of the above programme.

We shall be pleased to pay you a fee of five guineas (£5.5.0), it being understood that all rights in the recording shall vest in the Corporation. Will you kindly sign the acknowledgment at the foot of this letter and return to us, retaining the duplicate copy, and our accountants will forward the cheque in due course.

Yours sincerely,

(Signed) D. E. KNIGHT,
Television Booking Department.

Colin McCall, Esq.,
National Secular Society,
41 Gray's Inn Road, W.C.1.

To Television Booking Manager

I agree to accept the above offer on the terms and conditions stated.

Signature [Mr. McCall signed here.] Date 18/4/56.

Non-fulfilment

As this was the first opportunity (albeit brief) that our

Society has had to reach the viewing—or even the listening—public, it was regarded as a step forward. In fact, even that tiny contribution was excluded from the programme without our being informed.

It is true that Mr. McCall received the five guineas and signed that “all rights in the recording shall vest in the Corporation”. The fact remains: he was advised by phone and in writing that his talk would be used. Instead, the programme became virtually another vehicle for Christian—and more particularly, Anglican—propaganda, in a country where the majority of people do not uphold the faith.

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

The BBC and Atheism

Margaret Knight

Naturally, we received many inquiries from disappointed viewers, a number of whom told us they had 'phoned the BBC immediately without getting any satisfactory reply. One of the first letters was from Mrs. Margaret Knight to Mr. McCall, in which she wrote:

“I have just got back from watching the TV programme and am nearly bursting with indignation at their cutting you out. No doubt you were too good! It will be a bitter disappointment to all of us. But there may be redeeming features—it seems to offer most promising opportunities for protest, and one that is not confined to THE FREE-THINKER.

“I usually sleep on this sort of thing before I write it, but tonight indignation is too much for me. If I can help in any way with the protests, let me know. By the way, Professor Coulson's claim that Einstein was a supporter of religion should be corrected.

“With best wishes and many sympathies.—Yours sincerely, Margaret Knight.”

A Strong Side

Mr. G. H. Taylor duly corrected Professor Coulson on this point and made other significant observations. He wrote:

“If the N.S.S. were asked by the BBC to nominate a team representing science, philosophy and literature parallel to the one chosen by the Christians on May 22nd, we should probably select somewhat after this fashion: Bertrand Russell, Julian Huxley, Hyman Levy, J. D. Bernal, J. Bronowski, Somerset Maugham, Margaret Knight. No informed Christian would seriously question that the above combination is infinitely superior to that put up by the Christians on May 22nd. And it would be even more foolish to deny that the considered judgments of this team would, to put it mildly, be vastly different from those we heard from the Christian selections in the programme in question.

“It is all a matter of selection and who does the selecting. And a selector who failed to pick a team which could be relied on to say the right things would, in a Christian-controlled society, soon lose his job. In the ultimate it boils

down to fear of economic consequences. The economic stranglehold exercised by the ruling elements only allows its performers to dance in one main direction. The Christian barrel organ grinds its dusty tune while its monkeys fetch in the required coppers.

"Someone at the BBC obviously had the idea of a tincture of fair play—two minutes for atheism as a passing gesture. Then they viewed the result and changed their mind—or someone changed it for them. Here was the combined might of Professor Coulson, Bishop Wand, the Oxford undergrads, choir boys and all the rest of the 30 minutes of Christian propaganda, all assembled for an impartial (!) inquiry as to whether religion was losing ground. On the other side of the scale—a few short remarks by an atheist. It was too much for them. It was therefore cut out.

"I was told over the 'phone that to have included Mr. McCall might have put the programme out of balance. Well, what an admission! Thirty minutes of Christian propaganda, with a Bishop and a Maths Professor thrown in, knocked off balance by a few short remarks on atheism! A mighty Christian battle fleet running away from one secularist destroyer! Safely entrenched in a position where they cannot be attacked because no opponent is present to challenge their assertions, we heard from the Christians on May 22nd the type of things which have been exposed over and over again in these columns."

Correction

"Is it a fact," asked Mr. Taylor, "that Einstein can be enlisted as a supporter of Christianity? It is not a fact. It is a downright lie. That was made abundantly clear in THE FREETHINKER articles, following his death, by G. I. Bennett, J. Gordon and myself, and by Mrs. Knight at Birmingham. Is it a fact that the composition of matter is such that 'anything can happen'? It is a gross misstatement; Einstein never departed from the principle of causation. If, as we are told, 'anything is possible', then we must be excused for thinking it is even possible for a professor of mathematics to talk at the mental level of Billy Graham when he leaves his own subject and talks about religion.

"Is it true that 'philosophy leaves room for religion'? It is not. It is the worst form of a lie—the half truth. The downright obvious lie can be nailed; the half truth is more subtle—and therefore more disreputable. For you have only to take the word 'religion', strip it of all Christian doctrine and make it mean what you wish it to mean, and, lo! and behold, the statement becomes true.

"The average viewer may swallow it. The freethinking viewers see the rabbit put into the hat. The great fact which is hidden from the average viewer or listener is that his own scepticism is duplicated in the seats of learning. The half-hearted scepticism of the average layman; the unreasoned, often unconscious, scepticism of the man in the street; is paragoned by the conscious, the reasoned, the deliberate disbelief of professors of science and philosophy in all quarters of the world. If it suited the BBC, an unanswerable indictment of the Christian religion could be packed into a programme of equal length. Is it really necessary to wait for some social upheaval before getting fair shares?—G.H.T."

Startling

Mr. F. A. Ridley emphasised the connection with disestablishment of the Church of England, saying:

"The actual facts are startling! The BBC, an institution which has long since attained maturity, presumably 'clothed and in its right mind', deliberately invites a permanent official of the N.S.S. to take part in one of its publi-

cised programmes. Well-known people, such as the former Bishop of London, Dr. Wand, and a former junior minister in the British Labour Government, Mr. Christopher Mayhew, are associated with this episode in the series, 'Is Britain in Decline?' to be shown on May 22nd. When the day and hour arrived, Mr. Colin McCall, having duly recorded his talk and received his fee for so doing, is quietly, without a word of notification and/or apology, omitted from the televised programme. And all this in a professedly democratic country and by an institution which is never tired of denouncing dictatorship—abroad!"

Shameful

"It is not the first," he continued, "but is probably the most glaring, of such overt suppressions of free speech; it underlines in a particularly striking manner, the ban on really important matters, such as religion and/or the monarchy. One is, surely, forced to look beyond this particular incident to the underlying state of things that, alone, makes such partisan discrimination possible. This is to be found in our medieval state constitution, which still enforces the official alliance between the state and a particular religion, Christianity; despite the increasingly obvious fact that Christianity is, nowadays, the effective religion of only a minority of the British people. As long as England remains a Christian country, the BBC will, I suggest, continue to ban anti-Christian points of view on the air. The shameful suppression of the General Secretary of the N.S.S. underlines the peremptory necessity for separation of Church and state, which the National Secular Society—as its name implies—has advocated consistently since its foundation at a period long prior to the appearance of the BBC amongst the censors of free speech and opinion.—F.A.R."

Deplorable

Mr. J. Henry Lloyd, Hon. Secretary of the Humanist Council, on the other hand, saw evidence of an internal struggle at Broadcasting House. He wrote: "I learn with indignation but not surprise that once again the BBC has let 'I dare not' wait upon 'I would' with regard to the transmission over the air of unorthodox views about religion. I do not know the substance of the talk which Mr. C. McCall was asked to record and which he in fact did, but from my knowledge of the responsible attitude of the officers of the N.S.S., I have no doubt it was a dignified statement of the views held, not only by their members, but by hundreds of thousands of other British citizens. These views and those held by others who would describe themselves as Humanists have been denied adequate expression over the radio and television except upon rare and arbitrarily selected occasions. This attitude of the BBC is the more deplorable as it is contrary to the spirit of their own policy declaration of 1947 which recognised the need for the free expression of all responsible views about religion but has in fact never been wholeheartedly implemented by the BBC."

Unwise

"The circumstances of Mr. McCall's suppressed talk," remarked Mr. Lloyd, "and the long delayed Christian Humanist discussions which were eventually broadcast a few months ago, suggest that a struggle is going on in the BBC. Some members of the staff appear to be broad-minded and public-spirited enough to want to carry out the 1947 policy while there are other influences, perhaps the Religious Broadcasting Department or its influential Advisory Committee, which are intent on suppressing any view of religion but the teaching of the Churches in the main stream of Christianity. This policy of suppression is

unwise in the long-term interest of Christianity, as some Christians recognise: it suggests fear of the free expression of other views of religion. The danger to true religion is not alternative views and healthy criticism but dogmatism and intolerance.—J. Henry Lloyd.”

Legal and Moral

Such are the facts and the comments they provoked. We asked Mr. McCall to say the final word. “I feel rather like Mr. Christopher Mayhew,” he said, “summing up after the programme in which I didn’t appear. Like him, I am far from impartial in this matter. Yet surely my indignation — shared by Mrs. Knight and the other writers quoted

above — is righteous. When first we protested to the BBC, they asked if we were questioning the legality of the omission. What a petty, bureaucratic outlook! Of course they were within their (legal) rights to exclude my two or three minutes of plain — but, I must add, calm — speaking; of course they paid me (a very welcome) five guineas for dashing to Lime Grove one evening without any prepared script and being filmed within, I should think, a quarter of an hour of arrival — for the sake of spontaneity.

“Who cares about *legal* rights in a matter like this (except the BBC)? We indict them, not on legal, but on moral, grounds. The legal case against them is non-existent; the moral case against them is overwhelming.”

For Readers Only

By F. A. RIDLEY

PERHAPS the most famous library in the world and without doubt the most famous in the English-speaking world is that of the British Museum. Many famous men have worked within its hallowed precincts and many causes have benefited by recourse to its vast stores of knowledge, indicated by the enormous catalogue which gives access to the several million volumes this gigantic library contains; not least the freethinking cause. In the now distant period of the twenties when I first entered the hallowed precincts, the bearded figure of that doyen of British Rationalists, John M. Robertson, was still occasionally to be seen adding to his encyclopædic range of knowledge, and for many years the great McCabe was a regular visitor.

“FOR READERS ONLY”

The original reading room of the British Museum, which dates from 1758 was a modest affair “in a corner of the base story in Montague House”. This was an accessory to the Museum and art collection owned by Sir Hans Sloane, a wealthy art collector of the day. At the end of George II’s reign Parliament organised a lottery to purchase the Sloane Collection, to which the original reading room represented a modest attachment. One of its first readers was the poet Thomas Gray, author of the immortal *Elegy* and a Cambridge professor. On May 18th, 1857, the present reading room was first opened to the general public, but not to all of it, for next year will see the centenary, to be participated in by “Readers only”.

GHOSTS OF THE PAST

Many famous people, and, of course, a vastly greater number whom chance has omitted from that category, have laboured — or at least looked like labouring! — at the tables of the reading room. Inconspicuous in their own day, but nowadays probably the most famous of its 19th century readers, were Karl Marx, whose *Das Kapital* seems not only to have been planned but actually written within the library, and Samuel Butler of *Erewhon* fame. Long researches in which I have personally participated have failed to disclose the exact seats in which these eminent men, and others hardly less famous, pursued their epoch-forming studies. Personally more conspicuous than Butler or even Marx was a red-headed Irishman, witty, impetuous and omnivorous reader, George Bernard Shaw. As, however, Shaw was the self-confessed disciple of both Marx and Butler, we shall not rank him above them, in accordance with the sound principle of Holy Scripture that “the disciple is not greater than his Lord”. Dr. Aveling, who edited THE FREETHINKER during the imprisonment of Foote, was another luminary of the '70's and '80's, as also was J. M. Wheeler, perhaps the greatest scholar to have contributed regularly to this journal. Other famous English writers of the period, H. G. Wells and

George Gissing, were also regular readers. Probably the 20th century reader who has emblazoned his name most indelibly on the scroll of fame is the Founder of the Soviet State, the U.S.S.R., Lenin, who, like his Anarchist predecessor Bakunin and his future colleague Trotsky, was a regular reader in the opening years of the present century, and here he wrote his philosophical book *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*.

During the period of the second World War, when the Russians were hammering Hitler to defeat at Stalingrad, an amusing story was going round the Reading Room that some venerable greybeard who had been Lenin’s desk-mate forty years ago, lamented that he “hadn’t seen Lenin recently in the room”, a perhaps apocryphal tribute to the unworldly hermits who shut themselves up for life within the four walls of the Bloomsbury institution. Perhaps the typical representative of the Reading Room is no celebrity but “the unknown scholar” in this most democratic of institutions, the Republic of Letters.

THREE READERS WITHOUT A TICKET

However, while Lenin was perhaps the most famous Russian to work in the Reading Room, it was reserved to another Russian to witness the most remarkable spectacle ever vouchsafed to anyone within its walls. Naturally, such an honour was not reserved for a Communist! Equally naturally, perhaps, it was reserved for a theologian. Actually it was Vladimir Solovief, in his day a famous theologian of the Orthodox Church, described by his admirers as the Russian Newman, who in 1875 actually *saw* the Holy Trinity in the Reading Room, apparently all three Persons simultaneously. Three readers without a ticket? Solovief was so overcome that he promptly took a ticket to Egypt, following in the steps of one at least of the divine Visitors. Unfortunately, in his haste he forgot to be specific; he did not record either the exact date or number of the desk or table at which he — and They? — sat. To our knowledge only one other reader has had a somewhat similar experience, and that not within the precincts of the Museum. Madame Blavatsky, a regular reader, like her pupil Annie Besant, of course, saw the Tibetan Mahatma by the shores of the Serpentine, certainly a change from his native mountains. But to be sure, that was before the late George Lansbury democratised the Serpentine into the Lido, since when, as far as we know, no Mahatma has deigned to visit the Cockney Lido. Talking of Mahatmas, however, another much more famous — as well as authentic — one, Mr. Gandhi, was in his youth an inmate of the Reading Room.

WHAT THE STARS FORETELL

To pass from the visitors to the staff and the librarians,
(Continued on page 184)

This Believing World

Nothing can be more amusing than the way in which our men of science — astronomers, anthropologists, physicists, and others, almost invariably leave poor old God Almighty out of their reckoning. Here, for example, we have Dr. Shapley, Professor of Astronomy at Harvard University, discussing whether there is "life" on the stars and claiming in the *Sunday Times* that if the conditions are right, that is, whenever "the physics, chemistry and climate are right", life will "emerge and persist". He says that this makes it "unnecessary to postulate miracles and the supernatural". So Prof. Shapley joins Laplace in making God quite unnecessary for "creation". And what can the Churches say? Just nothing.

★

Records of musical hits are selling in millions and providing a handsome living for many artistes, but is it not a little unfair to call in God Almighty to promote more sales? Here we have Miss Anne Shelton, a most devout Catholic, getting her record discs *blessed* by a Man of God — Father Duffey, and naturally such a disc is bound to be more fortunate in sales than any recording a mere Protestant, Jew, or even an indifferentist. Blessing a disc is as unfair as a Roman Catholic boxer counting his rosary before a fight. What chance has an irreligious boxer against one who has God, Jesus, a priest, and a rosary against him, all other things being equal?

★

Congratulations to the Rev. S. Crookshank — a parson who, having found out how his religion has been and is commercialised, is not afraid to say so openly. He objects to the way secular Xmas cards, Easter eggs, flowers for Mothers' Day, crosses on chains, and many other things are used to grab money from believers — they must protest, he declares, against this trend "to make money cheaply out of sacred things". But are Easter eggs really "sacred"?

★

Another protest comes from Sir J. Rothenstein, the Director of the Tate Gallery, who finds some modern Christian art "drab, tawdry, and downright offensive", and says so in an article in *Picture Post*. This surely can be easily explained. Many modern artists have no religion whatever, and what appears to Sir John in his own Catholic religion "sacred", appears to other people quite silly. Angels, devils, saints, are just funny to anybody with a sense of humour, to say nothing of a Pure Virgin credited in the Gospels with a number of children. It is practically impossible ever to go back these days to the simple faith which dominated the Italian Primitives and their successors, and so gave us very beautiful pictures — but not from the religious point of view according to modern standards.

★

Miracles which used to occur in hundreds in the happy days gone by at Lourdes are now reduced to a trickle of one a year — if that, these days; but only rarely do we get any detailed account of the numbers of deaths which regularly take place among the unlucky pilgrims. However, the *Yorkshire Post* recorded the other day the death of a "happy" pilgrim — happy because he *died* at Lourdes. He went with 500 Yorkshire unfortunates, and after attending Mass in the Grotto, "he died a very happy man". So we are told by the Rev. Dr. Heenan.

★

Two of the pilgrims, after bathing in the waters of the Grotto, felt "better and stronger". A blind man said the journey had helped him "inwardly and spiritually". And

the others simply came back. If there is anything worse than this religious fraud, this humbug of healing, this commercialising of "faith and hope", we would like to hear about it.

★

The "**Sunday Graphic**" gave us the case the other day of a soldier wounded in Africa and Italy who is as helpless as a baby. "He cannot even blow his own nose," we are told. Well, where are our divine and spirit healers? Why do not the Pensions people send him to Lourdes, or get one of the numerous healers, men of God or men of spirits, to cure him? Once cured, his paltry pension could be saved — and yet nothing is done about it. Surely even our Pensions Minister has faith in God?

★

The **Church of England Moral Welfare Council** wants to throw overboard all or most of the past Christian teaching on "vice", and has issued a Report which proves how little it thinks of the old, and how much the members want to change to a new Christianity. In particular, they want to sweep away the old Christian laws regarding homosexuality, and prostitution with their severe Christian punishments, and introduce more "humanism" in dealing with offenders. But we may be pardoned for wondering whether their desire to change the existing laws may not be due to so many "criminals" being good Christians, or even parsons and priests, and not by any means because, as in so many other things, Christianity and Church laws are hopelessly out of date?

FOR READERS ONLY

(Concluded from page 183)

these latter, too, have frequently been distinguished. The present Reading Room owed its existence largely to the efforts of an Italian refugee, Sir Antonio Panizzi, who later became its principal librarian. Perhaps his most eminent successor has been Dr. Richard Garnett, an eminent man of letters who rather curiously was an ardent devotee of the dubious "royal art" of astrology. Several treatises from his pen on "What the Stars Foretell" are to be found in the library under the pseudonym of A. G. Trent. Dr. Garnett was not entirely happy about his extra-terrestrial labours. A more recent official of the Reading Room is now making his name in the field of fiction — Mr. Angus Wilson, probably finding fiction a welcome change after endless research in the often dry-as-dust facts recorded in the innumerable volumes of the catalogues. Not that everyone in the room is a scholar; there have been, and still are, plenty of cranks! The stars did not foretell to at least one reader known to the writer, what were the contents of the waste paper baskets. So, for many years, punctually on the stroke of four, he began to empty them systematically till every one had been emptied!

However, scholars, cranks or mere dilettantes, the readers at the British Museum have at their disposal all the resources of modern scholarship. While the library remains open we can be confident that the human mind will continue to revolve freely and will be adequately endowed for its inquiries. It would be no exaggeration to describe the library of the British Museum and its famous Reading Room as the greatest bastion of intellectual democracy in the world. One reader here would place on record his profound gratitude and appreciation.

—NEXT WEEK—

ALDOUS HUXLEY'S HEAVEN AND HELL

By C. G. L. DU CANN

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 10s. (in U.S.A., \$4.25); half-year, 15s.; three months, 7s. 6d.
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.

W. HARDY.—By an Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII in 1891 the Papacy recognised that the proletariat had grievances, thus to pose as the friend of the workers.

O. M'CANN.—We agree that the question of establishing an international language is important, but there are special journals for the purpose. In view of our limited space, we think we do our share.

E. W. SMITH.—The questions you raise are discussed in *God and the Universe* by Chapman Cohen (obtainable from this office).

S. FAYE writes: "The shadow of Lord Reith still hovers over the BBC. The evil men do lives on."

JEAN DUNN.—December 25th became a recognised religious festival in 274 A.D., when the Emperor Aurelian proclaimed it a state holiday for the feast of his sun-god Mithras.

H. ALANDALE.—In the hands of an expert theologian, theology becomes a logically presentable structure founded on the most absurd or gratuitous premises—nonsense dressed up to look respectable.

C. HARTLEY (Mrs.)—Doctors have ruled out "faith healing", including Lourdes. See forthcoming notes on the matter.

JOHN REID writes: "The N.S.S. has an important part to play in the Trade Unions, as a counter to Catholic activities." Agreed.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

Bradford (Broadway Car Park).—Sunday, 7.30 p.m.: Messrs. DAY, NEWTON and SHEPPARD.

Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street, Kingston-on-Thames).—Every Sunday, 8 p.m.: Messrs. J. W. BARKER and E. MILLS.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every Week-day, 1 p.m.: G. A. WOODCOCK. Sunday, 7.45 p.m.: Messrs. CAVANAGH and MILLS. (Platt Fields), Sunday, 3 p.m.: Messrs. CAVANAGH and MILLS.

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Pierhead).—Meetings most evenings of the week (often afternoons): Messrs. THOMPSON, SALISBURY, HOGAN, PARRY, HENRY and others.

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Every Sunday, noon: L. EBURY and A. ARTHUR.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY. Sunday, 11 a.m.: R. MORRELL and R. POWE.

West London Branch N.S.S.—Every Sunday at the Marble Arch from 4 p.m.: Messrs. ARTHUR, EBURY and others.

INDOOR

Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Tea and social gathering of Midland Branches. Among the guests will be Mr. F. A. RIDLEY and Mr. C. MCCALL. Visitors cordially invited.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, June 10th, 11 a.m.: Dr. W. E. SWINTON, "Evolution Today".

Orpington Humanist Group (Sherry's Restaurant, High Street).—Sunday, June 10th, 7 p.m.: LESLIE T. MINCHIN, B.Sc., "The Humanisation of Work".

MR. F. A. RIDLEY ON GERMANY

As many readers know, Mr. F. A. Ridley has just returned from an extensive tour in Western Germany and those who would like some first-hand information on the problems facing the Germans are cordially invited to hear his lecture, "Whither Germany, East or West?" which will be given at the Holborn Hall, W.C.1, on Friday, June 15th, 7.45 p.m. The lecture is held under the auspices of the Independent Labour Party.

Notes and News

NEARLY three months have now elapsed since the Humanist broadcasts of Messrs. Routh, Hawton and Blackham and Prof. Flew, and not a pip has sounded either in the national or local press. For six months and more, following the broadcasts by Margaret Knight in January 1955, many provincial papers were still buzzing with the controversy in repeated outbursts, and the cumulative effect is such that many editors are today according more space and fairness to what they have come to realise is a point of view far more widely held than they imagined. When the subject arose last Autumn of the possibility of more broadcasts unfavourable to religion, Mrs. Knight was told that other Humanists must be given a chance. The chance came nearly three months ago. And it was missed by a mile! The BBC are now in a position to claim that anti-Christian broadcasters were on the air in 1956, thus to reduce the claim for more freethought broadcasting.

★

WHEN one compares the substance of Mrs. Knight's talks with that which featured the script of the four Humanists, the moral is obvious. Where there is no sting there is no reaction. Without being unduly aggressive, Mrs. Knight threw doubt on the existence of a loving creator as the basis for a moral life. The whole Christian structure of ethics, dependent on punishment and reward, was thus challenged, and the national press sat up and took notice, with the results we have seen.

★

THROUGH the courtesy of the BBC Religious Talks Dept. we have been favoured with a sight of the script used in the broadcast discussions this year, and it makes sorry reading from the freethought point of view. The performance of our Humanist friends was, we regret to say, of such a character that the Christians could survive, and even welcome, similar performances every week of the year. We credit Mr. Routh and the others with the sincerest of intentions, but where are the results? Such broadcasts only serve to shield Christianity from real freethought criticism.

★

ONE of the late Chapman Cohen's most popular—and erudite—works was his *God and the Universe*, and we are pleased to learn that the Pioneer Press has just reissued the third edition. This is the work in which the author deals with Professors Julian Huxley, Einstein, Jeans, and Eddington, and the reply by Prof. Eddington is included. Excellently bound (at 4s. 6d.) we hope this edition will have a record sale.

BRANCH LINE

WEST HAM AND DISTRICT

As briefly indicated last week, the West Ham and District Branch, N.S.S., has reopened the outdoor speaking site at Victoria Park, where Chapman Cohen was once a familiar and (to the Christians) a formidable figure. The first of the new meetings was chaired by the Branch President, Mrs. E. Venton, and the speaker was Mr. James L. Shepherd, E.C. and Trade Union Committee member—already somewhat notorious in East London through his uncompromising exposure of religion in the local press, and now turning his attentive pen towards Scotland.

West Ham's Victoria Park meetings represent the first step towards increasing the Society's open air propaganda in the London area, and they follow a successful winter session at the Wanstead Community Centre, where the speakers included the President and Secretary of the N.S.S. We call on members to publicise and support the new series arranged by one of our oldest branches. Particulars of the West Ham and District Branch can be obtained from the Hon. Secretary, Mr. F. C. Warner, 83A Dawlish Road, Leyton, E.10, 'phone LEY 1580.

An Unproclaimed Freethinker

By G. I. BENNETT

I HAVE WRITTEN about Amiel before*, but more remains to be said. As I showed in my previous essay, the fame that came to this lonely scholar—a Professor of Moral Philosophy at the Academy of Geneva—was posthumous fame consequent upon the publication of fragments from his private *Journal*, which one or two thoughtful friends of his undertook after his death. In his lifetime he was unknown, unhonoured, and unsung, although a man of profound culture and one of the most widely read of his time.

Yet, notwithstanding the possession of a first-rate brain, a vast learning, and an ample leisure, Amiel in a life of sixty years published nothing other than several trivial compositions, which give no inkling of the power and fullness of his mind. Such power and fullness are revealed only in the pages of his *Journal Intime*. The 1904 edition of Mrs. Humphry Ward's English translation of this work contains an altogether praiseworthy index to the subject-matter, and merely to glance at it is to be made aware of an extraordinary universality of thought. Art, Literature, Philosophy, Religion, Poetry, Science, History, Travel... on what did Amiel not cast meditative intelligence? If he did not "read everything", as Scherer suggested, he read nearly everything of any consequence in the nineteenth century world of letters and of knowledge.

"Instead of a garden, the world; instead of a library, the whole of literature; instead of three or four faces, a whole people and all history—this is what the virile, the philosophic, temper demands."

He writes these words in criticism of the "beautiful" but "too narrow" circle of ideas that absorbed Eugénie de Guerin's life—yet how well they express the bent and range of Amiel's own mind!

Somehow, though, in the great spate of literature that has flooded the world in the last half-century the *Journal Intime* appears to have been almost forgotten—or perhaps it is that the demand for introspective writings has ever been small. That volume is Amiel's one claim to remembrance; and while a discerning few may still care for it, the majority have never even heard its author's name. Such has been the fate of one who described himself as "an obscurely-conditioned soul, far from the world's noise and fame", but who, in the cultured world of the late nineteenth century, posthumously acquired an international reputation.

Of those who people literary history, Amiel is surely one of the most ineffectual and pathetic. On his own confession, he was "a mere onlooker on life". He, his life long, found it easier to renounce a wish than satisfy it. "Action," he wrote, "is my cross." This "Buddhist tendency in me", as he described it, grew on him as the years passed; and it blighted his intellectual no less than his emotional life. About literary activities he avowed, "I am always preparing (to do something worth while) and never accomplishing". Mrs. Humphry Ward's opinion is that, as early as his thirty-sixth year, Amiel's "reflective faculty has outgrown his control". We may feel there is more to it than that, but as a general statement of truth this is indisputable. In one place he refers to action as "coarsened thought", and thought does in fact become more real to him than living itself—a circumstance of which he has the clearest and fullest awareness. And though his personal life is singularly uneventful (especially in the later years), his mind is throughout remarkably alive with all kinds of speculations

*"Henri Frédéric Amiel," THE FREETHINKER, June 17th and 24th, 1955.

and ideas, which it disburdens day after day into an accumulating pile of student exercise books that constitute his *Journal Intime*.

That the Academy professor possessed literary ability of a high order, a perusal of any part of his *Journal* leaves us in no doubt. On whatever he discourses, or meditates, or casts a nostalgic backward glance, his language is never at fault, but is an exquisitely supple instrument in his hands for expressing, with rare grace and fitness, his own subtle shades of thought and feeling. Of prejudice of any sort it is difficult to find a trace in his pages. His disposition is humane, his outlook liberal and enlightened, his approach to life sensitive and reverential—though acute with the poet's sense of the tragic. In fine, he is a reflective, philosophising man of learning, whose breadth of knowledge and desire to see all sides of a question make him conscientiously unable to express himself with any definiteness, pro or con, on many things—although his honesty and independence of mind are never suspect.

Amiel never entirely shook off the influence of the stern Calvinism in which he had been nurtured, and of which the Geneva of his time was a stronghold. That influence in some way underlies all his thinking; and an appreciation of this fact lead Renan, when he came to write his two essays on the Swiss scholar, to some comment (which we cannot take very seriously) about the relative psychological harmlessness of a Catholic as against a Protestant education. In the *Journal Intime* we are presented with the difficult struggles of a man whose intellectual convictions are in perpetual tug-of-war with his deepest emotional feelings. Yet because Amiel was above all else a thinker of integrity, his mind does not capitulate to his emotions—often expressed as is his desire to experience communion with God. To feel oneself "individually cared for and protected" by a Loving Father "lightens the struggle for existence". But Amiel's is a civilised mind. Possessed of a profoundly religious temperament, he does not allow religion to run away with him.

Some men accept freethought with a gladness akin to that of the manumitted slave who has at last gained his freedom, and some men do not. Our Swiss professor is one who did not; but he accepted freethought, nevertheless, and lived and died a freethinker—in effect if not in name. He accepted it because to him intellectual probity was everything. He came to see reluctantly but none the less surely that "no positive religion can survive the supernatural element, which is the reason for its existence... All concrete religions die eventually in the pure air of philosophy".

It was only in "the pure air of philosophy" that Amiel's questing, omniscient mind could expand and properly breathe. "Religious joy" (for which he yearned) could not be his; a transcendental faith or creed he had none. When he asked himself what he really believed in he could say no more than "I believe in goodness and I hope that good will prevail". "To give happiness and to do good," he says elsewhere, "there is our only law, our anchor of salvation, our beacon light, our reason for existing. All religions may crumble away; so long as this survives we have still an ideal, and life is worth living." Such thinking is assuredly humanistic! And when it comes to pricking the bubble of nations' self-righteousness, born of their arrogating to themselves the alleged virtues of Christianity, who in so

(Continued on page 188)

"Atheism is not just Atheism"

By H. CUTNER

IN THE NEW *American Rationalist* (which has many admirable features) there is an article, "Sterile or Creative?", by Marie Harlowe which professes to deal with atheism and which proves how easy it is for someone quite unfamiliar with the subject to write a lot of nonsense.

Miss Harlowe tells us it "may come as a distinct shock to many professing Freethinkers that there is more than one kind of atheism. Atheism is not just atheism". Let me hasten to assure Miss Harlowe that the shock is a very mild one, if it is even a shock. If one denies or disbelieves in a God one is an atheist. But there is certainly a difference between the atheism which denies the God Osiris and the atheism which denies the God Jehovah. All Christians are atheists as far as Osiris is concerned, but as they believe in the God Jehovah there is a distinct difference between such a Christian atheist and an atheist who also disbelieves in the God Jehovah. Those of us who disbelieve in all gods are quite used to such mild shocks.

Miss Harlowe, however, thinks that "American and European atheism" (which denies Jehovah) is an "unbalanced approach to the subject". Well, well. One can almost hear the still, small voice of the Christian in this dulcet accusation. Why is it unbalanced? "It offers", she sternly insists, "nothing for individual growth and progress."

We can admit at the outset that atheism *as such* is merely the denial of, or the disbelief in, a god — any god. But the shock Miss Harlowe talks about really comes when anyone writing on atheism calmly tells us that is all we ever do about it.

The truth is something quite different. Side by side with a declaration of atheism has always been the insistence of a moral code or a system of ethics which is now known as secularism. In book after book and pamphlet after pamphlet, modern atheists have expounded their ethical code — a code which dispenses with *all* supernatural aid, and concentrates on this life as the only life we know anything about. The key words are the greatest happiness for the greatest number. That Miss Harlowe knows nothing of this does not excuse her ignorance. Before writing nonsense on atheism she should have made herself familiar with our books.

But of course she was not really writing to attack atheism in this way. She wanted to bring to our notice "Oriental Atheism", which is for her so very superior to the Western brand. And she adds — "particularly the Buddhist phase". Let us assure her some of us know the Buddhist phase quite as well as she does.

But even the Buddhist phase is, in her opinion, not quite as good as the atheism in Burma, which has "an atheistic, Confucianist and Buddhist background". Here I must admit to a great shock. It is that we can always find some so-called atheists who see in something — anything — Oriental always a better "phase" than in Western lands.

An Oriental atheist never "backslides", she tells us, and she ought to know. As for American atheists, "a few months later" they are "back in the fold". So you can see how superior must be Oriental atheism.

Speaking as an atheist who has never gone back in the fold, let me assure Miss Harlowe that the best places for Oriental atheism, with or without Confucius and Buddha, are Oriental countries, and we have no quarrel with them.

But for those who live in the West, who have been nourished on Western civilisation and culture, with its rich art, literature, and science, our own brand of atheism is quite good enough. And many of us think that it is even

immeasurably superior to anything that comes from the East.

But just a few final words. In Miss Harlowe's article I find no authority whatever except her own. In other words, what is her evidence that there is such a thing as Oriental Confucianist Buddhist atheism? I am one of those unbelieving sceptics who deny that Buddhism is atheistic in our sense at all. And *worshipping* ancestors is not my idea of atheism. Moreover, Burma is packed not with atheists but with animists, believers in the religion of animism. The Burmese, most of them if not the lot, believe in "spirits". These spirits are propitiated by prayers to a bit of red cloth on a bamboo frame which houses a spirit, and to whom (or which) daily offerings are made. Miss Harlowe tells us nothing about this, but anybody can read about the religion of Burma in dozens of books. That a few more enlightened men than the mass in Burma no longer believe in animism may be true — but religion is a tough nut to kill, and nowhere more so than in Miss Harlowe's paradise, the "Oriental" countries.

THEATRE

Tales of Two Capitals

BERNARD SHAW declared that the only worthwhile literature was propagandist. I am prepared to agree with him, so long as it is written by an Irishman or Peter Ustinov. G.B.S. was a master of the art of literary — and, particularly, dramatic — propaganda; now a fellow-countryman, Brendan Behan, shows signs of succeeding him. *The Quare Fellow*, presented by Theatre Workshop at the Theatre Royal, Stratford, London, is a timely and most impressive play on the ghastly subject which we disguise under the respectable name of capital punishment.

It is not ostensibly a suitable subject for a play — and certainly not for a comedy — yet Mr. Behan triumphantly makes it so. He tells us that he did not write the play; that the "lags" wrote it for him; but this is patently false (one might as well give Holinshed the credit for *Macbeth*): they provided the material, but a talented hand has worked on it and shaped it to a new design. He told us on the opening night that Miss Joan Littlewood (the producer) and her players have made it a better play than he wrote; that may well be true, for the production and acting are of a high order. But the plain fact is that this is a very fine play.

Through all the Ronald Searle-like humour we glimpse a humanity that is tragically heightened at the end. There is no sentimentality — either on our part, or on that of the convicts. Two of the latter bet their solitary Sunday rashes of bacon on whether or not the condemned man will escape the gallows. The murderer himself is never seen, but his crime has been a particularly brutal one — our sympathy is not evoked from that angle. On the other hand, there is the bloated, bowler-hatted hangman (seemingly doing his calculations from Charles Duff's *Handbook on Hanging*) foolishly serious: a perfect piece of parody; and the warder who provides Dudley Foster with the most sympathetic part in the play. But, though the lags have not written the play, they essentially *make* it, and three of them (played by Glynn Edwards, Brian Murphy and Maxwell Shaw) are grim joys to behold and behave. Not least impressive are the hidden voices; and the horse-race commentary on the last dash to the scaffold — "the chaplain's leading by a short head" — is superb. So, too, are some of the silent touches: two warders considerably take off their wrist

watches before spending the last night with the condemned man; one of them is carried across the yard in a dead faint — and then the banging and clanging, the tumult of the traditional protest. Finally — silence, except for the plaintive song with which the play opened. A memorable evening is over.

MR. USTINOV'S *Romanoff and Juliet* (Piccadilly Theatre, London) is of a quite different order. Yet it, too, has a message. The Russian and American Embassies confront one another across a square in the capital of the smallest country in Europe. There is no grimness here; rather a romantic Ruritanian atmosphere and a delightful incongruity about everything. The son of the Russian, and the daughter of the American, ambassador fall in love, and Mr. Ustinov's light satirical pen is given a free hand.

He himself plays the General who governs on a "balance of feebleness" principal; who addresses his painfully decrepit Archbishop as "Your Altitude"; and who, in reply to the question "Do you believe in the hereafter?", says "I believe in the herein". With the aid of most ingenious sets we are amused by the family behaviour of the representatives of the two great powers; we note their similarities and their differences; their loveliness and their absurdities.

Mr. Ustinov guides us skilfully through this realistic fantasy land towards the destination that we all hope lies ahead: "the realm of sense, of gentleness, of love." C.McC.

"IN HIS OWN IMAGE..."

In his own image
Each creates his God,
His silhouette
Against the soul's grey universe.

REX CLEMENTS.

CORRESPONDENCE

OUR 75th BIRTHDAY NUMBER

THERE must be a great many conscientious objectors who would like to join me in thanking THE FREETHINKER, on the occasion of its 75th birthday, for its courageous tolerance and advocacy of minority opinion. There are not many journals which are prepared to give space to progressive but unpopular thought, and most of those which do are not always prepared to champion the cause of people whose opinions are not the primary concern of the journal. THE FREETHINKER has from time to time launched some very effective shots in the war against war, and cannot but have added to its laurels in so doing. Would that there were more like it!

C. P. SKILTON.

I AM not 75 yet, but I have known THE FREETHINKER as long as I can remember anything, because my father always read THE FREETHINKER and discussed it with the family. I also knew G. W. Foote and looked upon him as a very kindly man, always with a good word of advice. I shall never forget him when holding a small baby in his arms at the Queen's Hall (where he spoke every Sunday for many years), and gave such good advice to the parents, etc. This was in place of the usual christening. I wonder who that child was and whether he is the good Freethinker that G. W. Foote hoped he would be. The last time I saw him was shortly before he died. He was then very weak and could only walk slowly along the Southend front to get some sea air. My father is now over 80, still has THE FREETHINKER and reads it with great pleasure. I was very pleased to read the words by Professor Bernal. I first met him in Warsaw in November 1950, and the last time at the Conference of "Science for Peace" last month.

The other day I took a taxi to Lime Grove studios, where I had an appointment. I sat in front with the driver, and we got on to the subject of religion, and to my surprise he took a FREETHINKER out of his pocket and said "You should read this paper; it will teach you a lot". I asked him how long he had been taking THE FREETHINKER and he said only this year. Good luck to the future of THE FREETHINKER. The work is going on in a stronger way than it looks on the surface, but there is still much to do, and in a way the fight has only just begun, so "Onward, Freethought soldiers".

KATHLEEN TACCHI-MORRIS.

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

A correspondent in your issue of April 6th says: "The prime consideration of the state in its handling of criminals should be reform and transformation of the criminal... if that is possible." In my view, it is precisely this Christo-sentimentalist attitude, so widely held today, that bedevils the whole subject.

The prime consideration, on the contrary, should be the safety and well-being of the decent law-abiding citizens who constitute the vast majority of the community. What happens to a few criminals who are, *ipso facto*, undesirables, is relatively of no importance. To put their interests first is a fantastic inversion, repugnant to all common-sense, the more remarkable in persons who profess to be free from Christian influences.

One is reminded of the bad boy who was sent to a brand new approved school and who wrote back to his friends, describing in glowing terms all the modern conveniences and amenities he was enjoying. The good boy, who was left behind to rough it in the old dilapidated school, is still trying to work this out. Somebody might have thought it better to let the good boys have the nice new school, but no! We are so considerate for our bad boys — young and old.

CHARLES MACASKILL.

MIRACLE WANTED

I read that the Pope has obliged with two more miracles, this time for the Beatification of Innocent XI! Could His Holiness do one to help the strawberry crop, which is reported to be heading for failure?

A. D. CORRICK.

JESUS AND SEX

The compiler of "This Believing World" poses the rhetorical question: "Is not 'our Lord' the greatest anti-sex champion the world has ever seen?" Rubbish, my dear fellow!

The Gospel Jesus made few pronouncements on the question of sex, but those recorded show conclusively that he favoured lifelong monogamous union, and did not, like Paul immediately after him, exalt celibacy as "nobler" than marriage.

Real anti-sex teaching enters Christianity with the so-called "Church Fathers", and was most likely due to an exaggerated and hysterical reaction to the reckless licentiousness of the Roman Empire in its decline. Note, for example, the neurotic self-tormenting of St. Augustine in his Confessions. It is impossible to represent Jesus as an anti-sex fanatic; his views on this subject merely reflect the conventional and orthodox training of a dutiful son of the synagogue.

Delusions and obsessions Jesus certainly had, but they were connected entirely with his alleged "divine sonship" and his "kingdom not of this world". Let us estimate Jesus justly and sensibly, and not hoist him up as an Aunt Sally and pelt him indiscriminately whenever we are in an anti-clerical mood.

"This Believing World" would be much more effective if the writer would think a little instead of jotting down the first item that comes into his head and skating blithely on to the next item.

S. W. BROOKS.

OBITUARY

WE regret to hear of the death of Mrs. Grace Abbott, a lifelong and devoted member of the Leicester Secular Society. At the cremation on May 19th a service was conducted by Mr. Kirk, of the Leicester S.S., who paid a warm tribute to the memory of Mrs. Abbott.

AN UNPROCLAIMED FREETHINKER

(Continued from page 186)

few words has written more devastatingly than this? — "The Christian nations offer many illustrations of the law of irony. They profess the citizenship of heaven, the exclusive worship of eternal good; and never has the hungry pursuit of perishable joys, the love of this world, or the thirst for conquest, been stronger or more active than among these nations. Their official motto is the exact reverse of their real aspiration."

(To be concluded)

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