

The Freethinker

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UNDOUBTEDLY a landmark in the evolution of both Christianity and European civilisation was the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century, originally inaugurated by Martin Luther. The initial value of the Reformation lay in the breach which it drove into the previously undivided framework of the medieval Church. Mankind had henceforth two or more orthodoxies to choose from, and through the gap thus offered ideas arose which eventually went far beyond what the Reformers intended. For a long time, in fact, this represented the primary service of the Reformation to liberal thought. What must strike any critical student of the Reformation was its timidity in theological matters. After their initial

breach with Rome and the denial of Papal authority, Luther and Calvin and their successors made very few theological innovations. It is in fact only in the past century that the Protestant Churches have begun to apply their first principal of "private judgement" to the Bible as well as to the Church. The indescribable confusion into which the Higher Criticism of the hitherto sacrosanct scriptures has thrown contemporary Protestantism is well known, but one of its incidental results has not been at all happy: the current theological disintegrations and resulting weakness of Protestantism is one of the main causes of the present world-wide come-back of the Roman Catholic Church, constituting one of the greatest — to Freethinkers perhaps the greatest — of the dangers of our time. When, for example, Luther hoisted the standard of revolt at Wittenberg in 1517 he probably did not foresee that in 1956 his native land would virtually be ruled by the Vatican.

A Protestant Speaks Up

Another result of the weakening of the moral fibre of Protestantism is its changed attitude towards the Church of Rome. The present writer was brought up in ultra-Protestant circles in which certain dogmatic propositions were not so much argued as taken for granted. One such was, of course, the verbal infallibility of the Holy Scriptures down to the last comma, but another, hardly less firmly established, was the literal identity of the Papacy with the Scarlet Woman, the "great whore of Babylon" depicted in terrifying imagery in the Apocalypse of John. One might almost say that this identification represented the hallmark of a good Protestant. The leopard might not change his spots but the Pope could apparently change his sex? Nowadays the talk seems to be on "reunion with Rome." It is therefore with much pleasure that we find Protestants who will still speak up. The most recent Protestant writer to do this is Adrian Pigott, whose recently published book, *Freedom's Foe — the Vatican* (Wycliffe Press) contains much to interest and instruct all liberal thinkers who see in the Church of Rome the traditional foe and persecutor of both mental and political liberty.

Ecclesiastical Fascism

Mr. Pigott, a liberal Protestant and a widely travelled man, gives many first-hand instances of the paralysing grip of the dead hand of Rome on social and intellectual progress in many parts of the world, providing his readers with a comprehensive survey of the more notorious villainies of the "one true Church" in past centuries. The great Protestant historian Lecky long ago reminded us that the Church of Rome has shed more innocent blood than any other human institution, and though much blood, as well as water, has flowed under Nazi and Fascist bridges since Lecky's day, the Vatican still probably holds its unsavoury record. Mr. Pigott also produces fac-

similes of the medals struck by Pope Gregory XIII to commemorate the massacre of the French Protestants on St. Bartholomew's Eve, 1572, the stark horror of which stands out even from those bloodstained years. However, our author is no mere antiquarian; his record of Papal atrocities includes many more modern examples, and he forcibly indicates a point frequently made by the present writer, viz., that the Papacy represents ecclesiastical Fascism, the prototype of the secular brand. Nor is it any accident that all the Fascist dictators of our era — Mussolini, Hitler, Franco, Salazar, Dollfuss, Pavelic, Pilsudski — were all reared in Catholic circles, and that they went into their bloody business in conscious imitation of the Old Firm! Mr. Pigott accuses in particular Pius XI, the scheming Pope of the Vatican-Fascist alliance, described so fully by Mr. Manhattan in his *Catholic Church Against the 20th Century*. I cannot agree with Mr. Pigott that the present Pope is any less reactionary than was his predecessor. Circumstances, in particular the collapse of the Fascist empires in 1945, have merely compelled him to assume, temporarily at least, a democratic mask.

Terror Over Jugo-Slavia

Perhaps the most interesting, certainly the most terrifying, section of Mr. Pigott's book is that describing the clerical-Fascist regime of General Pavelic with its wholesale massacre of heretics, recalling the days of the Albigenses. This ground has already been covered by Avro Manhattan in *Terror Over Jugo-Slavia* but Mr. Pigott has the advantage of first-hand knowledge of the country. As both authors remind us, the bloody deeds perpetrated by Pavelic's Catholic crusaders indicate beyond doubt that behind its present democratic mask the Church of Rome still preserves the bloody machinery of organised terror. Mr. Pigott quotes eminent Catholic theologians who state explicitly that in the 20th century, as in the 13th when the Holy Inquisition was officially constituted, the Church has the right and the duty to put heretics to death. The book cover features a fierce denunciation of freedom of religion by the present Archbishop of Seville, Cardinal Segura.

VIEWS and OPINIONS

A Protestant

Speaks Up

By F. A. RIDLEY

Searchlight on the Vatican

It is, in fact, this permanently intolerant character that makes the Vatican the major enemy of human progress now as in earlier centuries. Mr. Pigott's searchlight on the Vatican deserves a warm welcome from all lovers of freedom and will, we hope, enjoy a wide circulation, which its low price should assist. Possibly in the future all of progressive mind will have to stand shoulder to shoulder against the totalitarian might of Rome; such a united front would include, we hope, many Protestants who have preserved the vitality, without the fanaticism, of the Reformers. The Vatican may not actually be the residence of the Scarlet Woman, but it indubitably houses the greatest menace to human progress and freedom. We welcome this timely and comprehensive book by an able and liberal Protestant writer as a valuable contribution towards such a future alliance of all progressive people against the common enemy the Vatican.

Freedom's Foe — the Vatican. By Adrian Pigott. Wycliffe Press, 184 Fleet Street, E.C.4. Price 1s. 6d.

Puritans on the Prowl

By F. A. HORNIBROOK

THE PURITAN OR SMUTHOUND is always out to reform something or somebody. Now he has organised an attack against the comic postcards which have always been a feature of our English seaside towns.

In many cases both the drawing and the humour is much more crude than coarse. Usually these cards portray ladies in scanty attire or bathing suits, displaying enormous frontal and posterior development, and the usual broad jokes about sex, flirtation, bathing, etc. Most people are amused at them for a minute or so and then promptly forget about them. Not so with the Puritan or Wowsler — he is easily shocked, in fact he loves being shocked. He thinks that his purity is being assailed and that the "young people" must be protected from anything which causes them lascivious thoughts. It is not the young people who see evil, it is the middle-aged and elderly puritans whose ideas are so primitive and whose minds are so vile who get a cheap sex thrill from cards of this type.

Regularly the police in seaside towns swoop on little newsagents and stallholders and confiscate their stocks of cards. Left to themselves, the police would never interfere, but pressure is exerted on them and they are egged on by a noisy yapping minority, often members of the local council who spend their time looking for things by which they will be shocked. The police, who could spend their time more profitably in checking crime, have also to act as art censors and condemn these cards on the grounds of indecency. Certainly our police are wonderful!

As a result of these activities of the smut merchants, the character of these postcards has now changed. Any humour in them has gone. Bedroom scenes have practically disappeared and given place to dull vulgarity; not that vulgarity would worry the Puritan, who is in any case of low-gear'd mentality and obsessed by sex.

The success of the Puritan in this little skirmish, may give him a certain amount of petty satisfaction, but he is waging a losing fight.

It would astonish the younger generation to read the violent attacks on mixed bathing waged by the reactionaries years ago. When the fight was won they turned their attention to sunbathing, ignoring its beneficial effects on sun-starved bodies. They lost that fight also.

Now we see hundreds of men in bathing slips on the sea fronts and women in scanty bathing suits, and nobody

takes any notice: it is accepted without comment.

Pictures of the bathing costumes worn even 40 years ago would cause laughter today.

The Wowsler must not only be fought — he must be exterminated.

All for "The Glory of God"

By SEAMUS

READERS OF THE FREETHINKER will be aware that recently there have been a number of veiled hints concerning the sale of the sites of redundant churches and the finances of the Diocese of London. An important interview was published in *Reynolds News* for September 30th. It was between a representative of that paper and the Ven. Archdeacon Hodgins, the former insurance official who manages the London Diocesan Fund, the body dealing with the diocesan finances. In this interview, the Archdeacon admitted that the diocese had an overdraft of £300,000 at Coutts' Bank. He was questioned about the sale of redundant churches and admitted that the diocese had received £490,000 for these so far. He likewise admitted that the whole of this money had been spent on general diocesan purposes. The most startling item of news in connection with the report was that a Member of Parliament is tabling two questions dealing with the matter, one to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and one to the Second Church Commissioner, as soon as Parliament reassembles.

We forbear any comment because the matter is *sub judice* until these questions have been asked. But there are certain things that we wish to know immediately. About £790,000 has been spent over and above regular income during some four years if we accept the Archdeacon's figures without question. What has been done with the money? In one sense, it ranks as public funds and a full explanation is necessary to the general public at large. How far has it been spent on churches, how far on religious work, how far on individuals? Again, we are under the impression that the law allocates with great strictness the use of money obtained from redundant churches in this way. Have these conditions been observed to the letter? If not, has there not been a serious misapplication and, if this be the case, to what degree does the seriousness go and to what degree will the law be invoked. Clearly *Reynolds News* has publicised the most serious statements on the Archdeacon's own authority and the matter cannot be left in this unsatisfactory state.

We must point out one further fact. The head of the diocese is the 69-year-old Bishop of London, the Rt. Rev. K. C. Montgomery Campbell. On any legal ruling, he embodies in his own person the fullest responsibility for the acts of his committees and their servants. Archdeacon Hodgins does not stand forth as a lone figure in the matter. The Bishop of London must bear the full weight of responsibility. If it should transpire on enquiry that things are badly wrong, he has been guilty of the grossest negligence in permitting the situation to continue. We await developments and insist as citizens that there must be the strictest enquiry into the affairs of this particular unit in an established institution.

—NEXT WEEK—

DOES SCIENCE PROVE THE BIBLE?

By H. CUTNER

The U.S.A. and the Panama

By AVRO MANHATTAN

THE IDEA of linking the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans by cutting across the waist of the American continent had been entertained for some time by various individuals, and contemplated by several Powers. The United States naturally showed a keen interest in the project but without doing anything concrete about it. It was left to Europeans — to Frenchmen, to be precise — to do the spade work, started in 1884 and continued for over five long years. But the French, who had begun the construction of the canal across the territory of Colombia, finally had to give up. The construction company went bankrupt and the work was called off. A canal linking the two Oceans, in neutral or even unfriendly hands, might become a danger to the United States. It was essential therefore for American security that it be in North American control, and the United States set out to find ways and means by which they could themselves construct it.

Here was a unique opportunity for someone with imagination to make a good deal of profit at the American Government's expense. The man with imagination appeared in the person of the chief engineer of the bankrupt French company. Bunau-Varilla acquired the right and the equipment of the French company, contacted a famous New York attorney, Nelson Cromwell, and the two offered the unfinished canal and the company for sale to the United States Government.

Bunau-Varilla had no doubt that the canal was a fabulous idea, that what had already been done was a fabulous work, and that for the United States it would represent a fabulous bargain. And so, naturally, he asked a fabulous price: 100,000,000 dollars.

Although of truly American proportions, the figure sounded a bit too fabulous even for an American Government. A Congressional Committee was set up and, after due investigation, estimated that the bankrupt company's assets were worth about 40,000,000 dollars. Bunau-Varilla and Cromwell received a fabulous "no offer." But the investigating Committee was indeed a fabulous Committee, which is proved by the fact that it put forward a positive suggestion. The canal, it said, should be dug across Nicaragua, instead of across Colombian territory. The American Government set out to implement the suggestion. Even in those days of composure the sight of 100,000,000 dollars slipping away so malignantly from an honest man's grasp was enough to make any chief engineer mutter tropical profanities. Bunau-Varilla had cataclysmic reactions. He had apocalyptic visions of American Congresses, American Committees, projected canals, and particularly of Nicaraguan Republics being scattered and indeed wholly obliterated by the smoke, the flames, and the boiling lava of vomiting volcanoes.

But if the chief engineer had a fabulous imagination, he was also possessed of a most fabulous realism. And on an ordinary day he went to an ordinary post office and bought some ordinary stamps. Thereupon he quietly, unhurriedly, and composedly set to work to enclose them in a number of envelopes. It was a small oddity, but after the shock of the lost 100,000,000 dollars it was incredible that he did nothing more spectacular. The letters were addressed to every member of the American Senate, which had to approve the new Bill. And when they arrived at their destination Nicaraguan stamps bearing the picture of an erupting volcano fell like blazing cinder flames into the Senatorial hands.

Senators, however, from Ancient Rome down to the times of the projected canal and after, have been known for their immunity to childish jokes and consequently are no longer as impressionable as at the beginning of their political careers. So they contrived unperturbed to debate the Bill. And after a ponderous discussion they reached a final decision: "The new canal," they decreed, "shall be dug in Nicaragua." But then, just while the final Senatorial decision was being put down on its official record, one of those volcanoes broke loose: not on the Senatorial stamps, but in Nicaragua. Such a timely eruption tickled the Senatorial imagination, which, anxious that the American Navy be not forced to float on melting lava, had the Nicaraguan project instantly repealed.

If the printed and real volcanoes defeated the Nicaraguan plan, they did not yet convince the Senators about Bunau-Varilla's 100,000,000 dollars. The United States, having by-passed him, became engaged in discussions with Colombia for the construction of the canal. Their offer: 10,000,000 dollars cash and a yearly rental fee of 250,000 dollars. The Colombian Congress thought it inadequate and adjourned without approving the treaty. 10,000,000 dollars is a small sum compared with 100,000,000 but it is a large sum when compared with nothing. That was what Bunau-Varilla, his attorney Cromwell, and friend Manuel Amador, physician of the Panama Railway Company, thought at this stage. Bunau-Varilla, who had already pondered upon physical upheavals, now speculated upon political ones. If an erupting volcano, why not a revolution? With 10,000,000 dollars and the help of the United States, this should be easier than to time the sprouting of flames from the bowels of the earth with the debating of a Bill in the American Senate.

For that is precisely what the United States had decided to do after the Colombian Congress had rejected their offer. It was simpler, cheaper, and more profitable to seize the stretch of land where the canal was to be constructed than to have to hire it and be at the mercy of the whims of a democratic assembly like the Colombian Congress.

Democratic principles, however, could not be violated for the sake of easy gain. But if such principles had to be respected by the United States with regard to a neighbour nation, that neighbour nation had to respect them with regard to some of its citizens. For the United States, curious as it may seem, suddenly remembered that there had been flurries of separatism inside Colombia, particularly in a certain province. Having regard to the fact that it was its sacred duty to help the patriots to achieve their independence, the United States came to the conclusion that there should be a revolution, for the sake of the independence of the unhappy Colombian province. The revolution, however, had to be a genuine uprising, had to be the work of true "patriots," and, above all, had to be the spontaneous manifestation of the will of the people.

As soon as the revolution broke out, the seceding Colombian province would have the immediate recognition of the United States. In addition to this promise, the United States, to help matters along, sent a warship, the *Nashville*, to the spot, with definite instructions to prevent an armed conflict. Genuine patriotism must not be stained by the useless effusion of blood.

The revolution broke out, and the American soldiers from the *Nashville* refused to allow the Colombian troops,
(Concluded on next page)

This Believing World

Whatever Scotland may owe to Burns or Scott, there is no doubt about its debt to John Knox, who first encountered the pure and unadulterated feast of Calvinism in Geneva 400 years ago. Imbibing it no doubt more easily than his mother's milk, he shipped it to Scotland which, thenceforth, became more fiercely Calvinistic than Calvin himself; and it is good to learn that Knox, more than any other Scotsman, made his countrymen feel the crushing responsibility of Sin.

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Not that a knowledge of Sin made any difference, for the essence of Calvinism is "Predestination"—that is, no matter what you did in the way of Repentance or Prayer, if you were at the outset condemned to Hell by a Loving and Merciful Creator, to Hell you will go; and all this was lapped up with intense joy by most Scotsmen. As for Scotswomen, Knox told what he thought of them in his *Monstrous Regiment of Women*, and that wasn't much. All the same, Knox's immense influence is still the hope of Scotland, and nobody more than John Knox is responsible for keeping Scotland where it has always been. And his house in Edinburgh is always shown with pride, God bless him!

★

Lest the poison of blatant infidelity should trickle into our schools, the BBC, ever ready to the full with the "truth" of Christianity to be propounded by eminent professors, has now got a course of lectures on Jesus Christ broadcast every Tuesday morning; and the Rev. T. W. Manson is assuring all children that Christianity is literally "historical" and must be judged from the historical standpoint. Everything in the Gospels is literally true—miracles, devils, angels, and, of course, everything "our Lord" said. Naturally it is, therefore, God help little children if they expressed or listened to any infidel doubts about it. What splendid support the Churches get from the BBC!

★

Bradford's Catholics have issued a leaflet with the title, "What Made Them Do It?" referring to Leonard Cheshire, v.c., Alec Guinness, Gilbert Harding, Joan Hammond, Dame Edith Sitwell, Ben Lyon, and James McKechnie as "celebrated" converts who "now believe that the Catholic Faith is the One True Faith." Well, the answer is quite clear. Not one of these distinguished converts could give a reasoned explanation of the Catholic or any other Faith. Not one would dare to take part in a public debate and proclaim that they know that the Catholic stories of Miracles, Devils, Angels, and Gods, are all true.

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Their conversion is due to emotion and nothing else—but there is one other aspect which should be taken into account. As entertainers—variations of the old court jesters—they no doubt fill a place; and in war, brave men like Cheshire are needed. But who would go to any of these people for anything new in science or even in art and literature?

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Another leaflet which has reached us is entitled "From Communism to Christian Faith" by Charles Potter. Mr. Potter used to be a Communist and he claims—which is most doubtful—that he was an atheist. Nothing whatever in the leaflet shows that he had even an elementary idea of atheism, or that he could answer any atheistic argument. The Rev. B. Graham was responsible for Mr. Potter's "conversion," and some of us feel that atheism at

least is always better for such departures as his. The only other point to note is the way a fellow Christian, he tells us, "refuted every argument" some unbelievers made in a railway carriage. Oh, Lord, why don't we meet these Christian champions?

★

That staid and respectable Sunday journal, *The Observer*, devoted half a column to a description of the "spiritual" healing of Mr. Harry Edwards at the Royal Festival Hall the other day. Naturally, it was packed with Edwards' fans, many of whom had been cured of incurable illnesses; but, at least of some of the "cures" performed there on the spot, "the results were inconclusive," according to the Staff Reporter. According to "our Medical Correspondent" there was no difference or very little in the patient's condition after treatment, and certainly no difference in cases of goitre. Until Mr. Edwards can clear a hospital ward of incurable cases in a morning, he had better not talk about "spiritual" healing. Anyway, not to a doctor.

The U.S.A. and the Panama Canal

(Concluded from page 335)

sent by the Colombian Government to quell the disorder, to cross the isthmus of the province. Thanks to this the revolution came off. The news was wired to the United States. The new nation was instantly given official recognition by Washington one hour and 25 minutes after its birth, a promptitude contrasting somewhat lamentably with the American recognition of another revolution, the Russian, which it took the U.S.A. 15 years to acknowledge; or for the Chinese revolution of Mao Tze Tung, which, according to America, never took place. Negotiations were promptly entered upon with the new Independent Republic, and in no time the construction of the canal was under way. For the name of the Colombian province which had so genuinely yearned for such swift independence—oh, truly blessed coincidence—was Panama.

The "patriots" who had engineered it all were duly compensated by the United States Government itself. Bunau-Varilla was nominated the first Panama Minister to the United States; Amador, the railroad doctor, became the first President of Panama; and the New York attorney Cromwell received a cheque for 800,000 dollars.

The Panama affair greatly embittered Colombia and Latin America. But if Panama was a loss for Colombia, it was a gain for freedom. The United States could not disregard the wishes for independence of the Panama people. After all, its Secretary of State, Elihu Root, in 1906 had said many a time, had he not? that "the independence of the smallest or weakest member of the family of nations is entitled to as much respect as that of the great empire." So he had declared, and his was the Voice of America.

Some years later, in 1911, Theodore Roosevelt slightly contradicted his Secretary of State: "I took the Canal Zone and let the Congress debate," he said, "and while the debate goes on the Canal does also."

This contradiction cost the United States 25,000,000 dollars, the belated compensation given to Colombia in 1921 for the loss of her Panama province.

That is why in Washington, prior to the outbreak of the Second World War, the Hitlerian technique of dismembering neighbouring nations and of making independent "satellites" was never seriously accepted as wholly original. The independent republic of Panama was still a reminder that the technique had first been conceived and adopted by that protector of the Western Hemisphere, the United States of America.

THE FREETHINKER

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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.

ALAN WARD, P. HINDE and M. ZACHARIAS.—Such headlines as "Science Admits the Bible was Right," etc., are mere eye-catching stunts. For the Bible to be "proved right" it would be needed to establish, among countless other things, the Fall of Man (replete with talking serpent) and the Redemption—upon which Christianity depends. Mr. Cutner will deal with the evidence for the Flood, etc., in due course when we get the "evidence."

A. ALMOND.—You are quite right—the extract you give from Arnold Lunn on Bradlaugh is "a piece of typical mendacity." Brewin Grant's methods were so obnoxious even to his own "comrades," that he was obliged to leave the Dissenting Sect he belonged to. Bradlaugh acted as he always did, like a gentleman, in the debate referred to by Lunn.

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

- Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Satis Café, 40 Cannon Street).—Sunday, October 21st, 7 p.m.: J. L. SHEPPHERD, "Religious Instruction and Its Relation to Crime."
- Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, October 21st, 6.45 p.m.: J. GALE, B.A., "Stalin and Trotsky."
- Central London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, off Edgware Road).—Sunday, October 21st, 7.15 p.m.: F. MAITLAND, "The Origins of Religion."
- Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, October 23rd, 7.15 p.m.: Prof. T. H. PEAR, M.A., "The Cult of Personality."
- Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, October 21st, 6.30 p.m.: H. CUTNER, "The Centenary of J. M. Robertson."
- Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Newcastle Chambers, Angel Row).—Thursday, October 25th, 7.30 p.m.: R. POWE, "Determination."
- Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Hall, Parliament Street).—Sunday, October 21st, 2.30 p.m.: D. W. HEALD, "An Analogy of Scientific Analysis."
- South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, October 21st, 11 a.m.: Prof. T. H. PEAR, M.A., "Limitations of National Thinking."
- West Ham Branch N.S.S. (Community Centre, Wanstead House).—Thursday, October 25th, 7.45 p.m.—F. A. RIDLEY, "Germany and the Roman Catholic Church."

THE FREETHINKER SUSTENTATION FUND

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £59 10s. 3d.; A. Brooks, 5s.; Miss E. Morrissey, 10s.; M. Byrn, £1; R. Reader, 10s.; D. Davies, 10s.; S. C. Denning, 10s.; Miss M. A. Blue, 10s.; Miss A. Muspratt, £2.—Total to date, October 12th, 1956, £65 5s. 3d.

SUSTENTATION FUND APPRECIATIONS

I have been a subscriber to THE FREETHINKER for over 60 years, being now 95 years of age and a West Ham Branch N.S.S. member. Good luck for the future of Freethought.

A. BROOKS (Brentwood).

In my three months as a reader of THE FREETHINKER I have come to look forward to receiving it every Thursday and it definitely does encourage me in tearing my religious friends to bits!

(Fareham).

Do not let this paper collapse. I should be very lonesome without it now.

(Innisfallen).

For the past 20 years THE FREETHINKER has been my weekly tonic and it would be a personal tragedy if it were to go out of existence.

(Manchester.)

I shall send more from time to time. May you grow and prosper!

(Birmingham).

Notes and News

THE leading article in the *Barnsley Chronicle* for September 29th comments:

In a recent issue of THE FREETHINKER reference is made to "the big controversy which is raging in the *Barnsley Chronicle*."

Here is evidence that the readers' views are being closely examined and sifted in other sources than in local homes. It is to the columns of newspapers that future historians will turn when making an appraisal of life in our age.

The whole of the splendid article is a plea for the free expression of opinion. Moreover, the *Barnsley Chronicle* practises what it preaches, and has given our views very fair treatment.

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IN the same issue a columnist on the *Chronicle* staff quotes a lengthy extract from our "Notes and News" on the controversy. Writing apparently as a Catholic, he says he "glanced" at THE FREETHINKER and found it "bigoted," but does not support this judgment by any argument. We commend to this writer his own editor's words, "closely examined and sifted," and ask him how that compares with his mere "glancing."

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DEFEATED in public controversy, it is an old habit of the clergy to retire to their Coward's Castle and attack Freethinkers in places where they cannot answer back, such as their pulpits and parish magazines. Messrs. Hughes and Tarquin, who frequently write freethought letters in *The Cornishman*, have recently had this experience.

★

A CORRESPONDENT in the services reports on religion in R.A.F. billets as follows: "The attitude is roughly the same throughout," he writes. "There is a small minority of people who are either atheists or agnostics, and an equally small minority who are pro-religion. These latter are usually Roman Catholics. The vast majority sit somewhere in between and may be further subdivided into two main groups. The first, and larger, says that it believes in the teachings of the Churches, but when questioned is not quite sure why. The second makes little pretence of believing but thinks that if the masses were deprived of religion, they would degenerate into debauchery!" Not unexpectedly, the billet is a miniature of the world outside. It is good to know that Freethought has its advocates in both; but we do not underestimate the magnitude of their tasks.

Was the Stone Moved?

By H. CUTNER

WHATEVER else the various Churches may or may not like about Freethought, we can rest assured that they never object to articles like the two recent ones by Mr. T. R. Fernando on "Who Moved the Stone?" They revel in any long discussions on the date of the Gospels, or on the Problem of Evil, or on the Virgin Birth. Give them an article which admits the Gospels as "authorities," which gives them chapter and verse from the New Testament, and they are quite content to leave it to the contestants to sort out the difficulties among themselves. Thus, they do not mind dozens of articles written with the more or less religious fervour of Mr. Fernando, especially when they begin, as he does, with "The facts common to all the Gospels . . ." The Gospels give us Facts and what more do the Churches want?

At the outset, then, I am obliged to differ entirely from Mr. Fernando on this question of "facts." There are *no* facts in the Gospels. They may agree with each other on some things but this is no proof whatever that they are dealing with facts, but merely that they may have each copied from some one document common to them all. And whether there can be two explanations of any one "fact" is a matter of opinion.

And first of all, before rushing into the business of explaining who moved the stone, Mr. Fernando should have made it quite clear as to whether he really believes in the Crucifixion—a word, by the way, which does not occur anywhere in the New Testament. There is literally no evidence that there was a Crucifixion; and if that is so there could have been no burial as described in the Gospels.

But for the moment, if we admit that there was some kind of death meted out to Jesus—what is the evidence, even from the Gospels, that he was alive when taken down from the cross or tree or whatever it was? In Acts, Peter distinctly says, "The God of our father raised Jesus whom ye slew and hanged on a tree." I am naturally aware that words in the New Testament can always mean something they don't say—but if Peter did not mean that Jesus was *slain*, what did he mean?

Moreover—presuming that the Gospels give us facts—Pilate handed Jesus over to be "crucified," and I cannot believe knowing with what monstrous cruelty Roman soldiers treated helpless captives, that they would allow Jesus to be taken down alive. Of course, there is one difficulty about this. Pilate delivered Jesus to the *Roman* soldiers according to Matthew and Mark; but according to John, Jesus was handed over to the *Jews*, who did the crucifying. John obviously hated the Jews, so he saddled them with the "crime"; it was a later editor, noticing the discrepancy, who made John contradict himself (in 19, 23). In any case, all the Gospels depict Jesus as *dead*, and if they are to be believed, they must have known a little more than Froude, who is quoted by Mr. Fernando. And it is simply stupid of him to say that "the only approach to direct statement is that 'he gave up the ghost.'" in Mark. Nothing is more direct than the statement in Acts.

Mr. Fernando's "faintly alive" is nothing but a gratuitous assumption which has done wonderful duty even for a novelist like George Moore (in *The Brook Kerith*) to say nothing of the Koran, which agrees that Jesus did not die on the cross. And if I may again have a little dig at my very reverent Rationalist friends, it would be a godsend for them if true, as it absolves them from believing in the Resurrection. The plain statements in the New Testament insist that Jesus did die, for if he did not rise from the

dead, the whole of Christianity falls to the ground. The Head of the Christian Church is not a Man but a God who could not die. It was always quite natural for a god to rise from the dead.

As for the beautiful picture which Mr. Fernando paints for us showing Jesus awakening from a swoon (or whatever it was) I cannot see any reason why this should be discussed. It is all pure unadulterated assumption. There is not a scrap of evidence about it—nothing but a kind of pious hope that something like it might have happened.

In his second article, Mr. Fernando assumes that Jesus really was dead, and then proceeds to give us a narrative, here and there based on the "facts," but cleverly mixed up with a whole lot of assumptions for which he gives us no chapter and verse whatever. For example, he says, "Next day came the Sabbath. On that day it got about that the priests intended to take charge of the body." The reference is to John 19, 38, which says, "And after this, Joseph of Arimathaea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate gave him leave. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus." There isn't a word about "On that day, it got about that the priests intended to take charge of the body." This assumption is made up for us by Mr. Fernando—and there are plenty more in the "coherent" story he tries to make out by flitting gracefully from one Gospel to another.

But the *fact* is that the Gospels hopelessly contradict each other on most of the facts so carefully gathered for us in his articles. Let me give a few instances.

John merely gives Mary Magdalene as the *first* person to visit the tomb on the morning of the Resurrection. Matthew adds, "the other Mary," whoever she was, for nobody knows. Mark gives us three names—Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome. Luke embellishes his narrative with quite a lot more women—Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the Mother of James, and "other women." Perhaps Mr. Fernando can tell us who was Salome?

And when did this one lady, or a crowd of them, come? Mark says it was "at the rising of the sun," while John says, "it was yet dark." And what did they see? According to Luke, "they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre." But according to Matthew, the stone was *not* rolled away until the Angel of the Lord "rolled back the stone from the door and sat upon it." This means that we can answer Mr. Fernando's query, "Who moved the stone?" by saying it was an Angel of the Lord. He should have said that at first.

However, Matthew says it was an angel whose "countenance was like lightning and his raiment was white as snow." I cannot say what a countenance like lightning really looks like, but no doubt angels were ahead of their time in the use of modern detergents; or perhaps there is permanently a miraculous laundry in Heaven.

Mark does not agree with Matthew, however, as to the angel—he says it was a young *man* but does not tell us how he got there. Luke, not to be outdone, says it was "two men"; while John, anxious to outshine his three comrades, plumps for two angels. You can take your choice.

Naturally, if Luke says his two men were *standing*, it is only to be expected that the others would say he or they were *sitting*; just as Matthew says his angel was *outside* the tomb, while Mark, Luke and John say he or they were *inside*.

Moreover, while Mary Magdalene saw the young man, or men, or angel, according to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, according to John she did *not* see them. Both Mark and Luke admit that the women were afraid; but Mark says, "they went out quickly and fled," while Luke says "they bowed down their faces to the earth." And did the women see Jesus? Certainly, according to Matthew; but *not*, according to Luke. According to Luke, they "told all these things unto the eleven and to all the rest"; but according to Mark, "Neither said they anything to any man; for they were afraid."

Luke says only *one* disciple visited the tomb — Peter; John, not to be outdone, says *two* — Peter and John. Luke says Peter ran "unto" the sepulchre and "beheld the linen clothes." John says they both ran but John won "and came first."

And so one could analyse each statement in the infallible Gospels which, according to Mr. Fernando, give us the "facts," and prove quite easily that it is quite impossible to make a coherent story out of them. Only Faith can reconcile their utterly contradictory accounts.

Mr. Fernando, however, finishes by quoting Matthew Arnold's famous admission about the "legend" growing under your eyes, but does not say that Arnold was anticipated by dozens of Freethinkers before him. And, to his credit, he admits that "reason and criticism" dissolve "the mists of myth." What then becomes of the "facts" he began with?

Five Delusions of Faith

By G. L. BENNETT

(Concluded from page 327)

The putative superiority of Christian ethics is a question too large to consider in detail here; but so frequently is that superiority taken for granted that one or two observations concerning it will not be amiss.

"Love thy enemies" is, I suppose, regarded as the ethical high-water-mark of the Christian religion. But who *does* love his enemies? Who *can*, in any legitimate definition of the word?

It is pertinent to note that the Stoics taught the exercise of forbearance and charity towards those who have wronged or would wrong you. They held that ill-will and anti-social conduct are out of harmony with man's true nature, and that no man will of his own knowledgeable accord pursue a course contrary to his true nature and contrary, therefore, to his higher interests. If an individual does act in opposition thereto, then he does so involuntarily and in ignorance of the quality of evil and of good. Why be angry with him? Why chastise and punish him when enlightenment is what he needs?

As with religious conversion, where one does not usually labour one's way to belief but accepts it in a thrilling moment of blinding illumination, so with the Christian conception of reformation of character. Christianity would have a man move from erring ways to virtuous life, from self-seeking to selflessness, from moral irresolution to resolution, in a single leap. It has scant patience for the plodder, or for him who cannot go the whole hog. And in its inception, at least, it held as a dogma that the mark of the true disciple was poverty. Jesus did not bless the generous alms-giver; he blessed only him who gave all. To surrender gladly every worldly possession and keep nothing for self was his consistent injunction. Verily, it was as difficult for a man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven as for a camel to go through the eye of a needle!

Much more could be said on the subject of Christian ethics; but what is immediately observable is their impractical nature, their contempt for the gradualness of the middle path, their delight in preaching self-abnegation, their love of counselling impossible, and therefore absurd, standards of excellence. Contrasts and comparisons are, in exhortations to the good life as in all else, often-times instructive. These lines from Marcus Aurelius's immortal fragments the world knows as the *Meditations* seem to me particularly so:

"When thou hast done good, and another received good, why seekest thou . . . for reputation and recompense?"

"The man who has done good should be like a horse that has run its race, a dog that has tracked its game, or a bee that has gathered its honey."

In other words, such a man has simply fulfilled his nature, that and no more.

Where is there anything in the Gospels to parallel in purity this view of goodness? He who thinks Christian ethics superior to all others may with profit turn to the *Meditations*.

How many times do we hear it said that animals have been "sent for our use"? Needless to say, it is a sentiment without the slightest biological warrant. Man, the last-comer, talking about creatures that lived on earth millions of years before him being "sent" for his especial benefit! It is astounding arrogance and astounding nonsense. But he has never had any difficulty in believing what he wants to believe. He plunders and ravages the animal world for food, for clothing, for sport, and in order to carry out many cruel and often apparently senseless experiments, which in my view the anti-vivisection societies rightly condemn. And he does so, mostly, fortified in the assurance that animals, like the produce of forest, field and orchard, are God's gift to man.

Now, if animals were considered to have souls, it would be different but, unlike us, born in the image of the Divinity, they have not. And so we slaughter countless millions of them every year to satisfy our palate for flesh foods, which are not in fact essential to physical health and well-being. Meat-eating, of course, is not by any means the exclusive preserve of religious folk; but amongst them it has many of its stoutest upholders, which is not surprising, seeing that here, as in numerous other directions, theism provides a supreme conscience-numbing sanction.

From the foregoing discussion of five delusions of faith (as I would call them) it is apparent that man's ability to deceive himself is almost boundless. Present prospects do not give much encouragement, for we have with us a new wave of fundamentalist ignorance, against which scholarship and fair rationality of mind are exercised in vain. But being all froth and emotion it will pass, as other similar excrescences have done, because it lacks sustenance for long life. What consolation there is lies in this, that the creeds — Christian and other — are dying, however slowly, one by one. When some day man has finally cleared his mind of the pernicious lumber they contain, the foundations of a brighter, saner, more civilised future will have been laid.

In Cardiff a boy who stole some bottles was discharged on condition that he attended a Sunday School. This seems an unnecessarily severe sentence.

On Keir Hardie

SOME OF US who remember Keir Hardie must have read Mr. Paul Varney's eulogy of Hardie as a "Freethinker" with more than astonishment — though this was tempered, of course, by the fact that he did not produce a scrap of evidence in proof.

Fortunately, however, we have in Foote's *Flowers of Freethought* an article reprinted from THE FREETHINKER—"Keir Hardie on Christ"—and readers can thus turn to a contemporary account for the truth.

According to an interview with Hardie published in the *Christian Commonwealth*, it is, of course, a fact that his parents were staunch Secularists and members of the N.S.S.; but Keir Hardie himself never joined our Society, nor did he ever say that he had no belief. On the contrary, indeed. For in this interview Hardie called himself a Christian. Not that he believed in "the Christianity of the schools," which he thought was "dead or dying." But "the humanitarian Christianity of Christ is again coming to the front." And he added, "The whole of Christ's teachings and conduct proves that he was intensely interested in the bodily welfare of those with whom he came in contact as a preparative to their spiritual well-being." Hardie did not offer any evidence for this nonsense, but proof is never required from a devout believer.

And Hardie was ready to account "for much of the atheism" he despised. It was the lack of contact "with nature and mother earth" which accounted "for much of the atheism which is a natural product of city life." And the interviewer thought this "was the finest and most beautiful of Hardie's utterances."

It is a pity that Mr. Varney rushed into print so very inadequately equipped on the "Freethought" of Keir Hardie, the Christian. H.C.

CORRESPONDENCE

THE POPE VERSUS MEDICAL SCIENCE

I would like to draw attention to the recent Papal broadcast to an international congress of Catholic doctors at The Hague, in which the Pope opposed euthanasia, abortion and other "medical acts which clearly contradict the law of God."

The doctor's conscience, said His Holiness, must be "illumined" by "thoughts of God."

The opposition to such humanitarian practices as euthanasia and abortion will, of course, be overcome in the future. Then we shall see the ruling Pope of that time hastening to catch up with progress and no doubt declaring such practices as "permitted if performed in the spirit of God" or some such nonsense. The Pope will then be hailed as a great social reformer! PETER HINDE.

BULGARIA

I was in Bulgaria during the time of the King and also saw something of it under Hitler. Religion was very strong there and I believe it still is. Some years ago (since the war) the Orthodox Church suppressed and expelled foreign churches on grounds of espionage. I was almost killed by Bulgarian Orthodox monks because I showed an interest in their mountain monastery. These monks are expert swordsmen and hunters, and the chief of a Bulgarian monastery is a dictator with his own harem, bodyguard and executioners. K. LIDAKS.

THE EARL AND THE PRESS

The Earl of Selbourne's somewhat childish attempt recently to limit the freedom of the press leaves us wondering how much is known of him. Long ago, in 1928, as Mr. Palmer, the Assistant Postmaster-General, he wanted to hand over the Post Office to private enterprise, a desire for which even Mr. Baldwin rebuked him by implying that he would grow up one day. He is now apparently fully mature and we discover that, in his spare time, he is the presiding genius of the Christian Evidence Society. Students of the careers of Bradlaugh and Foote will know something of the character of this society in its early days and we can only hope for

the sake of the worthy peer, that the leopard has changed its spots! We noticed that another officer of this society is the Bishop of Kensington, an understudy for the Bishop of London. But we were not a little amused when we found that he was none other than the son-in-law of the noble Earl. Two of his daughters married parsons. The Rev. Cyril Eastaugh became Bishop of Kensington, whilst the Rev. S. Brewis got St. James', Piccadilly, one of the richest benefices in the Church of England. When the Earl wants to limit the freedom of the press, we can well understand that he is asking for a state of

Bless the squire and his relations,

And keep us in our proper stations, exactly the outlook and mentality which the pioneers of press freedom had to fight from the days of Carlile and Hetherington to those of Bradlaugh, Holyoake and Foote. We now know, too, what "Christian evidences" mean and the sort of world which their victory would imply. We are only left wondering what the elderly cleric who spouts for this society in the parks thinks about his patrons and their outlook on life. Perhaps some of our readers will turn up and ask him!

ANDREW PEARSE.

THE EDINBURGH BRANCH

I was interested in your note regarding the Edinburgh Branch of the N.S.S. It was on Sunday, August 13th, while attending a meeting at the Mound that I became "converted."

The search for truth had occupied my thoughts for a long time. Having at last cast off the chains of religion, I find that my life has taken on a much happier and rosier aspect. J.T.

LECTURE REPORT

THE INDOOR MEETINGS at the Laurie Arms opened on Sunday, October 7th, with a lecture by Mr. F. A. Ridley, under the auspices of the Central London Branch N.S.S., with Mr. S. Salter, branch president, in the chair. Speaking on "Freethought Faces the Future," the lecturer thought that Britain was not an entirely satisfactory yardstick for measuring the present status of Freethought, being to some extent a political backwater. Whereas fundamentalist religion was the main target of Freethinkers in the last century, today Catholicism was the major enemy. It derived much of its power, however, from the current political situation and the fear of Communism.

With two thirds of the world now within the orbit of the Industrial Revolution, the impact of science and industry will become as acute on the rest of the world as it has been on Christian countries. Freethought will thus tend to become world-wide, not so much through propaganda as through changed conditions. Freethought is an advanced product of an advanced stage of society, but an important condition of its advancement was peace. In this country the most urgent immediate objective was the separation of Church and State. While remaining non-party, we should not divorce Freethought from the political struggle; the capitalist class had sold out to religion, particularly in Western Europe; Freethought would make headway only in alliance with radical elements in society.

The speaker considered the possibility of some future overthrow by the R.C. Church, and referred to at least one Catholic publication in Germany which was financed with Communist money. G.H.T.

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"WHITHER MEDICINE? or WAS JESUS CHRIST WRONG?" A lecture from Rationalist angle, on Collateral Marital Union, with diagrams, by EDWARD WILSON, M.D. (non-register), Sunday, October 28th, 3 p.m., Central Halls, Bath Street, Glasgow. Admission free, Collection.