

The Freethinker

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Dr. ALBERT SCHWEITZER, O.M., is a man of mark in several fields. He is, I am told, a great organist and interpreter of Bach; a great theologian and interpreter of Christianity; even, a great saint doing noble medical and missionary work in Central Africa.

He appears to have gained the good opinion of the Press; but in spite of that he may be respectable. As to his organ-playing, I have never heard him, so I express no opinion upon his playing, which one emotional admirer describes as "a sacrament." As to Bach, there can be few more unnecessary labours than to "interpret" a great composer of music. In my opinion, Bach can be allowed to sound for himself. As to saintliness, there are saints and saints, some indeed being worse than others. Finally so much helpful and civilising work, both for body and mind, needs doing in the doctor's native Germany and also in my native England, that one wonders why he should need to go so far as Africa.

However, there he is. "A challenging figure in the world," we are told. One of our great men.

The Missing Rubies

I have read his book *Christianity and the Religions of the World*, which certainly challenges me. Rare as radium and precious as rubies is original thought; and I was told I should find it in Schweitzer. I am only too ready to find that pearl of great price, original thought, anywhere I can. But I cannot find it here. There is thought, however, and that is much.

In this book, the writer is concerned to compare Christianity with other religions and to show its superiority. Non-Christian religions used to be denounced as pagan and heathen by English Christians, and that was the end of them. Not so today. Buddhism and Hinduism claim to be superior to Christianity and make European converts — even distinguished ones. And nowadays even Christians, if sufficiently well-educated to study comparative religion, find sublimity, knowledge and true godliness in other faiths.

Shadow Boxing

We can commend Dr. Schweitzer when he says Christianity should not ask for exceptional privilege (as it does in the Press and on the air and in all controversy) but "should be in the thick of the battle of ideas relying solely on the power of its inherent truth." Unfortunately it is not. The Churches regard with scandalised horror and reprobation any ideas but their exclusive own, and even each other's ideas are wicked, or as they say, "sinful," fit only for suppression lest weaklings should be led astray by them. So Christianity indulges in shadow-boxing with itself, but rarely indeed in real fights with its opponents.

Dr. Schweitzer begins by contending for the originality of Christ's teaching. But he is well aware that from the time of Bruno Bauer, if not before, this has been strenu-

ously denied. He differentiates it from the old Græco-Oriental mystery-religions. Its eschatology—its expectation of the end of the world and its transfiguration into the Kingdom of Heaven — is its novelty.

Christianity and the Also-Rans

In comparing the Christian faith with "the others," Dr. Schweitzer flings Zoroastrianism incontinently into the wastepaper basket at once; not because Zoroastrianism may not be true or have the greatest affinity with Christianity, but merely because (he says) it no longer counts as playing a great part in the world. In other words, a religion does not count when "the big battalions" are not there and there are neither numbers nor wealth. Well, really!

A fine truth-seeker is the doctor indeed! Three paragraphs is enough to dispose of one of the 11 major religions of the world — the religion of God *versus* Devil.

One more contemptuous paragraph disposes of Islam, which "lacks spiritual originality and is not a religion with profound thoughts on God and the world." As to the wretched Judaic religion, one single sentence finishes that off: comparison between Hebraism and Christianity is unnecessary "because the latter has taken over the most vital ideas of the former and developed them." Tell it not in the synagogues, and publish it not in the State of Israel that the religion of Abraham and Moses (incidentally Jesus himself and his Virgin Mother) is worth only one contemptuous sentence in a book professing to compare Christianity with the religions of the world.

The plain truth is that the good doctor is not personally interested — even as a truth-seeker — in these three Faiths. He chucks them aside. They make no appeal to him. So they do not matter. How differently does he deal with Brahmanism, Buddhism, Hinduism and the Chinese religions! They interest him. They are more powerful; so they really count. All "these have profound and unique ideas about God and the world."

No doubt. But though I am no Parsee, no Mohameddan, no Jew, I am not prepared to subscribe to the proposition that these do not contain "profound and unique ideas" of the same order. And I distrust Dr. Schweitzer accordingly for his prejudice.

The Cards are Marked

So far so bad. After his easy victory for Christianity over the first three religions, Dr. Schweitzer lays down his own "guiding principles" on which he will compare the Christian with the other faiths. Surely this resembles putting your opponents at a disadvantage to begin with. The cards are marked! This author reminds me of the Mr. Gladstone of whom it was said that not only had he a card up his sleeve to cheat his opponents but when caught out at this cheating declared that the Almighty Lord put it there!

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

Dr. Schweitzer on Religions

— By C. G. L. DU CANN —

He condemns Brahmanism as polytheistic — although this really is doubtful, since the gods are in Brahma (as much as the Persons in the Christian Trinity) and also for its asceticism, destroying the will to live. These other religions were "religions of knowledge," attempting to explain the mysteries of life and death and so are "arrogant." How much better the "Humility" of Christian teaching which leaves mystery intact. These other religions renounce the world: but Christianity while freeing a man from the world leaves him to the world's work, declares the author.

When he comes to the Chinese religions, Schweitzer is equally condemnatory. It is clear he admires some facets of them. But activity and ethical deeds for him are the test. Upon these tests all but Christianity is considered to fail. He is like Saint James in his epistle, ever-insisting: "Faith without works is dead."

It is not — unfortunately. It is only deadening — which is not the same thing at all. But it is deadening to others, not necessarily to the believer. For true spirituality without morality, merging into union with the Absolute (such as the Hindu religions aim at) includes saints and mystics and contemplatives who may have "life more abundantly," I dare say, than any activists. After all, we often live far more intensely in ourselves (even the basest and most unspiritual of us) than in the outside world.

Schweitzer as a Critic

To sum up: Dr. Schweitzer's comparison of his own religion with the rest is prejudiced, biased and unfair. The pacificism of the Eastern religions is nowhere contrasted

with the murderous bellicosity of Christianity. The bribery of Christianity in offering rewards and punishments compared to the superior virtue of Buddhism, which offers no incentives to virtue, is nowhere even mentioned. As to animals, the author is utterly anthropomorphic in his religion. Of the Kingdom of God he says, "We no longer think of the Kingdom of God as extending over the universe. We limit it to mankind." Pity the poor Universe and the animal and plant creation — excluded from its creator by the kindness of Christians!

No wonder devotees of the Eastern religions meet Christians with "an attitude of superiority," as Dr. Schweitzer observes. If this is the best modern Christian apologetics can do, none need be surprised at that. A better case could be made out for Christianity on the ground of its leading in self-sacrifice.

An Axe-Grinding Propagandist

The most that can be said for this author is that he is a capable and clear expositor of his personal thinking, which, however, is as "one-sided" as he fears it is. He is not accepted by the orthodox Churches as their interpreter. This would not matter if he were not so palpably concerned to gain a cheap victory rather than to get at the difficult truth.

But what do imagined victories in words matter? What the world needs above all things is the Truth. Dr. Schweitzer is a mere axe-grinding propagandist and Truth is not the aim of his book.

Caxton Hall Report

THE YORK ROOM of the Caxton Hall proved exactly made to measure in accommodating an audience of over 300 on Wednesday evening, October 3rd, for the Humanist Council public demonstration on "Freedom on the Air."

The Chairman, Mr. Joseph Reeves, M.P., opening the meeting, referred to the recent exclusion of Mr. McCall from a TV programme in which he had complied with an invitation to record a two-minute talk. Mr. Reeves said this was sadly in line with the BBC's policy as declared in its correspondence. In spite of the promises of 1947, the BBC had stated its duty to be the safeguarding of Christian values and, moreover, to "foster their acceptance." This positive policy was based, according to the BBC, on the grounds that we were "citizens of a Christian country."

Miss Kathleen Nott, following, thought we should not accept the idea that this was a Christian country. "That's where the rats get in," she commented. Miss Nott looked forward to a day when the BBC would serve as "a popular University of the Air," but not under ecclesiastical auspices. Humanism, she said, had to be *scientific*; not *dominated* by science but *served* by science (in which she particularly included semantics). Scientific Humanism could provide us with a *possible* ethics as against the *impossible* ethics of Christian dogma.

Mr. Reginald Sorensen, M.P., painted an amusing picture of prayers in the House, led by the chaplain with his gold-knobbed pole. "We get rid of this part of the business as quickly as possible," said the speaker, and he indicated one use of the M.P.'s prayer card, which, put into the slot of a seat, reserved that seat for the day. Defining himself as a theist, Mr. Sorensen said Humanism was of Christian origin in such a way that today many Christians could, and did, call themselves Humanists. As a theist, however, he wanted to know what the atheist had to say, and so he supported the meeting wholeheartedly.

That distinguished man of letters, a charming personality as well as a writer of felicitous prose, Mr. E. M. Forster,

was the next speaker. He touched briefly but deftly on some correspondence he had conducted with the BBC after the broadcasts of Margaret Knight in 1955. He had suggested that Mrs. Knight should be heard again, and that such talks should not be rounded off by Christian speakers, who had their own talks without any such intervention.

Mrs. Margaret Knight, who was warmly received, referred to the BBC's defence that this was a Christian country. She then clearly exposed the inconsistency of such a claim. In seeking to justify their protection of the Christian religion the BBC proved more than they intended, for the state religion is not merely Christian but specifically Protestant. Yet there was no reluctance to give plenty of scope for Roman Catholic propaganda on the air, the aim of which was to convert Protestants. Mrs. Knight proved that this was the avowed aim of the R.C. Church by quoting from a Catholic source. Humanists, she maintained, were far more numerous than Catholics in this country, and what was sauce for the goose was sauce for the gander. Of 1,500 letters sent to the BBC after her 1955 broadcasts the proportion was three to two against her, but of 2,000 letters received by herself the proportion was reversed. The public were not getting more used to the idea that the Christian religion could be attacked, and there had been a good press for her recent ITV appearance, in which she answered questions put by sixth formers.

At the close of the meeting, the audience was asked to vote on the following motion:

This meeting regrets that the Governors of the BBC have failed to provide adequately for the needs of a large body of secular opinion which would welcome the expression of fundamental Humanist convictions. It calls the attention of the Governors to the recommendations of the Beveridge Committee in this respect, and asks that they be implemented.

This was passed with only one dissentient.

Messages of encouragement for the meeting were
(Concluded on page 327)

Five Delusions of Faith

By G. I. BENNETT

MAN, theology never tires of repeating, is the child of God, made by God in his own image. Man gravely nods his assent. He feels in some vague way that he has kinship with the Maker of All Things. He believes he has an especial dignity as man, and accepts confidently the role of God's favourite and favoured creature in the kingdom of the earth. He lives, it seems to him, in a world that is inalienably his world—the stage specially prepared by God for man. And he carries with him these assumptions, which indubitably colour all his views about life, from the first years of immature understanding to the last years of decrepit dotage.

That man deceives himself is obvious. But to see how gross is his self-deception let us put him in his proper biological setting.

Our planet has been in existence upwards of three thousand million years. For something like half that enormous period, so ungraspably staggering to the imagination, it was bereft of life—a great ball of inanimate matter whirling through the heavens. Then somewhere—probably in the shallow, sun-warmed waters of the primeval sea—life began. From microscopic dots of protoplasm started a chain of infinitely slow but astonishing organic development. From minute unicellular forms came multicellular; from marine life came terrestrial; from invertebrates came vertebrates; from mammal came man.

For vast stretches of time the earth was the home of great varieties of species long since extinct—of fishes, reptiles, flying things, mammals, many of gigantic size and fearsome appearance. Either they were killed off by brutes of prey excelling them in strength, agility, or wit; died out as a result of hypertrophy; failed to adapt themselves to changing conditions; or developed variations unfavourable to their environment.

A mere million years or so ago *homo*, ancestor of *homo sapiens*, made his emergence; and it may be only some fifty or sixty thousand years ago that *homo sapiens* came on the scene amid the snow and ice of the last glacial age. Slight in bodily strength and without natural protective armour, he gained biological ascendancy by virtue of the exercise of brain and hand and craft. In these respects his superiority to the rest of the animal world was decisive and complete; and by reason of them alone does he continue to enjoy biological ascendancy.

Such is the evolutionary background against which man's claim that he is the child of God, created by God in his own image, must be maintained. Unlikeliest of unlikely notions! If it were indeed true that man was made in God's image then, clearly, he must have been an afterthought on the Creator's part. God chose, it would seem, to make a stupendous passing show of the most extraordinarily grotesque monsters before he experimented with the species *homo*.

Nor is that all. If man were really made in the likeness of God, it would mean, as a character puts it in a novel I read recently, that the Almighty will one day be a "back number": for who can knowledgeably suppose that man a million or more years hence (assuming he is still in the running then) will be physically and mentally similar to us? The idea of man's likeness to God pinpoints God not only in terms of time (our present stage of evolutionary development). It pinpoints him also in terms of space: how can we be so presumptuous as to think that, out of all the possible forms of higher life that may evolve in a universe of inesti-

mable myriads of stars, ours should be the form (the highest attainable form) in which God himself is shapen?

The Christian faith is so full of implausibilities that it is a matter for wonderment in this day and age that anyone of normal intelligence should any longer find it credible.

Take the story of Jesus. According to Christian belief, God sent upon earth hardly two thousand years ago his only son to tell us that, if we believed in him as Christ and did his bidding, we should be saved and blessed with eternal heavenly life.

Why this visit of Divinity incarnate should have been deferred to so relatively late an hour in the life of mankind is obscure. And what a peculiarly defective sense of fairness and justice does it reveal. Countless generations of men and women have apparently passed into the bottomless pit of oblivion (or worse), either because they lived before the coming of Christ or because they were born in a part of the world where another faith—Buddhist, Shintoist, Mohammedan, or some other—held sway.

But while millions will no doubt continue to believe in it all—Christ, salvation, and life everlasting—some of us at least will agree with Somerset Maugham that "immortality is too stupendous a notion to be entertained in connection with common mortals. They are too insignificant to deserve eternal punishment or to merit eternal bliss."

Popular fancy has it that Jesus was—and is, since he allegedly lives now and for ever—the Prince of Peace. Yet, ironical to relate, the nations of Christendom, diligent in their worship of his name and character, have never hesitated finally to use force in settling their differences. Throughout history, even to the present time, we are confronted with the spectacle of two warring nations or groups of nations, both affirming Jesus to be their spiritual lord, and both petitioning God to bless their arms and bring them victory. What extraordinary self-contradiction and delusive expectations of faith are men and nations capable of!

But there was one man of scrupulous mind and independent conviction who, though he stood at the head of his strife-rent nation during its desperate days of civil war, steadfastly refused to have any part in sponsoring corporate prayer for victory. He was Abraham Lincoln. He wrote simply:

"In great contests each party believes itself to act in accordance with the will of God. Both may be, and one must be, wrong. God cannot be for and against the same thing at the same time. In the present civil war it is quite possible that God's purpose is something different from the purpose of either party. . . ."

This passage, at any rate, is still worth quoting as a characteristic utterance of one singularly free of the cant and vapid piety into which men in high places so easily fall—especially in times of stress and danger.

(To be concluded)

CAXTON HALL REPORT

(Concluded from page 326)

received from such Freethinking organisations as De Dageraad (Holland), Deutscher Freidenker-Verband e.V. (Germany), La Libre Pensee (Luxembourg) and the World Union of Freethinkers. The New Zealand Rationalist Association was represented by Mr. and Mrs. A. T. Parlanc, at present on holiday in Britain.

G. H. TAYLOR.

This Believing World

We asked the other day what Roman Catholic women thought of the celibate pronouncements of their Church on the burning question of saving the mother or the child if that had to be faced in motherhood. One answer was given in the *Sunday Express* the other week, where an R.C. woman gave an account of the decision she and her husband came to. It was to save *her* life, and as a result, of course, the Catholic nurses "treated her like a criminal and an outcast"; they would not speak to her, and the visiting priest cut her dead. It was a dreadful experience—but what did the poor lady expect? She had to face a Roman Catholic law, and it would surprise her, no doubt, to learn that the early Church Fathers in general looked upon woman, as a sex, "as a sink of vileness and iniquity." Did she really expect to be treated as a human being by the Church?

★

We got an illuminating picture of a thoroughly Fundamentalist Christianity from Father Huddleston—the great opponent of Apartheid, who had to leave South Africa because of the Boer Government—on the ITV recently. England is spiritually dead, he said, and secularism and materialism thus had completely failed. When Mr. Tom Driberg asked to have this better explained, Fr. Huddleston went off incoherently on to Christianity and what "our Lord" said. But he did *not* explain how it was that after nearly 2,000 years of Christianity, most of the time forced on to the people by the most savage threats, England was, if not quite, almost dead "spiritually."

★

On the other hand, it was just as illuminating to listen to the way the "Brains Trust" on TV dealt with a question about Science and Religion. The only member who claimed there was *now* no opposition was Canon Demant—the rest, consisting of Nicholas Monsarrat, Arthur Calder-Marshall (both famous novelists), and Sir E. James (a distinguished High Master) plucked up enough courage to say or imply that the Biblical story of Creation was not *quite* true, but that was all. They appeared almost too frightened to say another word against religion. Or any more against the Divine Creation Story!

★

For half a crown you can get from Leicester a 12-lesson course on the "Faith, History and Practice of the Church of England." No doubt whatever it will steer all already fully-fledged believers into the right path. But what about the unbelievers? Would it convert even *one*? The truth is that, just as Billy Graham drew hardly anybody but true Christians to hear him, so any instruction of the "Faith" can only convince those who are already convinced. And in any case, Roman Catholics prepared a course years ago so effectively that quite a number of C. of E.s have gone over. What a game!

★

A Leicester padre has an infallible method of settling the Suez question—it is that everybody should pray, not that the Western Powers or Nasser or the Soviet should win, but that the "Will of God should be done." And what is the Will of God on this problem? *Nobody* knows. Nobody knows whether there is a will of God or even a God. But pray all the same. Something—anything—must drag in the Churches into the question of Suez.

★

After angrily insisting that divorce must be utterly and absolutely impossible in a Christian world because "our Lord" was utterly and absolutely against it—which is, in

any case, quite untrue—a number of our bishops are now contending that it should be allowed; for God Almighty himself would never, never prevent a divorced person from receiving Holy Communion, or getting married again in church. It is almost blasphemously comical to read the *volte-face* of some of our modern Christian Churches on the matter. Not, of course, the Roman Catholic Church. The celibates who run that relic of ancient superstitions will naturally never change on the subject of marriage. A man (or woman) married to a lunatic or murderer must bear his Cross for eternity. He would not even be allowed to contract a "Heavenly" marriage—whatever that is.

★

Then again the Vatican sends out from time to time its heavenly decision on such a subject as kissing. Its latest prohibition is that kissing between unmarried and unrelated persons is a "venial" sin—the word "venial" making it look much worse, of course. So, kissers, beware. It is Hell to come under the displeasure of the Vatican. However, when it comes to kissing between husband and wife, it is allowed if "the intention is pure." Lord-love-a-duck!

Facts for Freethinkers — 15

INDIAN PARTIES

ALTHOUGH India's second general election as an independent state will not take place until next year (probably March) canvassing has already commenced and the major political parties are drafting their manifestos to submit to the 175,000,000 electorate.

The ruling Congress Party, which has an overwhelming majority in both Houses of Parliament, seems fairly certain to be returned to power and is nominating approximately 4,000 candidates for the state legislatures and central parliament. Opposition parties, however, will, no doubt, campaign strongly in an effort to reduce the Congress majority, and strongest opposition will, in all probability, come from the Communist Party, which, with only 125,000 members, obtained over 6,000,000 votes at the last election and is the largest single opposition group, holding 41 seats (out of 715) in both Houses of Parliament and over 200 seats in State legislatures. Incidentally, the Congress Party also has an absolute majority in nearly all the State legislatures and has over 8,700,000 members.

The Praja Socialist Party has 263,391 members, and won over 17,000,000 votes in 1952, and, although they oppose Communist methods, may collaborate with the Communists and other political parties in some areas. Other parties worth noting are the Hindu Tory parties—the Ram Rajya Parishad, the Jan Sangh and the Hindu Mahasabha, which have practically identical aims and objects, disapproving of western, modernising influences on Indian political, social and religious life, and strongly opposing *secularism*.

These three parties wish to see a return to the administration "Ram Rajya," based on the Hindu religion, which operated during the reign of Rama, a god of Hindu mythology.

Eighty per cent. of the population being illiterate, the parties use symbols to enable the electorate to distinguish between them (i.e., hammer and sickle, plough, bullock cart, etc.) and ballot boxes are coloured differently, slogans being used "Vote in the blue box" or "Vote in the brown box."

In 1952 it was more than six months before polling was completed in the remoter parts of the country.

D.S.

THE FREETHINKER

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

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

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

- Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street, Kingston-on-Thames).—Every Sunday, 8 p.m.: J. W. BARKER and E. MILLS.
Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every weekday, 1 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, SMITH and FINKEL. Sundays, 7.45 p.m.: Messrs. MILLS, WOODCOCK, SMITH and FINKEL.
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 and R. POWE. Sunday, 11 a.m.: R. MORRELL and R. POWE.
Wales and Western Branch N.S.S. (Bristol Downs).—Every Sunday, 6.30 p.m.: DAVE SHIPPER.
West London Branch N.S.S.—Every Sunday at the Marble Arch from 4 p.m.: Messrs. ARTHUR, EBURY and others.

INDOOR

- Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, October 14th, 6.45 p.m.: J. C. SIDMONS, B.Sc., "The 20th Congress of the Russian Communists."
Central London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, off Edgware Road).—Sunday, October 14th, 7.15 p.m.: H. M. NAHMAD, "Middle East Background."
Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, October 16th, 7.15 p.m.: A. ROBERTSON, M.A., "The Impact of the Dead Sea Scrolls."
Glasgow Secular Society (Central Halls, 25 Bath Street).—Sunday, October 14th, 7 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, "Germany and the Roman Catholic Church."
Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, October 14th, 6.30 p.m.: Alderman J. MINTO, "The Watch Committee."
NOTTINGHAM COSMOPOLITAN DEBATING SOCIETY (Co-operative Hall, Parliament Street).—Sunday, October 14th, 2.30 p.m.: W. MESSOM (C.P.), "Nationalisation — for Needs or Profits."
South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Friday, October 12th, 7.30 p.m.: FRED HOYLE, M.A., "The Time Scale of the Universe"—Conway Memorial Lecture. Sunday, October 14th, 11 a.m.: A. ROBERTSON, M.A., "Anatole France as Humanist."

Notes and News

In a new book, *Irish Journey*, by an R.C. convert, Halliday Sutherland, published by Geoffrey Bles, we learn that of 3,291 unmarried girls who between 1950 and 1953 appealed to the Westminster Crusade of Rescue, half were Irish. These girls report that "in Eire the unmarried girl who wishes her baby to be adopted has to stay for one or two years in a Catholic institution without pay. Meanwhile the Catholic Protection and Rescue Society of Ireland complains that in England many children of unmarried Irish Catholic mothers are being adopted by non-Catholics and thus lost to the Faith. That means that the Catholic adopters of children are insufficient to take the number of Catholic illegitimates.

THE FREETHINKER SUSTENTATION FUND

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £41 5s. 3d.; Mrs. A. Vallance, £1; Wm. S. McNeil, £1; W. Steinhardt, 10s.; A. D. Corrick, £1; L. Hanger, 2s. 6d.; A. C. Blythe, 5s.; E.C.R., 5s.; H. Fitton, £5; A. Pigott, £5; E. Henderson, 15s.; J.T., 5s.; W. Collins, £2 12s. 6d.; S. Eckersley, 10s.—Total to date, October 5th, 1956, £59 10s. 3d.

It is further stated that some Catholic priests, on being consulted by unmarried pregnant girls, have given them £5 to go to England and have their child adopted, after which they are to return to Eire.

★

SOME weeks ago we published an article on "The Church and Mammon." The *Daily Worker* of September 17th quotes a letter from a churchman drawing attention to the huge overdraft, during a time of credit squeeze, of £270,000 for the London Diocese for "reorganisation." The writer comments: "Clearly the men of God are getting advantages which you or I, or the Secular Society, or the Communist Party, would be slung out for requesting. . . . We should like to know whether or not the Bishop of London approves of the Church receiving economic advantages which are not open to the community as a whole. If so we shall certainly feel that, for him, spirituality calls for some very dubious allies."

★

WHEN a law is absurd and antiquated, it is natural that people will try to circumvent it. It is not only natural; it is desirable. Such is the case with the Sunday Observance Act of 1780. The Lord's Day Observance Society notwithstanding, motor cycle scrambles continue, and it is well they should. Admission fees cannot be charged but what is to stop the sale of programmes constituting a "donation" to club funds? Nothing is more despicable than the "dog in the manger" spitefulness of the Sabbatarian, and we wish the scramblers many happy hours of Sunday sport.

★

PROTEST against another kind of Sunday entertainment appeared in the correspondence columns of the (London) *Evening News* on September 14th. It condemned the "type of play televised by the BBC on Sunday evenings" and regretted that the Churches hadn't protested likewise instead of accepting "the fact that atheists can force their rubbish on the public, keeping their worst efforts for Sunday viewing." "Surely decent people have the right to demand decent programmes," the writer exclaimed, issuing the warning that "Until we clean up our national entertainment our country will continue to rush downhill." Any day now, we expect a new ITA advertising slogan: "Decent programmes for decent people; the alternative to atheist rubbish."

★

THE movement called "Christianity in Industry" was formed to take Christianity to workers who showed no particular eagerness to take themselves to Christianity. An attempt is being made to catch workers at Slough during the lunch break. According to the *Windsor, Slough and Eton Express* (September 14th), out of Slough Trading Estate's 28,000 workers less than 40 turned up for the first open-air service.

★

THE Winter series of lectures at the Laurie Arms, London, W.1, commenced last Sunday with the visit of the N.S.S. President, Mr. F. A. Ridley. The Secretary of the Central London Branch N.S.S., Mr. J. M. Alexander, informs us that this coming Sunday's talk should be particularly topical, in view of the Suez crisis. The speaker, Mr. H. M. Nahmad — himself an Arab, has considerable knowledge of the Middle East, and has written, lectured and broadcast extensively on this subject.

John M. Robertson

By JOHN HASTINGS

A HUNDRED YEARS have gone by since the birth of John M. Robertson, the dogged Scots fighter for liberty of thought whom so many will still remember. They have been a hundred years of struggle for liberty of thinking and have seen vast movements forward in man's understanding of the universe. Darwin published his monumental work three years after Robertson's birth and, before a decade had gone by, the first glimmerings of scientific Biblical studies were making an impact upon English thought and religion. A number of political changes were to reform the constitution and the age of democracy was upon us. Robertson was among the pioneers of this free and democratic movement. But his followers have now no cause to be complaisant. In those days, it must have seemed as if the process of liberalising would go onwards and upwards for ever. Since then, there has appeared a large Catholic revival in the religious field and strong Fascist movements in politics. In other words, dictatorship and autocracy have raised their heads again and, if Robertson's lifework is to be carried on, it can only be in terms of a continued struggle for the free mind within the free society.

Robertson wrote very widely. He was never a popular writer and lacked the easy pen which makes for simple reading. But he was a vast collector of facts and contributed to learning in many fields. His works on the Jesus problem are among the classics of the mythicist theory and, whether or not one accepts this point of view, they are contributions to the literature of the subject which must always be considered by any who write upon it. Histories of Freethought are valuable additions by Robertson to general rationalistic literature. They are collections of facts which are not easily to be found elsewhere and do much to illustrate the flowering of the human mind and spirit. *Dynamics of Religion* was a pioneering study in the influence of economic situations upon organised religion, a branch of study which authorities such as Tawney, Max Weber or J. A. Hobson have since brought well to the fore. Robertson was also a Shakespearian student and his prolific writings included a number of political studies. *Saxon and Celt* was an interesting study of the Irish situation, whilst his other works touched upon points of patriotism and the nature of the political state.

As might well be expected in the old colleague of Charles Bradlaugh, Robertson was a strong libertarian, a radical and an individualist in his outlook. In the end, his political course was to lead him to acceptance of Asquith's leadership, his Cabinet post at the Board of Trade, and finally to defeat with his party at the 1918 election and to a general retirement from active politics. The world has changed a great deal since those days and Robertson was not among the younger Liberals who kept pace by joining the Labour Party. Indeed, his old-time association with Bradlaugh had made him more than a little suspicious of Socialistic theory. After a gap of many years, it would be easy to write off Robertson as an out-of-date politician whose theories belong to the lumber-room of the past and whose political party now lies in the dust. But to do so would be more than a mistake. It is too often forgotten that the old radicals were the spearhead of progress in their day. When Robertson was a practising politician, social reform and the service of freedom was in liberal and radical hands. Admittedly, theory had developed and the world had gone on into new courses, but this is no reason for decrying the work done in his generation by a worthy opponent of caste

and privilege. When the story of the growth of political liberty in this country comes to be written, Robertson's name should find a worthy niche within it.

Others will doubtless say much of his New Testament studies, but we should like to say a general word upon Robertson as an historian. Like so many liberal writers, he saw no exact or preconceived pattern in history. It was an evolution, progressive and moving forward, but not in terms of imminent purpose. Man was gradually undergoing a great emancipation of the human spirit. Again, writers of today would wish to state this theory a little less surely. Man moves backwards as well as forwards whilst biological theory does not seem to justify an easy optimism in social growth or intellectual progress. Yet, however much a pessimistic note may creep in nowadays with the memories of modern dictatorships over mind and body, it remains true that, in the course of history, the reactionaries have not had it all their own way. Great discoveries have freed the mind and have led to adventures of the human spirit. The struggle against reaction has had its martyrs and their sufferings have brought great rewards to humanity. The several volumes which Robertson wrote on the history of the freedom of thought should be read against the background of this general outlook. In his characteristic manner, he built up an arsenal of fact which it was impossible to gainsay and, in so doing, illustrated the battle for human freedom and for human rights in matters concerning liberty of thought and speech. The books are of outstanding value and should always occupy a place in any library on the subject.

We recall our earliest memories of Robertson speaking from the platform of the old South Place Chapel. It was his natural pulpit and he seemed to form a link with the Hall of Science, with Moncure Conway, and with the secularist movement in the fighting days of the 'seventies. He was a great man with wide knowledge yet none of the universities of the United Kingdom ever had the decency to offer him an honorary degree. He had to pay a big price for the privilege of preserving his liberty and his integrity. Many a bishop or other cleric, whose real academic attainments were of the slightest, was dressed up with an honorary D.D. Various people managed to secure honorific letters after their names for very attenuated services to art or learning. But Robertson was passed over because he had chosen to tread unpopular paths. Yet the day will come when he will be recalled as a great pioneer in the world of thought and in political life, when his services will be estimated at their true value. His great learning will have passed into the common stock of gain:

Others I doubt not if not we
The issue of their toils shall see,
And they, forgotten and unknown,
Young children gather as their own,
The harvest which the dead have sown.

In Eire, the Most Rev. Dr. Philbin, Bishop of Clonfert, unveiled a statue of Our Lady "Queen of the Universe" at Ballinasloe Mental Hospital. Seems as good a place as any.

—NEXT WEEK—

PURITANS ON THE PROWL

By F. A. HORNIBROOK

Public Enemy No. 1

By E. G. MACFARLANE

MR. F. A. RIDLEY'S repeated assertion that "Catholic Action is Public Enemy No. 1" so far as the Freethought movement is concerned is something which I feel ought to be examined more closely.

The future of the Freethought movement is surely bound up with the future of society generally and from this we can deduce that the chief menace to society is also the chief menace to Freethought. Now since it is commonplace and indeed undeniable that the dangers, which exist due to the immanent possibility of international war, overshadow all else in human society at the present time; it follows that the ideological features of our lives which make international wars possible constitute the focus for our attention in the matter of locating Public Enemy No. 1.

I assert without fear of substantial contradiction that the mental activity aroused by Catholic Action is so negligible in this respect that to suggest that Catholic Action is Public Enemy No. 1 is just ridiculous. In my lifetime I have seen two wars and in both of these wars I have seen Christians of all sects in one country killing Christians of all sects in another country. To my simple mind there is a vital lesson here. Religion or religious loyalties are in practice always regarded as inferior to national loyalties so far as the mass of the people are concerned. Thus we can rest assured that the devotees of Catholic Action in Britain will readily obey the call to kill devotees of Catholic Action in Germany or any other country when the governments of these sovereign states decide that military action is required to settle an international difference of some kind.

Recent developments in connection with the Suez Canal controversy also support this view—and the pressing menace of this particular international dispute must surely have brought home to many how little Christian principles or indeed any other religious teachings affect the actions of people inspired by nationalism. On the Egyptian side we have seen the priests of the Moslem religion eagerly becoming the tools of nationalism insofar as they urged their Moslem followers to decide that any military action in defence of the Egyptian attitude to the future of the Canal could be regarded as "holy." Make no mistake either that, should the British Government decide to use military action to press their own views about the future of the Canal, we shall also see the priests of Britain symbolically blessing the bombs and the flame-throwers to be used against the "infidels." We should clearly and emphatically realise that the leaders of religion everywhere are the slaves of local nationalisms and that those who pay any heed to such religious leaders or support their policies of religious instruction in schools and monopoly of the radio and television programmes are simply being their dupes and lending themselves to the modern Public Enemy No. 1, which is nationalism.

Nationalism has displaced all worship of a God of the Universe—which was a reasonable activity at an earlier stage of the development of the human mind. Nationalism has introduced the heretical principle of putting the value of the part above the value of the whole. Priests everywhere have connived at and supported this development. This is really why they must be shunned and rejected in all aspects of social life. They have betrayed the sacred cause of truth and general social unity in their anxiety to pander to and flatter the politicians nominated by the idolaters of the nation or the sect. These priests and ministers have thus become the engineers of division and destruction—because there can be no doubt that where division is attained in the

shape of local national sovereignty (which bows to no superior authority short of defeat in war) we have the surety of *destruction* following the clash of nations armed with modern weapons.

In the name of Science (which sees all men as members of one race—Homo Sapiens) and Freethought (which would release the minds of all men from all ancient dogmas) we must consider now where we are going and the nature of the ideas which guide our destinies. High on their list must be the exposure of the idolatry of the nation and part which religious leaders have played in foisting this idolatry upon the minds of men everywhere.

Skulduggery

By COLIN MCCALL

THE LOSS of those who are near and dear is as tragic for the Christian as for the atheist. Human grief is no respecter of creeds, and it would be in bad taste, as well as unkind to make death an occasion for fun. I have no such intention here. Yet I feel impelled to refer to an Irish newspaper passage bearing upon the death of Cardinal Bernard Griffin. The passage in question was written before the Cardinal's death and appeared in *The Standard* of August 17th, in the regular feature, "A Catholic News-Letter from London." It displays the foolishness and—I think—the degrading Catholic attitude to both life and death.

It reported that the Cardinal had left London on August 7th on what was "officially" a holiday, but was described by some papers as a convalescence. He was recovering from his third attack of cardiac thrombosis and felt quite well. "I shall resume my engagements next month, after my return," he said. We know now that this was not to be, but there was apparently no anxiety at the time. He had gone for a holiday in Devonshire, and the letter-writer thought it "a reasonable conjecture to say that His Eminence is now staying at the Convent in Torquay where he has stayed on a number of past occasions."

He went to the Convent of the Daughters of the Cross at Stoodley Knowle, Torquay, for his convalescence in 1951, and it was while he was there that the Bishop of Plymouth—now Archbishop of Birmingham—"brought him the skull of Blessed Cuthbert Mayne, the Cornish proto-martyr of the English seminary priests of the 16th century, whose canonisation the English Bishops earnestly hope to obtain." The skull, we are told, is kept by the Carmelite nuns of Lanherne, Cornwall, in their chapel.

Now, the veneration of old bones has always seemed to me—along with certain aspects of the eucharist—the most physically disgusting feature of a disgusting religion. It is bad enough to regard bleeding hearts and ghastly crucifixes as objects of devotion, with which one should surround oneself and one's children; to drink what is allegedly the blood itself is cannibalism. But worst of all, perhaps, is this solemn adoration of skulls and skeletal remains. It is important to have skulls for examination and display in museums and for demonstration purposes in hospitals and possibly schools. Apart from these and similar uses, I am a firm believer that the place for human skulls is the crematorium or the earth—and preferably the former.

Considered anatomically, a skull can prove interesting and instructive; æsthetically it leaves a great deal to be desired. One may decorate it with jewels and set it on

velvet, but this serves only to vulgarise. True, a macabre enjoyment may be derived from the numerous assorted patterns of skulls and bones in the Paris catacombs or in the Capuchin Church at Rome. But it is the anonymity of the whole collection which makes it bearable — for me, at any rate. To the Capuchins in their church, it is different. It would seem that some of them are still buried in this curious crypt, alongside the skeletons of their predecessors draped in the habit of the order. This strikes me as unhealthy.

I am not particularly squeamish but I dislike morbidity. Like all human beings — and some animals too — I mourn the death of those I hold dear. It is natural, inevitable, that we should. But we have, sooner or later, to turn back to the job of living. It is absurd, indeed harmful, to shut oneself off from the world and to perpetuate mourning, as the widow does in Tennessee Williams's *The Rose Tattoo*. It is also primitive.

It is more primitive to believe that relics of the dead possess magic powers. And this is precisely what the Catholic Church teaches, though it would doubtless deny the adjective. That "magic" is the right word, however, may be seen in the present instance in connection with the skull of Blessed Cuthbert Mayne. In 1952 seven thousand pilgrims gathered at Launceston, Cornwall, for the annual pilgrimage in his honour; and Cardinal Griffin was there. Addressing the pilgrims, the Cardinal, "in very much better health, attributed his recovery to the martyr's intercession." Whether the skull was present at this gathering is not stated, but it was obviously a necessary factor in the healing process referred to; otherwise the Bishop of Plymouth would scarcely have bothered to bring it along. If it were not considered to possess special properties, why preserve it at all?

"It may well be that Cardinal Griffin is now again seeking the intercession of Blessed Cuthbert Mayne," adds the writer of the London letter. This time, however, the skull's magic qualities were wanting.

CORRESPONDENCE

MR. READER AS PROPHET

Must the lamentations of Mr. Reader continue to knock the heart out of us with the gospel of hopelessness and despair? Such horrors as he bewails have happened before and the human race has survived. Gunpowder was just as alarming to its contemporaries.

What does he want us to do? Collapse in a flood of tears? And even if he is right, should that affect our grim determination to fight for the best we know, so long as we can?

His hero Akhnaton was a hopeless failure who ran away from from his job (like our own Edward the Confessor). MOLLY ROCHE.

CHRISTIAN AND JEW

Mr. Morton is in error when he says that the Jews imposed Christianity upon the Gentiles. The historical fact is, that although a Jewish sect founded Christianity, the Gentiles took this ready-made religion from the Jews and made millions upon millions of pounds out of it. I agree that biologically there is no such thing as a Jewish Race or any other race. There is only the human race with variations brought about by physical and other conditions. The wealthy Jew thinks no more about the poor Jew than the rich Christian thinks about the poor Christian.

The Jewish and the Christian religions are two great frauds, manipulated for the purpose of keeping the masses in subjection. The governing factor is profit out of their poor deluded dupes who are promised milk and honey in the world to come. The sooner working men Christians and Jews recognise this fact, the sooner will they be emancipated from both religions.

Pope, Archbishop, or Rabbi, their foul trade is the same to the Freethinker, and as long as these villainous purveyors of superstition exist, so long will wars be prepared in the name of God and peace. These parasitic growths on the social organism of all countries always have peace on their lips, but it is the peace of death.

PAUL VARNEY.

THE CHURCH AND MAMMON

According to the astounding revelation made in the *Sunday Express* of September 23rd by Lady Fulbrook, she has started a fashionable florist's business in Knightsbridge, and when she received orders for the decoration of certain churches for society weddings, she found that a particular florist had paid the church for monopoly rights and that all others were barred from the work. The Vicar of St. Peter, Eaton Square, says that he works a list of "approved florists." But the Rev. Patrick Gilliat of Brompton, a prominent Evangelical leader, and the Rev. J. S. Brewis of St. James', Piccadilly, both openly admitted that a certain firm had an exclusive rights in their church and both agreed that they had an "understanding" with the firm in question. The latter gentleman is a son-in-law of Lord Selborne, a prominent spokesman for "free enterprise" in commerce, and a leading figure in the Christian Evidence Society! Our first impression was that of the sordidness of the whole affair. Filthy lucre has entered the church doors with a vengeance and it implies a state and an outlook where there could be little room for the Son of Man who had not where to lay his head and his 12 workman-followers. Had they entered these churches, they would presumably have been told very quickly that somebody else had already bought the exclusive rights! Certainly one cannot imagine them even qualifying even for so minor a position as that of verger in these august portals. In fact, the whole set-up looks extremely bad and casts a lurid reflection upon what passes for fashionable Christianity in modern London. It is to be presupposed that the Bishop of London is a believer in the social and political outlook claimed in the Gospels as propagated by the Son of Man. Perhaps, when he has a moment free from examining the finances of his Diocesan Fund, he will devote it to stopping what is obviously as scandalous a state of affairs as was the appearance of certain money-changers in the Temple!

A. CHALLENGER.

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