

The Freethinker

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Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

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As STUDENTS of comparative religion are well aware, theories which seek to explain the origins of religion have a habit of changing from age to age. In the 18th century, the precise era of the enlightenment, the great men who launched the Freethought movement on an international scale believed that religious origins were due to *conscious* fraud on the part of priests. The great Voltaire, for example, said: "Priests are not what they would like us to believe; it is our credulity that makes their reputation." Elsewhere we learn that "the art and practice of theology arose when the first knave encountered the first simpleton." Voltaire seems to have expressed the general view of his free-thinking contemporaries who, as one of them forcibly expressed it, believed that humanity would only attain a harmonious social equilibrium when the last King was hanged with the entrails of the last priest.

The Origin of Religion

Nowadays such a view seems over-simplified; religion is a complex product, the end-product of a variety of causes. Some modern scholars have even appeared to deny that fraud entered at all into the process, but this seems as over-simplified and one-sided as the opposite view of Voltaire. The truth appears to be between the extremes. Religion probably *originated* as the natural result of ignorance and fear of both social and natural phenomena which a primitive man could neither master nor understand. But at a more advanced stage of human development, self-interest and, to further its ends, *conscious* fraud, did actually play an important, and sometimes a decisive, part in the origin and evolution of particular religious cults. If Voltaire's view that religion was created by the conscious self-interest of priests can be countered by the query, "What, then, created the priests?" yet one should remember the wise observation of a modern writer. "Have we not," asked B. H. Chamberlain, "got into so inveterate a habit of digging deep that we sometimes fail to see what lies before our very noses?" In his pamphlet, *The Invention of a New Religion*, a pamphlet too little known, Prof. Chamberlain, writing in 1912, described in some detail how an actually new religion masquerading as one of immemorial antiquity was artificially created by the imperialistic ruling class of Japan within the past century. That religion, Shintoism, "the religion of (Japanese) imperialism," as one of Chamberlain's Japanese contemporaries called it, was, it is true, at least temporarily destroyed in 1945 by that spectacular victory of Science over Religion represented by the atomic annihilation of Japan. During its short but sensational course the cult of Shinto, aptly summarised as Emperor worship, added a most fascinating fresh chapter to the modern evolution of comparative religion. Had Voltaire lived to witness its spectacular rise and fall he would there have found original confirmation of his theory that religion is created by a conscious act of fraud. The only

qualification which he would have had to make is that it was not priests but politicians who deliberately set out to give Japan a new god and a new religion.

Modern Japan and the Shinto Cult

As is common knowledge, the history of Japan as a modern state began as recently as 1868 when, under the threat of foreign conquest, the old feudal Japan voluntarily committed *hari-kiri*, and the ruling class embarked on a feverish programme of modernisation, industrialisation and rearmament which inside half a century made the former Asiatic backwater one of the half dozen leading Powers of our century. Japan's dramatic vic-

tories over China and Russia and her final sensational collapse in 1945 make one of the most spectacular chapters in world history. The whole process of the rise, zenith, decline and fall of the Japanese Empire happened between 1868 and 1945, seventy-seven years, within a single lifetime. At its meridian the famous Tanaka Memorandum (1928) openly proclaimed its historic mission to subjugate Asia and dominate the world!

Brain Washing

Such a spectacular transformation required as its essential foundation not only military but moral rearmament. The astute rulers of Japan quickly grasped this fact; they deliberately sought to find a new ideology suitable for an imperialist nation starting on a perilous race in which strength was as essential as speed. Buddhism, the traditional creed of Japan, was rejected as too pacifist, while Christianity was the creed of rival imperialist powers. Finally the selectors decided on Shintoism, an old long-discarded nature cult going back to ancient times. It was, says our authority, "taken out of its cupboard and dusted." Its subsequent evolution was rapid and remarkable. Our author describes it thus:

"They insisted on the Shinto doctrine that the Mikado descends in direct succession from Ameratsu, the native goddess of the sun, and that he himself is a living god on earth who justly claims the fealty of his subjects. Such things as laws and constitutions are but free gifts on his part, not in any sense popular rights. Of course, the ministers and officials who carry on his government are to be regarded, not as public servants, but rather as executives of supreme — one might say supernatural — authority."

The ethical code sponsored by the new cult was primarily military and taught a stoical willingness to suffer and die for the Fatherland embodied in the sacred person of the Emperor. Education, Chamberlain goes on to tell us, was effectively converted into Shintoist "brain washing." The schools "are the great stronghold of the new propaganda. History is so taught to the young as to focus everything upon imperialism and to diminish as far as possible the contrast between ancient and modern Japan." This, he adds, was particularly so where the past and

VIEWS and OPINIONS

Fraud and Religion

By F. A. RIDLEY

present status of the Emperor was concerned. For prior to 1868 the Mikado had been held as virtually a state prisoner in his palace, while feudal military chiefs had actually ruled, often deposing and even murdering the nominal Emperors! As all this did not fit in with Shintoist theology about the supernatural origins of the imperialist dynasty, this aspect of the national history along with many others had to be ruthlessly revised. In brief, between 1868 and 1945 a new religion was born and an entire powerful nation was, if one may use the term, simultaneously modernised technically and medievalised mentally. So equipped, Japanese imperialism and its divine Emperor set out on the road to world empire — and Hiroshima! No doubt Hitler had his Japanese allies in mind when he

evolved his theory of the "Aryan" supermen who, incidentally, included the Japanese "Aryans."

"Sly and Crafty Men"

The ancient Romans seem to have anticipated the modern Japs in their use of religion: according to some ancient writers, religion was invented by "sly and crafty men." Voltaire held the same view! There is enough truth in the theory, perhaps, to justify our including fraud as the third person of the unholy trinity, along with ignorance and fear, as the effective creators of religion. Modern Japan is but one of many possible examples. Religion, perhaps, owes more to rogues than to saints. True, the two species are often indistinguishable!

Oil for the Glory of God

By ANDREW PEARSE

(Concluded from page 359)

A TIME is being reached when the shrinkage in number of the clergy and increasing costs are producing an impossible situation. In London, for example, it has clearly been necessary to sell up in order to carry on, and church after church has disappeared. The money received still leaves the diocese far "in the red." At the moment, it is impossible to state the cause. It could be extravagant administration or it could be the outcome of contemporary causes. An effort has been made to put the diocesan administration on to a big business basis and this is where it has all ended. Nor is there any sign of recovery. Promised religious revivals have simply failed to materialise. The economics of the situation are more than obvious. Unless the trend can be reversed, the end will come when the last vicar has sold the last site and the authorities are trying to do a deal for St. Paul's Cathedral!

It is possible to claim that the Church is bearing a heavy burden through the pressure of the times. Doubtless this is the case, but the real problems go deeper. During the first half of the last century, enormous schemes for church extension were carried through in the large cities. Some were financed from outside but a great deal was possible because society as a whole was largely a believing community and was willing to put its hand into its pocket in order to build churches as an investment for the safeguarding of public order. People could still be found who would give money freely to raise endowments. Those days are now long ago and have no present parallel. If church extension is undertaken today, it has to be financed from the diocese and the parson is probably paid through the Church Commissioners. Somewhere else, there may be a "sell-up" to make the extension possible. In other words, society has become increasingly secularised and the Church is no longer regarded as a legitimate tax upon the public conscience. Big business methods are invoked by the Church and the authorities become increasingly strident in their demands for money and yet more money. A row with a diocese over money will become far more bitter and violent than any quarrel over doctrine! The supplies are giving out and a fresh astuteness must be invoked to get money in as rapidly as possible. "Shear my sheep" becomes the favourite watchword of those whose task it is to raise funds. At the same time, it is still possible to get rid of vast sums and to be extremely indignant when questions are asked as to why and how they were spent.

It is not for us to suggest remedies and we are clearly analysing an institution in a state of advanced financial and spiritual decay. But we would suggest one course

which is becoming increasingly necessary. It is that of the separation of Church and State. This body is clinging to us and using old endowments which were left to the nation as a whole and the nation as a whole no longer wants this body. The disendowment which was applied to Ireland and Wales is an act of elementary social justice long overdue in England. State connection enables the Church to maintain a prestige to which it is no longer entitled in reality and which permits it to act like a brake upon the practising of what are, in fact, the contemporary opinions of the majority. A very good example of this interference was to be seen in the ecclesiastically-fostered outcry concerning Mrs. Knight's excellent broadcast lectures on morality without religion. Again, the State connection is one which gives to the Church an advantage in the educational realm to which it is not entitled by weight of the numbers of practising Churchpeople. The affairs of a small group, dwindling away under increasing economic pressure, is a matter for itself alone and it must look to its own resources. But a small group in numbers, linked with the State and possessing state advantages, is a very different matter. Results of economic crises upon it are now apparent, and the time has come when the State should make it clear that it can no longer be in any way responsible for this body and its affairs.

The Right to Die

THE ABOVE IS THE TITLE of a recent article in *The Medical World*, written by Mrs. Naomi Mitchison, the novelist. She deplores that "people are being kept alive who are getting precious little out of it." This is a procedure which gives more satisfaction to the doctor than to the patient. And among babies "there are some who will all their lives be a psychic and material burden on their parents and will perhaps stop them from having other children. . . . Any member of a local authority is bound to worry about the increasing expenditure on the subnormal and abnormal child when there is not enough allowed for the educational needs of the normal."

She makes a strong plea for allowing people the right to choose whether they shall continue to live. For instance, "when an old farm worker or fisherman says he would rather die in his own house among his own things," why should we "consider it correct to remove him . . . in order to prolong his life: for what?"

—NEXT WEEK—

Virgin Births Debunked

Time, Gentlemen, Please

By G. H. TAYLOR

AT LONG LAST the *Barnsley Chronicle*, apparently yielding to the protests of a section of its Christian readers, has stopped the controversy "Christianity versus Freethought" after a long duration. The *Chronicle* is to be congratulated on allowing so much space week after week in a situation where Christian arguments were being torn to shreds and their protagonists dropping out of the conflict, but the editorial policy spoiled its good record by the actual manner in which the closure was applied. Whether this was connected in some way with the editor's recent illness can only be conjectured. Whether the illness was connected with the controversy would perhaps be carrying conjecture too far! At any rate, we trust he will fully recover, for there are too few editors of his calibre.

Three local reverends were among those who entered the lists on the Christian side, while the Freethought case became a triangular effort between Mr. H. Irving, of Barnsley, Mr. H. Day, the Bradford N.S.S. President, and the present writer; Mr. Lyndon Irving, of Derby, also added learned contributions to the Freethought case. The function of THE FREETHINKER is now to balance out the gross injustice of the abrupt closure.

We do not object to Christians having the last word. That is something we have learned to expect, and in any case they never make good use of it. It happens in newspaper controversies just as it happens on the BBC. It is a time-honoured privilege given to the weaker side. What we do object to is the introduction of important new matter, including a Christian challenge, which was not allowed to be taken up.

Now the fact that a challenge is printed is, if we assume intellectual honesty on the part of the paper which prints it, a clear indication that the paper takes the challenge as an item for debate. In other words, it indicates that its columns are open for the challenge to be taken up.

To print a challenge and then suppress the acceptance of that challenge is to give some readers the impression that the Freethinker has suddenly got cold feet.

A previous challenge from a parson had already been taken up, as we indicated in "Notes and News" some weeks ago, but this reverend defender of Christianity went shy and nothing more was heard of him. The later challenge was by another professional "defender" of Christianity, the Rev. W. Parkes, similarly thirsting for the atheist's blood, but who, to judge from his writing, was even less likely to get it than his equally truculent predecessor.

Not only was Mr. Day ready to debate with the Rev. W. Parkes but he furnished the *Chronicle* with details as to how such a debate could be arranged, offering alternative choice of venue and dates for the convenience of his opponent, and if these were not satisfactory he would negotiate further. But all this was hidden from the readers because Mr. Day's letter was suppressed. THE FREETHINKER is now rectifying matters and we shall now see what these swash-buckling clergy are made of.

Is the Rev. W. Parkes ready to debate? Or does he only talk about it? We suspect the latter. There is a certain type of Christian "champion" well known to freethought propagandists, who flings out challenges right and left, but whose little pocket diary of engagements unfortunately prevents him from dealing out the verbal thrashing he so glibly promises.

Another important piece of new matter introduced by Mr. Parkes was the existence of a book he once saw, or

heard of, but whose name he did not mention (having possibly never seen it), which proved that the vast majority of scientists were believers in religious doctrines. Again the freethought reply was suppressed.

The Rev. W. Parkes, in his letter, quotes a question put to these scientists, and I recognise it as coming from a book called *The Religion of Scientists* (1935; ed. Drawbell). This shocking travesty was exposed twenty years ago. The "inquiry" was not scientifically conducted, many of those questioned could only very loosely be called scientists, and the questions were framed.

Inside this book with the presumptuous title *The Religion of Scientists* we find, more correctly, the replies of, statistically, a mere handful of radio experts, naval constructors, mining researchers, engineers, mechanics, surveyors, antiquaries, experts in metallurgy, hygiene, aviation — experts on all kinds of things except the ones that matter; that is, experts in applied sciences instead of those who also study nature, the supposed handiwork of God.

The most farcical feature of the inquiry, however, was the framing of the questions. For instance, the question "Do you credit the existence of a spiritual realm?" invites an affirmative reply from all who regard music, art, poetry, etc., as "spiritual."

Moreover, even if the questions had been properly devised and put to real scientists the inquiry would not have satisfied the requirements of a scientific investigation. Any Gallup Poll organiser will inform Mr. Parkes that there are certain well-defined principles and methods to be observed. And for the opinions of scientists on religious teachings the standard work is still the inquiry conducted by James Leuba and related to similar inquiries dating back to 1906. The methods of selection and the principles governing the inquiry are given in great detail by Prof. Leuba; they are unquestionably just in every respect. And the picture they give of American men of science is a progressive trend towards the rejection of religious doctrine. This trend accelerates as we pass from the "lesser" scientists to the "greater," as we pass from the simpler to the more complex sciences, as we pass from 1906 through the years, and as students pass from their first year to their fourth in the colleges. We are therefore not dealing with a few haphazard private opinions; we are dealing with a movement of thought.

Some of our younger or newer propagandists in the freethought movement may not have met with Leuba's figures — to which no counter has ever been made from the Christian side. When pressure on our space permits, we shall look for a chance to tabulate them in our feature "Facts for Freethinkers."

Meanwhile, we are of opinion that when a controversy has aroused great interest over a lengthy period the impartial editor will act somewhat like the barman in calling for last drinks before "Time." The best way of closing a long dispute is surely to declare "no new matter" in concluding letters from each side.

"SECULAR" PROPHECIES

The Universe recently published a severe denunciation of the "prophet" Nostradamus (actually the assumed name of a French physician who became the official astrologer to Catherine de Medici). *The Universe* Enquiry Bureau expert said: "It is not surprising that out of the large number of symbolical predictions there may be one or two which can be interpreted as corresponding to subsequent events which actually took place." We might say exactly the same thing about the Bible,

This Believing World

According to the High Master of St. Paul's School, Mr. A. N. Gilkes, in the *Sunday Times*, one of the most heartening signs of "post-war revival" is the Church's "new call" to rebuild the home. Rebuilding the home is, for him, drawing "the family together into every form of worship." If this means anything at all, it means bringing the rankest Fundamentalism into the home—belief in miracles, angels, devils, spirits, in fact, all the good old paraphernalia which distinguishes true Christianity from the many attempts to civilise it.

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Mr. Gilkes's experience as a prominent High Master leads him to believe that children would love it, while parents would "welcome every opportunity of family worship"—though, of course, there are "formidable obstacles." And one of these is that parents actually believe that there is "a conflict" between Science and Religion! If only they would read Archbishop Temple, Canon Raven, or Prof. C. S. Lewis, they would realise how easy it was to find answers to "the devastating queries of the young." The "religious impartiality of the modernist" is completely bogus, insists the all-believing Mr. Gilkes!

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We are afraid that this High Master is "completely" oblivious of modern unbelief. It is not based on the "impartiality" of modernists. It is based on *science*, which has annihilated all the distinctive features of Christianity—God, the Virgin Birth, the Son of God, the Fall of Man, the Resurrection, Holy Communion, as well as its Hell and Heaven. And no "Operation Firm Faith" can ever bring them back to people who think.

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By this time hundreds of thousands of Premium Bonds will have been sold in spite of the very religious denunciations of our priests and parsons, who simply loathe the idea of anyone getting "something for nothing." Actually, although the Bonds are a form of lottery, nobody gets something for nothing; but they might well get a lot of cash for very little outlay. Everybody, except very pious Christians, likes a little flutter, and the chance of "winning," whether from horses, lottery tickets, or Premium Bonds. And it must be very galling for true Christians to realise the complete failure of Christ Jesus to eradicate the gambling spirit from most of his followers. It must also be very galling for, let us say, people like the Rev. D. Soper, who is quite sure that Jesus would have opposed Premium Bonds if he were living now, to find his fellow Christian, Mr. Macmillan, opposing both Mr. Soper and Jesus (or the other way round) in so successfully selling them.

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Everybody knows how enthusiastically religion can be sold by the BBC, TV and ITV, to say nothing of the way the methods of Billy Graham are eagerly lapped up by faithful believers. In the U.S.A., books glorifying religion have huge sales, like *The Power of Positive Thinking*, which has sold in two years two million copies to a thirsty public. Its author, Norman Peale, says "God and the doctor, that's what I give them," which is just what Christ Jesus gave 'em; though that successful Deity added now and then some rolls of bread and fish cakes. Peale—naturally—found in the Bible the source of his greatest inspiration, especially the Positive Power of Prayer. Well, the royalties from a sale of two million books prove how much money there is still in the Grand Old Book, and how much credulity and ignorance in the people who read it.

In spite of the BBC, TV and ITV, and the millions of books selling us religion, Mr. W. Begley, who is a London County Councillor, tells us how shocked he was to find that in London no fewer than 92 churches have had to be closed down and "are gone for ever." He adds, "The London diocese has embarked on a selling-up policy. So far sales represent almost a seventh of its assets." This is so shocking as to amount almost to blasphemy—though, to be fair, the out-of-work parsons continue to draw their full salaries. But why should parsons merely draw their salaries? What about a spot of work helping the BBC, TV and ITV to convert infidels? It would be a whole-time job of course—but, alas, with no prizes!

Tears and Torment

THE PURITAN has successfully infected persons who are antipathetic to Puritanism with his belief that there is something about the actor's profession which renders him peculiarly liable to lapses, because, presumably, he is engaged in work which involves him in the display of his emotions. The last person to reproach the actor in this respect is the Puritan himself, since, in spite of his profession of austerity, he has generally expressed his religious feelings in scenes of unparalleled emotion, and is accustomed to boast of his tears and trances as if they were signs of ineffable grace. All the great evangelists and holy men wept profusely on the slightest provocation, and the more lachrymose they became, the more highly they were esteemed. St. Augustine confessed that he wept "almost daily." St. Thomas Aquinas constantly wept and fell into faints. "Not a day passed," writes Tocco, "but he was ravished out of his senses," an assertion which may be extravagant, but must have had some foundation in fact. He often wept while praying, and very often, during Mass, would burst into tears. John Wesley caused men and women and little children to become intensely emotional, so that he himself had trouble in making himself heard above the cries and moans and lamentations of his congregation. There was a woman at Newgate who, while Wesley preached, broke out into "strong cries and tears," while great drops of sweat ran down her face and all her bones shook. She was one of a multitude of persons similarly affected. George Whitefield not only induced what seemed to be madness in those who heard him, but was himself violently upset by his own eloquence. "Such," said a Mr. Winter, who lived with him, "is the scope he gave to his feelings sometimes, that he exceedingly wept, stamped loudly and passionately, and was frequently so overcome that for a few seconds you would suspect he never could recover." His addiction to oratory seems to have acted upon him as an addiction to drink acts upon other people, for Mr. Winter, with disgusting detail, states that sometimes he was only able to recover from his apocalyptic eloquence by vomiting. It is notorious that the after-effects of evangelistic piety on those who are subjected to it profoundly disquiet many pastors and parish priests who are less sympathetic to peripatetic preachers than they might be expected to be. The actor, then, will concede nothing to the devout man in this matter, but will strictly maintain that when it comes to displays of emotion, the evangelist has excesses that are beyond his capacity or his desire.—*The Theatre in My Time*, by ST. JOHN ERVINE.

One Catholic society has a useful scheme for helping the bed-ridden. To each applicant a crucifix (specially blessed and indulgenced) is sent. The invalid may gain the same indulgence as his more fortunate co-religionists merely by reciting (while meditating on the Passion) 20 Our Fathers, 20 Hail Marys and 20 Glorias. Little enough for an after-life of eternal bliss in Heaven!

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.: 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.: S. M. CAINES.
West London Branch, N.S.S.—Sunday, November 18th, at the Marble Arch, from 4 p.m.: Messrs. ARTHUR, EBURY and SHIPPER.
Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Satis Café, 40 Cannon Street).—Sunday, November 18th, 7 p.m.: Dr. CLARK, "Russia's Medical Service."

INDOOR

Brandford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, November 18th, 6.45 p.m.: A. H. WHARRAD, "This Modern Age."
Central London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, off Edgware Road).—Sunday, November 18th, 7.15 p.m.: Mr. L. EBURY, "Atheism."
Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, November 20th, 7.15 p.m.: Miss M. LANGTON, "The North American Indian, Past and Present."
Head Office N.S.S. (41 Gray's Inn Road, W.C.1).—Friday, November 16th, 7.15 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, "Comparative Religion" (second of six lectures). Admission 1/-.
Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, November 18th, 6.30 p.m.: J. HILL, "Further Education—What is it?"
Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Newcastle Chambers, Angel Row).—Thursday, November 22nd., 7.30 p.m.: A Lecture.
Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Hall, Parliament Street).—Sunday, November 18th, 2.30 p.m.: W. OWEN, M.P., a Lecture.
South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, November 18th, 11 a.m.: H. J. BLACKHAM, B.A., "Can we Afford Equality?"
West Ham and District Branch N.S.S. (Wanstead Community Centre).—Thursday, November 22nd, 7.45 p.m.: COLIN MCCALL: "The BBC and Atheism."

Notes and News

THE Pioneer Press has now a limited supply of Chapman Cohen's very popular work *Essays In Freethinking*, some volumes of which have been out of print. Beautifully bound and printed, series 1, 2, 3 and 4 can be had at 6s. each, 6d. postage. These four volumes have a knack of becoming out of print—so if readers wish to secure copies, early application is necessary.

THE Pioneer Press has also for sale Mr. Adrian Pigott's terrible indictment of the Catholic Church in politics—*Freedom's Foe—the Vatican*: "A collection of Danger-Signals for those who value Liberty." Its 128 pages are packed with facts, and there are six illustrations. Price 1s. 6d., postage 4d. And—in response to many requests—Mr. F. A. Ridley's articles on *Social Catholicism* have been reprinted in pamphlet form for 1d.

FREETHINKER SUSTENTATION FUND

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £98 17s. 11d.; Dr. W. H. Cilliers (South Africa), 5s.; A. J. Orchard, £1; N. Cluett, 2s. 6d.; A. W. Harris, 2s. 6d.; J. P. Tuck, 7s. 6d.; S. G. Leech, 10s.—Total to date, November 9th, 1956, £101 5s. 5d.

THE Thomas Paine Memorial Centre, to which we referred some months ago, is now an accomplished fact. Opened officially a few weeks ago, it will now be the headquarters of the Friendship Liberal League at Philadelphia, containing library, book store, League offices and a meeting hall. We congratulate the Freethinkers of Philadelphia on their purchase, which creates a freethought and cultural centre for the area.

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THE Conference of Evangelical Churchmen has welcomed the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Marriage and Divorce, who called for instruction in the true meaning of marriage "as upholding our Lord's principle of the lifelong union of one man with one woman." In spite of this, the Conference maintains that the New Testament allows for divorce in certain cases, and that remarriage may not be sinful or deserving the censure of the Church. The Conference, which will now submit its findings to the Church leaders, welcomes the "growing conviction within the Church" that neither divorce nor remarriage should be in themselves grounds for exclusion from Holy Communion." This signifies that once again there is a "growing conviction within the Church" that they had better bring themselves up to date with Freethought.

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FATHER PATRICK O'REILLY of the Maynooth Mission to China has a wondrous tale to tell. While in a Chinese prison he became blind owing to maltreatment, and his Chinese guards provoked him by saying that if Our Lady could work miracles she could heal him. Just to show them who was who, he began a triduum and in three days he could see the prison bars again. (He could have seen them in three minutes if Our Lady had not been so busy attending to other cases.) These half-miracles, however, are not very artistic; it would have been far more convincing if Our Lady had got him out of prison altogether.

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FROM South Africa comes the news, via Mr. Verster, Director of Prisons, that three in every 1,000 of the Union's population are in prison. (This is eight times larger than Britain's figure.) One in every 12 of the population appear before the courts during the year for some major or minor offence. The situation has become so grave that, in desperation, a national day of prayer was held recently, Prime Minister Johannes Strydom giving a special message for the occasion. He evidently expects that now God himself has been asked to intervene, the position will become rapidly better.

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ONE of the first plays to be banned by Hitler was "Nathan the Wise" (by Gotthold Lessing). The play's hero is an aged Jew and the theme is religions tolerance and humanitarianism. It is significant that the news magazine *Spiegel* now reports that the play has been removed from the seasonal programme of the theatre in Kleve "following intervention by Catholic clergy and Catholic educational authorities."

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SPEAKING to a group of Catholic social workers, Father Bagnall told them, "Yours is the proper type of welfare—you report to the pay desk in Heaven, not to government offices." What confidence tricksters outside religion would be allowed to get away with such a system of post-mortem credit!

John M. Robertson - 2

By H. CUTNER

IT WAS ONLY NATURAL that *Christianity and Mythology* should be followed by *Pagan Christs*. In this fundamental work, Robertson gives us a profound study of what he calls "the Rationale of Religion" — beginning with the pregnant saying of Petronius that "Fear first made the Gods." No one who wants to understand the "how" and the "why" of religion can afford to miss the highly detailed discussion of its many facets; and Robertson's notes to his great book show how wide and varied was his reading in science in general, and in anthropology, mythology, and comparative religions in particular. But it had a central thesis described by Robertson as an

attempt to trace and synthesise the real lines of growth of the Christian cultus; and it challenges criticism above all by its theses (1) that the Gospel story of the Last Supper Passion, Betrayal, Trial, Crucifixion, and Resurrection, is visibly a transcript of a Mystery Drama, and not originally a narrative; and (2) that that drama is demonstrably (as historic demonstration goes) a symbolic modification of an original rite of human sacrifice, or which it preserves certain verifiable details.

Needless to add, neither Christian nor reverent rationalist could answer these two points so they ignored them, much to the surprise of Robertson. "Much more surprising," he said, "is the general evasion of the two theses upon which criticism was specially challenged in the Introduction — the thesis that the gospel story of the Last Supper, etc., is demonstrably not originally a narrative, but a mystery-drama . . . (which) was inferribly an evolution from a Pales-tian rite of human sacrifice in which the annual victim was 'Jesus the Son of the Father.' Against this twofold position I have not seen a single detailed argument."

But *Pagan Christs* was much more than this. Its 500 pages are replete with the most devastating criticism of the principal Christian positions as well as a long discussion on Mithraism and Zoroastrianism and the religions of Ancient America. I cannot do more than mention it in the hope that students will study both books as two of the greatest contributions to the study of religions ever written.

Robertson's main position was that there never was such a "person" as Jesus Christ; and his books — he wrote four more on the problem — in my opinion have never been answered. It is no reply to his main positions that here and there he has paged an authority wrongly or quoted some forgotten writer. What he did with some of his critics he shows in his "replies to criticism" at the end of the volumes; but, of course, he was not allowed to reply to them in the pages of the magazines which published the attacks. Even the *Hibbert Journal*, supposed by some people to be so very "liberal," took good care to refuse his answer to a critic. (Incidentally, when I asked the same magazine to review my own book on the Myth Problem, the Editor most kindly advised me that under no circumstances whatever would he allow any notice of a book which characterised "our Lord" as a myth).

As no doubt some readers are aware, I look upon the Myth Theory as the only real reply to Christianity (apart from science). Reverent rationalists, like the late Dr. F. C. Conybeare, who is supposed to have answered Robertson in his *Historical Christ*, are welcomed with more than open arms by the Christian Churches. Utterly unable to reply to Robertson themselves, they have been hiding behind Conybeare ever since 1914, when the book first appeared. In their journals, they are always being asked what is the historical basis for a real Jesus, and the reply invariably is that the Myth Theory has been "decently buried" by *rationalists themselves* — read Conybeare's *Historical Christ*. In truth, no more terrible enemy than Robertson

has ever faced the Christian Churches. They know it — and tremble.

But Robertson always had a new book on hand. He would write *Essays towards a Critical Method* — and follow it up with further *Essays* on the same subject. He would write an "Appreciation" of Walt Whitman, a book on the *Fallacy of Saving*, on *Patriotism and Empire*, a defence of the Boers against Conan Doyle, a withering analysis of Shaw's *St. Joan* in *Mr. Shaw and the Maid*, books on *Free Trade and Tariffs*, religion, in *Studies in Religious Fallacy*. Books like these and articles on all sorts of subjects, to say nothing of lectures and debates — the knowledge of trade, of imports and exports, he shows in his memorable debate with Samuel Story, M.P., is astonishing — came from him with ease. And the point to remember is that never did he fail in "quality," that elusive high-water mark which distinguishes a great writer from so many of his fellows.

How he managed to pour out such work while he was in Parliament both as a back bencher and as Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Trade is a mystery to which I cannot find the answer. At all events, after 12 years in the House of Commons, he set to work to deal in prodigious detail with what he called the *Canon of Shakespeare* — that is, how much of the plays in the First Folio were written by the one man we know as William Shakespeare, and how much by the other Elizabethan dramatists — Marlowe, Greene, Peele, and the rest. Before he embarked on this laborious analysis, he had written *Elizabethan Literature* — the finest short introduction to that phenomenal blaze of literary activity in our language, and *The Baconian Heresy*, a smashing attack on some of the most vaunted positions of our Baconians. But in this last book, he tried to meet *The Shakespeare Problem Restated* by George Greenwood, who was not only a brilliant barrister and an M.P., but a fine classical scholar as well. Greenwood (not a Baconian) took the position that we do *not* know who wrote the plays of Shakespeare — and *certainly* it was not the actor from Stratford. Actually, Robertson was not particularly interested in the biographical side of the problem at all, for with him it was always a literary discussion on the plays. Greenwood was a master of his subject, and a formidable debater. If the reader wants to see how the two giants fared he should read the two books I have referred to, and follow them up with *Is there a Shakespeare Problem?* by Greenwood. He will not only learn something about the art of debating, but also quite a lot about Shakespeare.

What was Robertson's *magnum opus*? It is a difficult question to answer — but the four volumes of his *History of Freethought* will always remain a monument to his great and many-sided qualities. No other contemporary writer could have written this tremendous work which in itself contains his extraordinary powers as a brilliant historian, literary critic, and fighting Freethinker. The only way in which our Christian champions can meet it is by boycott. There is not a single theologian in the world who can answer it.

The last book he was at work with was *Courses of Study*, a revised edition of the one he published in 1904. It is a book that all students should have by them for therein will be found fascinating descriptions of books on all sorts of subjects young students in particular would do well to study if they want to know what constitutes a "liberal education." It will certainly surprise most of them, and prove how little we really know.

If John M. Robertson had not been an aggressive Free-thinker he would have honoured more than one university by accepting an honorary degree; but in this country, independent thought and learning never gets quite the reward meted out, for example, to jockeys and cricketers. He cannot be ignored in our encyclopædias, but he can be "damned with faint praise" even by our reverent rationalists. I stand amazed when I read (sometimes) their pious denigrations.

In the second volume of the *History of Freethought* there is a splendid bibliography of Robertson's works, a reading of which will show why, in a couple of articles, it is so difficult to do justice to a man who — as he once said at an R.P.A. dinner in my hearing — wanted to be remembered as a Freethinker if remembered at all. But those of us who love literature and history and sociology need not confine our admiration only to the one subject of which he was so great a master. We salute all his great qualities, above all his unswerving devotion to truth, and those splendid books of his, a monument to his thoroughness and his scholarship in many fields of human thought and endeavour.

There were giants in his day — Bradlaugh, Holyoake, Foote, Ingersoll, McCabe, Chapman Cohen — but I feel, looking at what he accomplished, John M. Robertson outshone them all.

Report from Malta

By A SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

THE CLERGY IN MALTA are organised to conduct a ceaseless campaign aimed at those who are bold enough to stand against them; aimed, too, at interfering with the sound judgment of the remainder of the population. In every town and village, through the parish priest, they organise what they term the "Parochial Committee." This consists of specially chosen members, well known for their servility to the Church and their willingness to subdue heresy. The Committee is entrusted with the task of infiltration into societies of all kinds, with the intention of gaining strong voting representation. By fostering jealousies, emphasising differences, and stirring up religious zeal inside the organisations, the Committees cause internal divisions and achieve virtual control. It is not a new method but it still works.

The first step is often to stimulate a sense of loyalty towards the local patron saint and the feast day set aside for his celebration. Childish though it may seem, rumours are spread that, through lack of funds, the yearly feast of the saint is likely to be below the standard of that of a nearby locality. People must not squander their money on luxuries and entertainment and neglect their obligations to the Church. Fools are plentiful in Malta — as elsewhere — and in order to avoid discrimination they give to the Committee what their families could well use. Comforting themselves with the slogan that God will provide, they provide for the Church.

The worst victims are, of course, the women — so often in the hands of the priest. They are urged to refuse marital relationships to their husbands if the latter hint at birth control. They are told to induce their sons and daughters to join Catholic Action; and they are, naturally, asked to give of their meagre savings for the greater glory of God and His Church. This summer, young women were warned against wearing the fashionable imported dresses which were "indecent," and encouraged to hide themselves in antiquated "Mary-like" dresses instead. In these and many other ways, the Church strives to combat "materialism."

Perhaps most effective of all is the suppression of literature: the prevention of new ideas from reaching the younger generation. Working through the parties in power, they enforce laws of censorship on progressive social, sexual and similar works. Any kind of literature not in conformity with Catholic ideas is branded seditious and often confiscated at the Post Office.

In Malta, of course, the priest must be revered; and he is protected by law. One cannot sue a priest without permission of his Archbishop. On the other hand, the priest intrudes into the most intimate aspects of Maltese family life. Through Confessional privileges he learns — from those foolish or frightened enough to tell — the innermost secrets, particularly from the poor women.

In political life, the Church is prominent in checking laws beneficial to the working class. It well knows that it will lose its grip on the populace if the people are taught to use their brains, to think rationally about their conditions. In the educational sphere, the damage — in time-honoured Catholic fashion — is done early. The majority of teachers are chosen not for educational ability but for adherence to the Church. Quite recently a typical example occurred. The Government issued circulars to the United Kingdom for applications for various technical posts. Promptly the clergy's organ, ill-named *Voice of Truth*, appeared with the headline that applicants for technical school posts in Malta must be Roman Catholics.

A recently-formed body aims at teaching young engaged couples to adhere strictly to Church rules; conferences are being organised throughout the island under priestly control with this intention. It is of especial interest to note that the Church is endeavouring to organise a community in London to deal with emigrants from Malta. Under the leadership of the Jesuit Father E. Coppola this body will strive to prevent marriages outside the faith and similar deviations from clerical control.

Imported films are also censored in Malta and Catholic Action is strongly represented on the censorship committees, doing its utmost to ensure that the people shall see, not what is good for them but what *Rome considers* good for them. The consequence: fifth-rate films. One is branded materialistic, heathenish, etc., if one dares to complain.

In Britain, you may find it hard to appreciate the position on the George Cross Island. I have tried to give you some idea of what it is like. Malta will become a burden to the British taxpayer if she does not progress. Malta needs knowledge: knowledge of the facts of life, social and family; it needs to develop freethinking individuals. Freethinkers can do a lot to help. They should strive to flood Malta with literature that will teach the younger generation to grow up independent of mind, independent of Church.

A Powerless Archangel

IN northern Argentina a "visionary," David Damaio, has a large following of simple peasants, collected in the last few months on the strength of his claim to be an emissary of the Archangel Michael and to be the owner of 600 million cruzeiros. When soldiers were sent to arrest the Holy Man a pitched battle resulted and eight people were killed, seven of them by a gross lapse of guardianship on the part of the guardian Archangel Michael, being dedicated followers. Finally Damaio and two of his officers were arrested, and, unless the Archangel Michael effects supernatural levitation on their behalf, seem likely to be guests of the government for some considerable time.

CORRESPONDENCE

ETERNAL CYCLE?

Re Lt. Col. J. C. Fuller's letters on the origin of matter, does not the solution of this problem appear as impossible of proof as that of the existence of a deity? The finite mind might well despair of ever reaching a definite conclusion.

There is nothing more difficult to conceive than the idea of nothing! One may eliminate, one by one, the earth, the solar-system, our galaxy, the other galaxies, matter, energy — until there only remains the "all-pervading ether" (which is merely a convenient fantasy of the scientists). But dispense with *that* and the imagination comes up against a full stop.

Theists claim that the universe was "created in the Beginning," but ask them what God was doing before that Beginning, and they will take refuge in abstract verbiage, as imponderable as the physicist's "ether." They may reply even that He was playing about with other universes, getting His hand in, practising His "Divine Plan," in readiness for the Final Experiment of Man, etc.! But the whole theory becomes a system of mutually reflecting mirrors, and the image stretches into Infinity.

Perhaps there was no Beginning and will be no End. What if Time is circular, like the hypothesis of curved space? Perhaps matter and energy never began and never cease, and when the universe "runs down" it "winds itself up again." In that event it might be surmised that our present Time and our individual lives will recur and we shall pass (and have passed) the same point — this momentary Now — an infinite number of times, and the whole thing threatens to become as boring as the theists' eternal heaven (except that we apparently have no memory of these recurring existences).

H. H. ROGERSON.

PUBLIC ENEMY No. 1

Your contributor E. G. Macfarlane objects to my opinion that Catholic Action represents, nowadays, Public Enemy No. 1 for the international freethought movement. He appears to think this precise designation should be reserved for nationalism. I am in complete agreement, of course, that such current outmoded ideologies as imperialism, nationalism and colour bar are opposed to any freethought worthy of the name, and, of course, *facile princeps*, there is the threat of atomic war, which would make hay of freethought and Freethinkers! However, that is not quite a relevant comparison. These inimical ideologies are not identical, as is Catholic Action, with an international organisation which is working night and day all over the world to make freethought for ever impossible.

In the '30's the Nazi movement was perhaps equally deadly; it actually did destroy the freethought movement in several European countries. Today, however, there is no danger comparable with Catholic Action. It is in this sense that I describe it, and shall continue to describe it, as Public Enemy No. 1, or Ecclesiastical Fascism, the prototype of the secular brand. As such I submit that it is nowadays as great a danger to international freethought as its secular imitator, Fascism, was to international democracy and political freedom in the '30's.

F. A. RIDLEY.

BULGARIA

K. Lidaks makes some extraordinary assertions about the Orthodox Church in Bulgaria today.

I have in fact just returned from Bulgaria, where I made a particular point of seeing the position of religion in the country. As a result of discussions with clergy of various denominations, I would say, that, while religion is strong among elderly people, the young have abandoned it almost completely.

K. Lidaks also says that the Orthodox Church has expelled and suppressed other foreign churches. It would be interesting to know what these foreign churches are. I visited a Russian Orthodox Church in the very heart of Sofia, where a service was being carried on, without the faintest trace of interference. K. Lidaks may have been almost killed, but it could not have been for looking at their mountain monastery, because there is no law forbidding people entering any religious building in Bulgaria. I called at the church in the remote village of Chepelare in the Rhodope Mountains, and was cordially received by the priest, although I explained during the course of our conversation that I was an atheist. It may well be that the monks are expert hunters and swordsmen: mountain dwellers usually are. But to claim that, in a non-religious state the head monk has his harem, bodyguard and executioner, can only be described as the product of a fevered imagination.

H. FRANKEL.

PAPAL BULLS

I have recently had some correspondence with the Spanish Embassy, including some questions about bullfighting in Spain. Here are extracts from their reply:

"Religious leaders in Spain have not made official statements

deploring bullfighting which, as far as I know, has nothing to do with religion." The Archbishop of Canterbury agrees with this, it is only fair to say.

"There are no hunts of the English type in Spain — there are even many Spaniards who consider the tearing of the fox by the hounds more cruel than the expert killing of an attacking bull in a well-conducted fight."

Picture these kindly-natured Spaniards joining with us in a protest against fox-hunting! Picture the evil "attacking bull," in the ring of his own choice, viciously attacking those innocent bystanders, the picadors, matadors and toreadors! Picture the "expert killing" of this "well-conducted fight," a bovine "Death of a Thousand Cuts." Picture this "attacking bull," having vanquished all the defenders, returning happily to his paddock to die of old age! (Queensbury Rules?) These Spanish humanitarians obviously have the welfare of the animal world at heart. They neglected to mention, by the way, that we, at least, don't get so many spectators.

Another answer may be of interest to my brother Secularists: "Of course we have suffered from atheism in our country; otherwise it would seem difficult to explain the widespread burning of churches." (They wouldn't be Fascist headquarters, would they?)

D. SHIPPER.

KEIR HARDIE

In reply to your correspondent H.C. it seems to me that he does not quite understand the material conditions and the background which determined Keir Hardie's statement to the Christian Commonwealth. I know all about that interview and the interviewer, who, by the way, was not a Christian believer.

At the time, a tremendous effort was being made by Parsons and Priests to defame Hardie's character, and to bring about his defeat at the coming election. However, there were quite a number of Nonconformist preachers who stood by Hardie. Many of these brave men were sacked by the deacons, and consequently suffered great hardship. Press articles and letters to the press charged Hardie with being a Socialist, an infidel, and a supporter of free love.

Force of material circumstances, often compel people of advanced views to utilise cunning in holding their own against Christian liars, and it is probable, that an unsophisticated man like your correspondent H.C. would stand little chance of survival if forced to enter the jungle of life and struggle for survival. That is just what Hardie had to do, but the jungle killed him at last.

However, looking back at that period, I believe that Hardie would have been elected for the Merthyr borough even if he stood as an atheist, for he was very popular with the masses.

PAUL VARNEY

[We find no evidence in the above letter that Keir Hardie was a Freethinker—Ed.]

CHLOROFORM

I must say that the chloroform called religion does not suit my conscience; therefore I shall have to go through all my life in this world without it, even if I suffer more than those religious people. I cannot be intoxicated with any religion. I am always quite sober and ready to persevere any pain with the full sense.

—YOSHIO MARKINO.

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