

The Freethinker

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Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

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IN THE 924TH YEAR of the foundation of Rome by Romulus — with some assistance from gods, virgins and wolves — the Roman Empire was on the point of entering upon that long-drawn and sombre process of its decline and fall. In 170 A.D. the Emperor was Marcus Aurelius, a dignified and melancholy man who wore himself out on distant frontiers defending the Empire against the ever-present dangers of the German barbarians, while every night committing to paper those secret impressions and reflections which, when finally given to the world many centuries later, were to confer posthumous immortality on their author. *The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius* ranks with that other immortal secret diary of Samuel Pepys as the two most famous diaries in world literature. While the imperial philosopher, however, saw life as the proverbial tragedy that it is "to those who feel," to the English civil servant it appeared as the permanent comedy that it is "for those who think."

However, in 170 A.D. the literary fame of the Emperor still lay far in the future. At that date the most famous living writer was a Syrian, Lucian of Samosata, perhaps the last of the great writers in the greatest of all human literatures, that of the Ancient Greeks. Lucian was a Greek-speaking writer and displayed an almost Voltairean genius for satirising the many absurdities of his credulous generation which saw the invasion of a flood of oriental superstitions, ultimately destined to subvert the rationalist culture of the classical world, and finally, a century and a half later, to culminate in the definitive triumph of one of them, Christianity. Lucian, unlike his friend Celsus, who was the first pagan writer to treat Christianity as a serious menace and who wrote the first reasoned criticism of it in his *True Word*, did not take the Christians very seriously. Though not actually writing anything specially directed at them, his versatile writings — which include the first recorded work in science fiction (much more fiction than science) — do refer to Christians periodically. One such reference is of special interest, since it is actually the earliest detailed reference in secular literature to the present official religion of the Western world. Our author lived at a time when thought was still free; had he lived a few centuries later, Lucian could probably have tested for himself his rather surprising assertion that death by burning was the most painless of deaths!

Early Pagan References to Christianity

Nowadays we are used to hearing glib references on the BBC and elsewhere to the "best-attested facts in human history," those which allegedly attended the origins of Christianity. Actually the "best-attested" fact in connection with Christian origins is that we know practically nothing about them! The fact that scholars familiar with the evidence still have not made up their minds unanimously whether Christ or his Apostles ever existed, affords the best possible proof of this fact! There is no such uncer-

tainty about such secular characters as, say, Caesar or Napoleon. The new religion, traditionally born in an obscure frontier district of the Roman Empire, made an unobtrusive entry into the world. For at least a century and a half the contemporary references to Christianity are meagre and second-hand; indeed, it is not absolutely certain that they are even authentic. Tacitus, Suetonius, Pliny — these second century authors merely repeat second-hand the current gossip, or ask for legal advice on how to deal with this strange sect with its dubious status.

VIEWS and OPINIONS

Christianity Through Pagan Eyes

By F. A. RIDLEY

was Lucian; as, for instance, when he speaks of them as combining with their mortal enemies, the rationalistic Epicureans, to shout down a rival impostor, the wonder worker Alexander with his bogus clairvoyance. In another place Lucian refers sarcastically to a Christian prophet who had made "an aerial journey," probably a reference to Paul's description of how he was "caught up into the third heaven." Lucian himself took an "aerial journey," though only in fiction, and to the moon.

Lucian's most detailed description of his contemporary Christians, however, occurs in his satirical account of *The Death of Peregrinus*, an adventurer and charlatan of a type apparently very common in Lucian's days, who finally committed suicide by throwing himself into a burning pyre prepared for the purpose in the presence of an enormous crowd who had specially gathered for the purpose of the Olympic Games, 169 A.D. Lucian himself was present and wrote the account soon after.

Christianity under Marcus Aurelius

The varied career of Peregrinus is recorded in some detail and quite maliciously by Lucian, who was something of a professional "debunker" of tricksters and frauds, particularly religious ones! It is evident from his descriptions that Christianity had still to face keen competition in this field under Marcus Aurelius before it asserted its religious monopoly under Constantine. In their relations with Peregrinus, described at some length by Lucian, the Christians of Asia Minor showed themselves the reverse of artful: in fact, Peregrinus made a good thing out of their simplicity. It was only after a considerable time that the Christians got wise to their erstwhile co-religionist!

Christian Communism?

Lucian, who himself was probably an Epicurean and certainly a rationalist, speaks of the oriental sect with barely concealed contempt.

"It was now," he relates, "that he came across the scribes and priests of the Christians in Palestine and picked up their queer creed." "The sect," he adds, "worship a man to this day — the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites and was crucified on that

account." However, the current practice of the Christian Church about 165 A.D., when Peregrinus frequented it, rather confirms the statement in the *Acts of the Apostles* that the early Christians practised, if not Communism, at any rate a kind of Welfare State of their own. Lucian says:

"You see, these misguided creatures start with the general conviction that they are immortal for all time, which explains their contempt for death and voluntary self-devotion, and then it was impressed upon them by their law-giver that they are all brothers from the moment that they are converted; they deny the gods of Greece and live after the laws of their crucified sage. All this they take on trust, with the result that they despise all worldly goods alike, regarding them merely as common property." So, concludes Lucian, "an adroit unscrupulous fellow who has seen the world has only to get among these simple souls and his fortune is pretty soon made; he plays with them."

Peregrinus apparently played with them very profitably, especially after he had managed to get himself convicted for some minor offence. His (bloodless) martyrdom made him quite a hero among the Christians, and Lucian adds that at this stage of his varied career "the money came rolling in." However, all good things come to an end, and so did Peregrinus among the simple followers of the "crucified sage." Evidently he overplayed his hand—

Lucian does not tell us exactly how—and got expelled

from the sect, after which the old rascal joined the Cynics, the eccentric school of Diogenes of the famous Tub. Perhaps they had no money or possibly were too "cynical" for one used to dealing with simpler folk, and Peregrinus did not last long with them. He finally made a 'nine days' wonder with his spectacular cremation at the Olympic Games.

A Fraudulent Resurrection

However, this "was not the end of this shocking affair." As Peregrinus had lived fraudulently, so did he rise again. For as Lucian quitted the scene after the public suicide he met a crowd of Peregrinus' admirers belatedly arriving to see the last rites. Our satirist, who was also a practical humorist, gravely informed them that at the moment of death a tremendous earthquake occurred and a vulture flew from the funeral pyre crying out in Greek: "From the earth I seek Olympus." Next day the whole town knew about the vulture and, to add insult to injury, "an old man with a long beard and with dignified air" related to the amused Lucian how he had himself seen the vulture ascend from the Games at the very moment of death!

How do religions begin? Religious psychology was perhaps not so very different in 169 A.D. from that of today, or perhaps at the date of an earlier "resurrection" at which, unfortunately, no Lucian was available to record it for us.

From Hungary—2

[An extract from a letter in reply to a question from Mr. D. Shipper. The writer is Miss Vilma Fodor, for the English section, Radio Budapest. It was, of course, received before the present upheaval.]

YOU SAY that something more than scientific teaching may be needed to combat supernatural beliefs founded on ignorant superstition. I agree with this point. Superstitious beliefs draw much of their strength from the fact that people suffer from poverty, misfortune and insecurity in this world and hope for a better life in a future world. As long as we do not give them the means to achieve this life here and now, people will console themselves with thinking of the world beyond and will turn willingly to those who profess to tell them about it. The building of Socialism will solve the question of want and insecurity. There will always be human sorrows arising from personal causes, but people will no longer feel that they are powerless against unknown forces; they will realise that it is in their own hands to make their life what they think it ought to be. We must admit that in Hungary, owing to a number of causes—the backwardness of the past, the ravages of the war, the cold war and the mistakes in the building of Socialism—we are still some distance from achieving this outlook. Those who think politically and study can achieve it under present conditions, but for many simple people, peasants or the older generation, this is still difficult to grasp. That is why we think that economic action is a more important line of advance than directly anti-religious propaganda. As I mentioned before, our scientific publications are in an indirect way combating superstition, and people are very eager to read such magazines as *Life and Science*.

I do not know of any books or pamphlets written by Hungarians in recent years directly attacking the Church, nor have I heard of any individual wishing to form an anti-religious society. So I can only say that the question has not arisen in this form.

You say that the Roman Catholic Church is a militant Fascist organisation. This is no longer true of the Church

in Hungary. It is not possible in Hungary today to spread Fascist ideas or publish Fascist propaganda. The leading clergy have officially expressed support for the government programme, their pastoral letters accept and further the government's plans for increasing the wellbeing of the people, and a Peace Committee of Catholic priests has been formed, which is anti-Fascist in ideas and outlook. We have no justification for doubting the sincerity of these proofs because the Church has seen that its own welfare and that of the people are bound up with loyalty to the government programme. That is why we do not wish to attack the Church in any direct way.

You have asked for the number of adherents to the various religious sects. I have ascertained for you the numbers given by the Churches themselves, but although this is a valuable indication of the proportion of Catholic to Protestant Church membership, I do not think it is a guide to the number of Church adherents as a whole. The reason is that the figures are taken by the Churches from their own baptismal registers, and in a great many cases a person is baptised in a particular Church but does not attend it in later life. The figures give no indication at all of how many people have fallen away from the Church, and, as you know, there are varying degrees of Church membership, from the people who only get married in Church, perhaps from sentimental reasons or to please their parents, to those who attend Church weekly or even daily, and there exist no statistics which can give you a picture of this. I can only say from my own experience that many people who would have gone to Church themselves and sent their children to religious instruction in the old days, no longer do so.

Here are the figures: Catholics, 6,400,000; Reformed, 1,800,000; Evangelical, 500,000; Unitarians, 15,000; Jews, 120,000; Baptists, 15,000; minor sects, 30,000.

—NEXT WEEK—

REPORT FROM MALTA
By A SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Oil for the Glory of God

By ANDREW PEARSE

THE NEWS made known recently in the press that the Church Commissioners have had a successful deal in Trinidad Oil caused not a little heart-searching. Left with a large surplus to their income, it was decided to apply about a quarter of a million pounds to the stipend of some clergy by about 12 pounds per annum a head. Some rather thin excuses were put forward for what is, in practice, an ordinary Stock Exchange gamble, and the news was given out by the Archbishop of Canterbury that the Commissioners were looking forward to finding a suitable company in which to reinvest the remainder. He made the comment that they already had enough invested in oil, a strange admission when it is recalled that the oil world is one of the more potent elements in modern armaments programmes. It seems as if the Church Commissioners have turned against the historic policy of putting their money into "real estate." At one time, they were much criticised as the ground landlords of slums and brothels. An officially sponsored Church of England pamphlet made the excuse that the sale of these ground rents would merely mean that the Church Commissioners would surrender any possible opportunity of future intervention if the law became modified. Later, when circumstances financial favoured sale, potential moral obligation was dropped silently from the picture and the dubious property went under the hammer! Nowadays, this august body, the property-owning side of the Church of England, seems to favour the Stock Exchange, where it has done extremely well, so well, in fact, that it must itself be an embarrassment to the more Puritanically-minded of the bishops and clergy when they try to condemn the minor flutter and set out upon one of their periodical and tedious anti-gambling crusades.

This latest sidelight is all the more curious as it comes on top of the more telling revelation that the diocese of London has managed to disperse £490,000 which it has received over and above regular income for the sale of redundant churches and sites, that it has got rid of some one-seventh of the churches which it possessed at the outbreak of war and that it now has an overdraft of £300,000. Such is its financial state that members of Parliament have become interested and are asking questions, whilst some very tart remarks have appeared in the press about the relationship of the whole picture to the "credit squeeze." Clearly, there is a contradiction somewhere in these two pictures. The one is a picture of affluence sponsored by the Archbishop of Canterbury; the other points to a dreary story which had to be disentangled by the interested from balance-sheets and the like. Obviously, the national Church as a whole still possesses large assets, but it is in danger of bankruptcy at some of its localised positions, whilst the assets would not be sufficient to rescue the whole institution if it were to crash. Only certain financial tinkering can be undertaken, such as augmenting the stipends of the clergy, which, as the Archbishop remarks, fall for the most part well below those of the professional classes as a whole.

The picture is one which enforces the fact, underlined by J. M. Robertson over 30 years ago, that the real problem of the Churches today lies in the realm of economics. Various rationalistic and quasi-rationalistic movements have done their work. The Churches fought a tremendous battle in the last century against a growing knowledge of physical science and against the scientific outlook as a whole. Their historical documents were riddled through

and through by scholarly criticism, whilst their distinctive doctrines were traced back to their primitive sources. Various reactions took place. In the Church of England, evangelical emotionalism suffered the most. A few, such as Stopford Brooke or Voysey, took their departure into more rationalistic circles. The cultured and anti-intellectualist types of emotional experience found satisfaction in a sacerdotal ceremonialism and cults which lay outside criticism and thus helped the growing strength of Anglo-Catholicism. There was a strong "broad church" movement which made some terms of accommodation with the tide of rationalistic criticism. After almost a century, the whole picture has worked itself out. A tiny majority of the population, mainly wholly lacking in culture or learning, can still be attracted by evangelical and emotional appeals. The ritualistic movement has worked itself out and the Roman Church has proved to be the haven for the more logical who are attracted in this direction. Anglo-Catholicism as a formative cultural movement is clearly in decline. Any broad church movement has almost faded away simply because it lacks a mass lay following. Laity who have become critical of the traditional foundations of faith are more likely to turn away from churchgoing altogether than to erect some compromise institution. At the same time, the steady growth of a point of view which stresses the social and utilitarian basis of morality rather than its dependance upon some future state of rewards and punishments has undermined the main traditional factor in religious compulsion over life.

A state of decline naturally produces economic stresses. Almost a century ago, Professor Goldwin Smith was remarking that the ablest graduates no longer took holy orders. At that time, the cause was possibly economic at root. Since those days, economics have done much to hamper recruiting for the ranks of the clergy. The positions available in schoolmastering offer far greater economic attractiveness and a wide range of opportunity is open to the young man of brains and education. Gradually, the clergy have come to be recruited from the ranks of the ill-educated and the ill-informed. It is rare indeed to find clergy who are men of wide reading or cultural accomplishment. Steadily, the situation has come to reproduce itself upon the episcopal bench, and the average bishop is not usually a man of either culture or learning. Indeed, really learned men are not wanted among the clergy. The powers-that-be are somewhat scared by them and it is difficult to find them suitable niches. If they should go sour, they can be dangerous. Clerical work has come to have little to do with the intelligence. For a while, it found a useful scope in social service and charitable administration, but that age is now over and it has been supplanted by a far greater efficiency with the coming of the "Welfare State." Organisation of whist drives, keeping a certain social life going in a very limited circle, tending the sick and dying, have come to be the occupation of the average clergyman. It does not call for learning and it does not even call for religion in the traditional or mystical sense of the term. It merely implies a professional technique and a readiness to accept the dictatorship of the knot of ecclesiastical bureaucrats who run the local diocese. In return, some effort will be made to pay these men a living wage which, at the present cost of living, is not excessive but is probably far in excess of the sum which a great many of them, bishops included, would be capable of earning through their native abilities in the world outside.

(To be concluded)

This Believing World

History — as reported by "The People" — was made years ago by Mrs. Estelle Roberts, the "well-known" medium, when she saw the spirit of her husband leave his dead body. We can't recollect that even scientists who believe in Spiritualism have ever seen a spirit waft upwards to heaven, or gracefully descend to the other place; so Mrs. Roberts must be the first and perhaps the only person in the world who has actually seen a spirit in the flesh, so to speak. We congratulate Mr. Barbanel, who tells us of the wonderful miracle as casually as if he were describing the sucking of an orange.

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The other miracles described in "The People" performed by Mrs. Roberts are naturally the usual ones with a Red Indian Guide called Red Cloud — if it hadn't been Red Cloud it would still have been a Red Indian — and, of course, all her seances as witnessed by Mr. Barbanel "surpassed those portrayed even by great writers on stage or screen." We can hardly believe that the Editor of *The People* could have read this article without laughing. Even Christians can't beat Spiritualists for tall stories.

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It is an astonishing fact that Christians are still doing their utmost to get other Christians to accept Christ as their Saviour. For example, we have just seen a little pamphlet by J. R. W. Stott, M.A., with the title *Becoming a Christian*. After nearly 2,000 years propagating Christianity, our Mr. Stotts have still almost hysterically to implore Christians to accept it — for, of course, his pamphlet is not directed to those of us who have once for all realised that Christianity is not true. It can only appeal to those who still feel that the Bible is God's Precious Word.

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This is shown by the fact that Mr. Stott constantly appeals to the Bible to prove what he says. It never occurs to him that, at least in the eyes of those who have thrown over Christianity, the Bible has no more authority than a school book of fairy tales. However, for those who accept the Bible, the would-be searcher for Christ has to acknowledge himself "in God's sight as a helpless sinner," he must believe that Jesus "died on the cross," and must "come to Christ" and claim his "personal share in what He did for everybody." He must also repent of his sin, surrender to Christ, and confess Christ before everybody. He will then be a true Christian — and won't God Almighty be pleased!

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With the BBC and ITV blazing its blast of Fundamentalist Christianity through the country, the "literalisers" have taken heart and, like Dr. Keller, they are proclaiming that "Science" is now acknowledging that the most Fundamentalist portions of the Bible are all true — as true as Gospel, if the Gospels are true, of course. Books solemnly announcing that every comma in Genesis comes from God himself and Evolution is of the Devil are furiously being published or re-published, and even bishops are gaining heart. Even if they *privately* agree with our unbelieving Hoyles, it is better for the Church to have M.A.s and Ph.D.s on the side of Genesis and the Gospels than on the side of THE FREETHINKER!

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Some of these all-believing M.A.s and Ph.D.s actually send their books to us — to Freethinkers! It's amazing. A Mr. O. Hallesby, Ph.D. really believes that his book *Why I Am A Christian*, contains such convincing arguments that even hide-bound and blatant infidels like ourselves must succumb to Christ. This book is packed with more Christian nonsense than we have read for years, for it is

merely one of the million tracts which flooded our homes last century expanded into a volume, and quite as worthless.

★

Or take the book by W. J. Beasley, F.R.G.S., entitled *Creation's Amazing Architect*. He actually believes that "the Sacred Record can be shown to be in harmony with the independently ascertained facts of modern scientific research"! All you have to do is to modify a little the translation of certain words in the Sacred Record and the Bible *must* be true. Of course, "the Genesis writer did not attempt to explain *how* God created things; he merely stated the Fact." That's all. "God created the heaven and the earth" is the first Fact, and science now stoutly admits it! And there are people who lap up this balderdash as fast as enterprising publishers can get it on the market.

The Rising Generation

XIV — THE HOLY TRINITY

THE AVERAGE CHRISTIAN PARSON hates talking about the Trinity to the "uninformed." It is a "Mystery," and as such can only be thoroughly understood by those who understand other Christian mysteries. It is useless reciting the Athanasian Creed to people who flock to hear the Rev. Billy Graham or even to the Rev. D. Soper. It is always best to tell Christians that they must accept the Godhead of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost as all one — for that is the Holy Trinity — without asking questions as to what it means, for *nobody* knows.

It is here, however, that paganism can well come in, for that is where the Trinity first appeared. The Hindus call their Trinity, Tri-Murti. It consists of Brahma the Father (or Creative Principle), Vishnu the Son (or Protecting and Preserving Principle), and Siva the Holy Ghost or Spirit (or the Destructive and Reconstructive Principle).

The Chinese also have a Trinity called Fo who is always described by them as one Person with three Forms. Fo is really Buddha — or one of the Buddhas, for there were many.

The Persians' Trinity was composed of Oromasdes the Creator, Mithras the Son or Saviour, and Ahriman the Destroyer.

The ancient Scandinavians' Trinity was Odin, Thor, and Frey, always considered a "Trinity in Unity." And even our ancient Druids had a Trinity, Taulac, Fan and Mollac.

In the New World, the Mexicans had as their supreme God Tezcatlipoca, with Huitzilpochtli on his left hand and Tualoc on his right. And no doubt many other pagan tribes and nations have also triune Deities.

To make sure, however, that the Trinity must be found in our Holy Writ, the famous passage in 1 John 5, 7 was forged — "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one." It is *not* found in the Revised Version; and, of course, many Christian authorities have deplored this blatant fraud.

If the young enquirer is not satisfied with what has been said about the Trinity, and would like it more clearly explained, he can, according to a parson I once met, have it easily made clear by a simple illustration — a cup of tea. This consists of tea, milk, and sugar, and the three form one. Quite conclusive, is it not?

H.C.

An incongruous note was struck by an advertisement for Lourdes miracles which was immediately followed by another saying "Whatever the Pain — Nothing Acts Faster Than — Anadin!" Possibly taken in a glass of Holy Water it can indeed work miracles?

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

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, 3.30 p.m.: DAVE SHIPPER and S. M. CAINES.
West London Branch N.S.S.—Sunday, October 28th, at the Marble Arch from 4 p.m.: Messrs. ARTHUR, EBURY and others.

INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, November 11th, 6.45 p.m.: J. MELEISH, "Psychical Research, Science and Religion."
Central London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, off Edgware Road).—Sunday, November 11th, 7.15 p.m.: H. CUTNER, "John M. Robertson."
Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, November 13th, 7.15 p.m.: H. CUTNER, "J. M. Robertson and the Shakespeare Problem."
Head Office N.S.S. (41 Gray's Inn Road, W.C.1).—Friday, November 9th, 7.15 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, "Comparative Religion" (first of six lectures). Admission 1/-.
Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, November 11th, 6.30 p.m.: E. DIXON, "Germany—Friend or Foe?"
Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Hall, Parliament Street).—Sunday, November 11th, 2.30 p.m.: W. WARBEY, M.P., "Democratic Socialism and Communism."
Orpington Humanist Group.—Sunday, November 11th, at Sherry's Restaurant, at 7 p.m.: Mr. J. B. COATES, "Humanism and Existentialism."
South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, November 11th, 11 a.m.: A. ROBERTSON, M.A., "J. M. Robertson and the Myth Theory."

Notes and News

We are pleased to report the formation of a North Staffordshire Humanist Group under the Secretaryship of N.S.S. member, Mr. J. W. Hawthorne, 1 Fairbank Avenue, Oakhill, Stoke-on-Trent. Meetings are to be held monthly in the Guildhall, Newcastle-under-Lyme. The first was on Friday, October 19th, when Prof. Antony Flew addressed the group on "What I mean by Scientific Humanism." The next will take place on Friday, November 16th, and the speaker will be Major T. G. Robson on "A Layman and the Law." Readers in the North Staffordshire area will be welcomed at the meeting; further information may be obtained from Mr. Hawthorne, whose enthusiasm, we trust, will earn the reward it deserves—a flourishing group.

FREETHINKER SUSTENTATION FUND

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £76 7s. 5d.; Mrs. A. M. Allen, £1 1s.; J. A. White, 12s.; C. England, 10s.; "Old Stiff" (S. Rhodesia), £20; J. Rusack, 5s.; R. J. Hale, 2s. 6d.—Total to date, November 3rd, 1956, £98 17s. 11d.

MRS. MARGARET KNIGHT and the Bishop of Rochester (Dr. Chavasse) were the protagonists in the Oxford Union debate on November 1st: "That in the opinion of this House, modern man does not require religious beliefs in order to be moral." The motion was lost by 239 votes against 330 but the interest it aroused was encouraging. The House was packed to the doors.

CATHOLIC ACTION having led the Australian Labour movement into many internal squabbles, they have had many condemnations from Protestant leaders, who disapproved of the entry of religious forces into Australian politics. However, the Queensland Council of Churches inserted large newspaper advertisements headed "Why Intelligent People Will Vote Against the Gair Government." This was on the eve of an election. The Presbyterian Church, disapproving, immediately withdrew its affiliation to the Council and on the morning of the election the Baptist Church publicly criticised the Council for embarrassing those who had been battling against the Catholic Action sectarianism. Nice to see Christian Unity in action! Incidentally, the Gair Government was returned with a majority which gave it two-thirds of the seats in the House.

WHAT is happening to Billy Graham's "converts" these days? Well, we know of *one* thing that is happening to them. They are getting appeals for money to help the Graham organisation in America.

In New York, at a well-known book store, among the many bargains now on sale are Soviet Bibles at £3 10s. each. These Bibles are from an edition (25,000 copies) issued by the Russian Orthodox Church earlier this year. According to official statistics, 50,000 Bibles have been published in Russia since the revolution. This is the first edition of the Bible published in the U.S.S.R. since 1928, when the Russian Baptist Church were granted permission to print 25,000 copies. In the near future the Russian Orthodox Church are expecting to publish another 75,000 copies and other religious groups are expected to follow suit. This new Bible, printed on good quality paper with large type, has 1,280 pages, and is the standard Russian-language version of the Old and New Testaments.

VINOBA BHAVE is the new great prophet in India. The *Indian Rationalist* reports that this man is becoming a second Mahatma Gandhi and that the world will likely hear much of him in coming years. The report states: He has taken to the technique of mahatmahood as to the manner born. He has the natural advantage of looking like Gandhi, with a slender figure. He puts on the same scant clothing which Gandhi familiarised among the people. Indeed, he has gone one step further than the Mahatma and has grown a beard. He affects the same simple habits, eats almost raw vegetables, drinks milk and treks 10 to 15 miles a day through narrow pathways leading to the villages. He indulges in spectacular fasts which are ceremoniously broken by the drinking of fluid food at prayer meetings. He calls the people to prayers and asks them in the holy name of religion to discard "western" materialism and to go back to their own "spiritual" past, to curtail their wants and not to crave to increase their level of life, to revive primitive hand industries and to turn their backs upon machinery and modern technology.

John M. Robertson - 1

By H. CUTNER

THIS YEAR OF GRACE is not only the centenary of John M. Robertson but also of three other distinguished men who made their mark in varying degrees on their contemporaries.

They were George Bernard Shaw, Sigmund Freud, and William Booth. One cannot help wondering what will be the place of all four in a hundred years' time. Bernard Shaw is without doubt one of the greatest playwrights we have ever had — with only, in my opinion, Shakespeare and Ben Jonson above him. He made his mark also in many other fields — as a musical and dramatic critic of the highest class, and as a Socialist. Freud nearly revolutionised our ideas on psychology; and if one cannot go as far as he did in his psychoanalysis, no one can doubt his immense contribution to a difficult study, that of the mind.

"General" Booth comes in an entirely different class, but his creation of the Salvation Army cannot be lightly dismissed. His religion filled a gap in the lives of millions of people, however much we Freethinkers are disposed to pour fun on his credulity and superstition. If religion is as deeply ingrained in man as its supporters claim, the Salvation Army provides a classical example of the way it can be organised to produce a great deal more than mere faith. Booth alone did not produce the Army as we have it today, but its mixture of religion and secular business with plenty of cash dividends will take some beating.

It must be confessed that all four found it difficult at the beginning of their careers to make money; but making money, as such, was not John M. Robertson's primary concern. Born in the island of Arran, he had very little education in the academic use of the term; but Nature and his own industry overcame any difficulties here. Like many other writers, he was born with a pen in the hand so to speak, and before he was 20 he was writing leaders for the *Edinburgh Evening News*. He was also one of the band of young enthusiasts who formed the Edinburgh Secular Society, where he developed his gifts as an exceptionally fine speaker.

For me and for many others, the lectures of Robertson represented the high-water mark of critical culture. Never an "orator" in the accepted sense, his encyclopædic mind made them a delight to all who loved literature or critical commentaries on current problems. And it always seemed to me that Robertson early took his place as one of the greatest and keenest literary critics of the day.

How devastating he could be, even in his twenties, can be seen in two early pamphlets, *Overpopulation and Socialism and Malthusianism*. Like Bradlaugh, Ingersoll and Foote, Robertson was a convinced Malthusian, and there was little left of the Socialist position on the population question when he had done with it. But if the reader has any doubt of the way in which he could "annihilate" an opponent, he should read his *Thomas Paine, An Investigation* (1888), in which he gave Leslie Stephen the trouncing of his life for the way in which that reverent agnostic denigrated Paine in his *English Thought of the Eighteenth Century*. Stephen showed Paine no mercy, and was utterly wrong in almost everything he said about him. A few years later came Moncreu Conway's splendid *Life of Paine*, and Stephen — who thought it best to ignore Robertson — had to make amends, which he did most lamely. He was obliged to admit he had gone to Cheetham's foul and libellous biography of Paine for his "facts"; but I have always felt that Stephen's was the case of someone convinced against his will who was of the same opinion still. For me, this pamphlet on Paine is perhaps the finest piece of debunking I have ever read.

It is not only Stephen who was debunked. In his *Dynamics of Religion* (1897) Robertson made short work of the contention that Anthony Collins' *Discourse of Freethinking* had been "slashed and torn" by Richard Bentley, at one time one of the great Christian champions in the Deistic controversy of the 18th century. Both Leslie Stephen and Mark Pattison had no doubt whatever about it. Robertson exposed some of the grossest blunders of Bentley in a splendid chapter, and debunked Butler and his famous *Analogy* in another. Modern readers have little idea of the position Butler and Bentley used to hold in Christian circles as having decisively beaten Deism out of the field. No one, on the other hand, so thoroughly exposed the fallacies of both as Robertson did in this almost forgotten work written, by the way, under the pseudonym of "M. Wiseman."

But London and not Edinburgh had to be Robertson's Mecca, and from 1884 to the death of Bradlaugh in 1891, he acted as assistant editor of the *National Reformer*. He then became its editor, but after three years it ceased publication, one reason being perhaps that the high literary quality Robertson tried to infuse into its columns was not at all relished by its readers.

But his activity as lecturer and writer never ceased. And had he been encouraged he could easily have added to the small number of great historians we have had. As it was, we have his splendidly annotated edition of Buckle's *History of Civilisation* which can well compare with Prof. Bury's *Gibbon*, to say nothing of those two fine volumes, *Buckle and his Critics* and *The Saxon and the Celt*, both of which had as a sub-title, "A Study in Sociology." But both are brilliant detailed studies in history as well.

He continued writing for the *Free Review* and other literary journals, and he contributed a full account of Bradlaugh's parliamentary struggle to Mrs. Bonner's biography of her father. But he did more than that, for he added an account of Bradlaugh's atheism and Malthusianism as well, a model of explanatory propaganda for both, which, in its own way, he never bettered. If any reader wants to have these subjects explained to him in clear and unequivocal terms, let him read these chapters.

And all the time Robertson was trying to enter Parliament as a Liberal-Radical, and particularly as an out-and-out Free Trader, as Free Trade was one of the great issues of the day. He achieved his ambition in 1906, rose to be Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Trade but was defeated in the 1918 General Election and never sat again.

He took his place almost at the outset with the leaders of the Freethought Movement, and how much he was determined to go his own original way can be seen not only in the numerous articles he contributed to the *National Reformer* but also in his choice of a subject. There are the articles, for example, he wrote on Christ and Krishna, later published in 1890 in book form under that title, and still later as part of his invaluable *Christianity and Mythology*. It is a brilliant piece of criticism of the Christian theory that the resemblances between the two Gods can only be accounted for by the Krishna writers copying from the Christian ones. Robertson proved beyond the shadow of doubt that if there was any copying it was done by Christians. But the probable reason for so many of the resemblances is because both the Christian writers and the Hindus were following a more or less common tradition. But *Christianity and Mythology* was much more than a comparison between Christ and Krishna. It was a very close and detailed study on original lines of Gospel

Myths — 30 chapters on Myths of Action and 12 on Myths of Doctrine. It was a book which could not be ignored by Christians, who thought they could answer it. What a sorry mess they made can be seen in its second edition, where Robertson replied to a few of the more notable ones. The worst case was perhaps that of Albert Schweitzer, who was, as Robertson noted, "entirely free from *odium theologum*," and whose book *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* had a "manly and unsectarian spirit." It is for this reason that Robertson felt it unfair towards him, for Schweitzer could never have read *Christianity and Mythology*. He could not read English. And his reference to the book was nonsense.

World Union of Freethinkers Report

By C. BRADLAUGH BONNER
(President of the World Union)

THE MEETING of the General Committee of the World Union at Geneva was a precedent in that it was organised from outside the country since, though there is a small Geneva Freethought society and a German-Swiss association, there is no national body and the German-Swiss body is not a member of the Union, nor willing to co-operate. There is, however, a very active organisation in Haute-Savoie, the secretary of which is a schoolmaster at Gaillard, almost on the Genevese frontier. There remain a few members of the former French-Swiss Freethought Society, but they are all of advanced years. It may be remarked that of recent years the Roman Catholic population of those Calvinist centres Geneva and Lausanne has greatly increased, and that the need of vigorous militant freethought has become imperative. I need scarcely remind N.S.S. members that a former president of theirs warned them that the ultimate struggle would be with Rome.

Among the decisions arrived at by the Committee were the following: A telegram was sent to the Burgomaster of Marcinelle of condolence at the terrible mining catastrophe and admiration at the courage of the rescuers. As a number of members of the Belgian Freethought Federation had lost their lives in the disaster, particular sympathy was expressed for their relatives and friends. Herr Freisthuler was authorised to negotiate with the Austrian and German-Swiss Freethinkers to affiliation with the World Union.

A message of sympathy was sent to "Giordano Bruno," the Italian national society, on the sudden death of their energetic and efficient secretary, Signor Silvestri. "Giordano Bruno" is establishing an annual essay competition in his memory.

Regret was expressed at the cancellation of the proposed Amsterdam congress, and approval of the President's action in maintaining friendly relations by writing an article for the centenary volume, obtaining a letter of congratulation to the Dageraad from Bertrand Russell, sending a greeting to be published in *De Vrijdenker* and provisionally accepting the invitation to attend their centenary celebrations.

The possibility of renewing relations with Freethinkers to the east of the Iron Curtain was discussed. As the old Freethought societies had been suppressed, it would be with individuals only; the official Soviet response is that there is no longer any need for militant Freethought bodies. (Writer's comment: I imagine that the Roman Church is of the same opinion.)

There was a lively discussion of the trial and consequent outlawing of the German Communist party at Karlsruhe;

it was generally felt that the trial was a threat to liberty of speech and thought, but that any action on the part of the World Union might be construed to the injury of the German Freethinkers; it could be "inopportune, premature and ineffective."

The abuse of the radio and television in all countries to the profit of the Churches, especially of the Vatican, and to the disadvantage of the Freethinker, was emphasised, and it was decided to give all possible support to the National Secular Society in its protest to the BBC. In Italy the situation is far worse than in Great Britain; in France, although the present government is friendly to the Freethinkers, the latter seem to obtain less time on the air, and it is the same in Belgium. On the whole there would seem to be greater opportunity allowed for the expression of freedom of thought than in most countries.

1959 will see the 50th anniversary of the murder of Ferrer; it is proposed to organise manifestations in Brussels and in Paris. Senora Ferrer-Vilar, Ferrer's daughter, is collecting documents and souvenirs of her father, which will form the subject of a monograph and the nucleus of a museum. (Note: Any readers of THE FREETHINKER who may possess letters or sources of information which could be useful to Mme. Vilar are asked to communicate with her, 47 rue Monge, Paris.)

The invitation of the French Federation to hold an international congress at Paris in 1957 was accepted. The main subject for discussion will be Freethought and Overpopulation; the secondary theme the U.N.O. Charter and the Vatican Concordats (two leading jurists have been asked to undertake this report). (Note: Bertrand Russell has accepted the Presidency of Honour of the Congress and will send a message; the subject is one on which he feels strongly.) The French representatives declared that their Federation wished to make of the Congress a memorable gathering; for there had been no Congress in Paris since 1925.

It was found impossible for the French party from Bourg to join in the Geneva programme arranged; when, a few days beforehand, it was learned that they would number about 140 and arrive at Ferney, where the mayor had agreed to a formal reception and also to give an address at the Voltaire monument, the World Union President and Secretary decided to join them at Ferney. Over 20 of the World Union members happened to be at the same hotel as the Secretary and asked to come too. The French coaches arrived nearly an hour late (having come about 200 miles) and this threw the whole programme out of gear. Still the ceremony at Ferney was impressive and attracted a considerable crowd. Instead of revisiting Ferney, the World Union party went on the Monday to Madame de Stael's chateau at Coppet, which Voltaire visited several times. The house is kept much as it was in Mme. de Stael's time and is full of relics of great interest, even if it is less striking than Chillon and the gardens less delightful than those of Mon Repos at Lausanne, where Voltaire was frequently the guest of the Marquis de Langallerie, both of which we visited. While the General Committee was deliberating M. Stadlin of Geneva guided a party round his city from the Servetus monument at Champel, through the old city to the Palais des Nations. Servetus, as readers know, was slowly burned alive by Calvin, his one time fellow-student. A monument erected to Servetus' memory at Annemasse was sold to the Germans during the war by a clerical mayor and melted down to make munitions. Early this year a committee was formed to erect a new monument under the presidency of M. Edouard Herriot and with the support of the World Union. M. Jean Simond of Gaillard is the hon. secretary for subscriptions.

CORRESPONDENCE

J. M. ROBERTSON

It was fitting that the centenary of the birth of John M. Robertson should be marked by a notice in *THE FREETHINKER*, but the article by John Hastings seemed to one reader at least somewhat unsatisfactory. Robertson, says Mr. Hastings, "lacked the easy pen which makes for simple reading." On the contrary, Robertson was the essence of lucidity. He happened to write for adults with some background knowledge of the subjects involved, and not for the man in the street.

Agair, says Mr. Hastings, "Robertson was not among the younger liberals who kept pace by joining the Labour Party." Robertson rejected the unsophisticated fallacies of religion, and also the more sophisticated but fundamentally comparable fallacies of sociology and politics. He was not "a little suspicious of Socialistic theory." He had no use for it at all.

Some Freethinkers tend to overlook the essentially religious nature of Socialism with its "saved" and its "damned," its spiritual pride, and, through the Trade Union movement, the unrivalled opportunity it gives to sadists, under the excuse of class solidarity, to persecute the heretic.

Mr. Hastings seem to criticise Robertson for undue optimism in respect of "progress." To my mind this is disproved by his writings and speeches on the population question.

Finally, I think one might take exception to Mr. Hastings' remark that Robertson "had to pay a big price for the privilege of preserving his liberty and his integrity." Surely Mr. Hastings is not trying to make a martyr out of J.M.R. just because no university offered him an honorary degree? He got a full column and photo in the *Manchester Guardian* at his death. Many a bishop has had less.

W. E. NICHOLSON.

SCHWEITZER

Mr. C. G. L. Du Cann in his article on Albert Schweitzer complains that the missionary doctor is prejudiced and unfair in his thinking on religion. I fear no less can be said of Mr. Du Cann's thinking on Schweitzer. For has he not allowed his dislike of this man's religious views to warp his judgment?

I hold no brief for Schweitzer's theology, and believe he is at his weakest in writing thereon, although the original aspects of that theology are obvious to anyone who reads, shall we say, his celebrated *Quest of the Historical Jesus*. But it is just because his inherent scepticism has stripped Christianity of all dogmas except an attenuated monotheism that his apologetics on its behalf seem laboured and strained, and never worth the effort he expends on them. In ethics Schweitzer is a force profound and far-reaching, but in religion he is a thinker tied in some inescapable way to the traditions and influences of his early environment and nurturing, and later theological education. Coupled with that, he has a style that does not always, I think, lend itself to clarity and ready understanding. What, for instance, does he mean by "Kingdom of God"? Not, I imagine, an actual celestial abode of the blessed, but an inner spiritual happiness arising from a dedication to an ethically meaningful way of life. That, of course, is an experience we must *ipso facto* "limit to mankind," as Mr. Du Cann quotes the African doctor as saying. It could certainly not mean what Mr. Du Cann takes it to mean—that Schweitzer is suggesting that God confines his concern and benevolence to mankind—even if only because Schweitzer, so far from being indifferent to animals, has a compassion for them paralleled only, perhaps, by that of Francis of Assisi.

My regret is that Mr. Du Cann, instead of reading, say, *My Life and Thought*, which in several ways admirably expresses the governing spirit of Schweitzer, reads one of his least satisfying theological works and appraises him, as I think, somewhat ungenerously and unjustly on that. For surely, the imp of sheer iconoclasm sat on Mr. Du Cann's shoulder when he wrote. He would not otherwise have penned that (to me) appalling sentence in which he questions why, if Schweitzer's motives were humanitarian, "he should need to go so far as Africa." The truth is, Mr. Du Cann's intention was to depreciate; and in thus failing to temper wholesome criticism with an avowal of Schweitzer's great qualities as a man, and undeniable nobility of mind and purpose, he has, in my submission, fallen short of the best traditions of freethought. As a Freethinker, therefore, I for one would register this, my disclaimer.

G. I. BENNETT.

[Mr. Du Cann writes: "Mr. Bennett—or anyone else—is quite entitled to disclaim my views. But had he not better read the one book in question instead of talking about others? He may know more of Schweitzer than I do; but I wrote only of what I know. The book I reviewed is a poor, inadequate, intellectually dishonest piece of propaganda in favour of one religion and in summary superficial depreciation of others. There is no apparent "nobility of mind" or "purpose" in that book. I am quite entitled—indeed I must—judge any man on what I know of him, and before suggesting that I am wrong in my judgement, Mr. Bennett should read the book for himself."]

SOUTHWELL CHECK LIST

AMENDMENT to "Charles Southwell: A Preliminary Check List" (*THE FREETHINKER*, June 15th):

Entry No. 11.—Verbatim report of the two night's discussion in the City Hall, Glasgow, between Mr. Alexander Jamieson... and Mr. Charles Southwell... Glasgow. Published by J. H. McGuire. Free Thought Book and Tract Depot, 9 Brunswick Street, 1854.

The compiler is deeply indebted to Messrs. R. M. Hamilton and Tom Keys, of Glasgow, for having drawn attention to this scarce pamphlet, and presenting it to his collection. V. E. NEUBERG.

LECTURE REPORTS

At the October monthly meeting of the Wales and Western Branch, Mr. S. M. Caines, the President, spoke on "Religion and Race Relations." The speaker had obviously spent a great deal of time in research on the subject and a most interesting lecture was the result, followed by an interesting discussion. Members attended from places as far apart as Bristol and Abertillery, 75 miles away from each other.

★

ON SUNDAY 14th October, Mr. F. A. Ridley, President of the N.S.S. spoke before the Glasgow S.S., on the German problem, in particular relation to the R.C. Church. He pointed to the economic recovery of Germany and to the danger of another war represented by the current division of Germany. The lecturer went on to show that, historically, there had been three successive German Empires, of which the first was the Holy Roman Empire, the second, created by Bismarck, was dominated by Protestant Prussia. The Third Reich of Hitler had been created with the active collaboration of the R.C. Church. Today, under the political leadership of the catholic Dr. Adenauer, catholicism was aiming at a recreation of the Catholic Holy Roman Empire by reunion with the catholic south rather than with the protestant and communist East; a policy supported by the present Pope, a former Vatican diplomat in Germany. Mr. Ridley emphasised that, generally in the Western world, the R.C. Church has succeeded Fascism as the chief bulwark of social and intellectual reaction.

A stream of questions and much interesting discussion occupied the best part of an hour, thereby paying tribute to the keen interest of the large number present. Mr. R. M. Hamilton ably occupied the chair.

Mr. Ridley also opened the indoor season of the West Ham & District Branch N.S.S. on Thursday 25th October at the Wanstead Community Centre, London, E.11. His first-hand information on the R.C. Church in Germany again evoked great interest and led to many questions. All present agreed that a very profitable evening had been spent and the N.S.S. President was warmly thanked. The Branch looks forward to his next visit.

★

THE ADDRESS on John M. Robertson given by Mr. H. Cutner, at Leicester and Manchester, dealing with the life-work of perhaps our greatest Freethinker, was listened to with the greatest interest in both cities and was followed by stimulating discussion. Mr. Cutner wishes to convey his best thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Cartwright of Leicester and to Mr. N. Cassel of Manchester for their generous hospitality.

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