

The Freethinker

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THE EVENTS of the last few weeks in both East and West, in both Egypt and Hungary, have witnessed a remarkable combination of religious and political intrigues. The present age is characterised by political, rather than by religious, interests. It is a pre-eminent characteristic of our era, in fact, that religion relies more and more on political propaganda for its influence on society. The age and the sort of social conditions that once combined to make people religious have long since passed away. Religion today needs to be watered liberally by political intrigue in order to survive in the alien atmosphere of the modern world.

The two most powerful contemporary religions are undoubtedly Roman Catholicism and Islam. Both in the modern world, as formerly in the medieval, are totalitarian creeds; using politics, religion and culture to ensure their domination. Rome and Mecca represent respectively probably the two most effective international organisations the world has ever known, whilst the two great Church languages — Latin, as used in the ritual of the Catholic Church, and Arabic, the sacrosanct language in which Allah dictated the Koran *verbatim* to the prophet Mohammed — have attained an international vogue which must make the modern adherents of Esperanto and similar "universal" languages green with envy.

Colonel Nasser and Islam

In the recent tragic events which have convulsed the world and which seemed for some terrible moments to mark the beginning of the world's first atomic conflict, religion — more exactly Rome and Islam — has played a leading, if at present scarcely definable, role. Whatever view one may take of recent events in Egypt, it is indisputable that the action of Nasser in July in seizing the Canal aroused tempestuous enthusiasm throughout the world of Islam. Not only were his Arab co-religionists behind him to a man but the whole Muslim world reacted favourably towards him, including even a Dominion in the British Commonwealth, Pakistan, the "Land of the Pure," that is of Muslim "True Believers." Behind Nasser was ranged the tremendous latent power of Muslim fanaticism, so often demonstrated in past centuries as a major political, as well as religious, force.

Allah Blesses Colonel Nasser

Not much publicised here but perhaps the most important statement issued on behalf of Nasser was the declaration of the famous Muslim University of Al Hazar, which occupies a position broadly analogous to that once occupied by, say, Oxford in relation to the theology of the Church of England. British editors, presumably unacquainted with the niceties of Muslim theology, probably did not realise the full importance of this intervention by the famous Cairo university into the political controversies of today.

But the declaration in favour of the Egyptian Government by the most famous Muslim seat of theology is of immense importance. The declaration was that Nasser had the blessing of Allah in his political offensive against the West: this won for him many millions of Muslim allies.

The "Holy War"

The initial declaration was followed up by the *Jihad* declaring the "Holy War" against the Christian invaders, which has an ominous ring and stirs up ancient relics of "old unhappy things," of battles long ago. Time was when the Holy War waged under the green crescent flag of Islam was simultaneously

VIEWS and OPINIONS

Religion and Politics

By F. A. RIDLEY

the terror of the Christian West and Hindu and Zoroastrian East alike. When the Muslim crusaders conquered Spain in the West and Constantinople in the Near East and Delhi in the Far East for a millenium, the Muslim "Holy War" represented one of the most powerful political, as well as religious, forces in the world. And the past decade, which has seen so many startling changes, has seen a remarkable recrudescence of the medieval power of Islam. New Muslim nations have sprung into active political existence from Indonesia to Morocco; how they and their still medieval theology will fare in the changed circumstances of our modern world remains to be seen, but recent events have undoubtedly contributed considerably to the growing solidarity among the hitherto dormant nations of the Muslim East. This awakening to active political life and to modern industrial culture of some three hundred million Muslims cannot fail to have a profound effect upon the world — and upon Islam. In his now famous book, *The Philosophy of a Revolution*, Nasser indicated that he fully realises the tremendous latent political power inherent in Islam.

Re-enter Cardinal Mindszenty

While Islam, the oriental "hellish twin," as we have described it, was involving itself actively in the East, its western brother Rome went into action in Eastern Europe in Poland and, more spectacularly, in Hungary, where the martyred heroes of the Church in Communist lands re-entered upon the scene in dramatic style. Without rushing in where angels fear to tread, and venturing an opinion on the at present confused Hungarian scene, certain facts appear to stand out clearly. While the recent civil war in Hungary began as a dispute *inside* the Communist camp between the Stalinist upholders of Russian hegemony over the Communist countries, and the Titoist nationalists who advocate national autonomy in the Communist camp, yet it appears certain that other forces not at all interested in the reforming of Communism soon took a hand. It is now clear that the statement by the radio service of the former Hungarian regime, recently reproduced in THE FREETHINKER, represented propaganda and not truth — at least not the whole truth. A section of the Catholic Church in

Hungary may actually have collaborated with the Communist regime there, as stated. But it did not represent the real voice of the Hungarian Church, most certainly not that of Cardinal Mindszenty, who immediately on his liberation denounced the whole Socialist set-up in Hungary and demanded the immediate restoration of private property; that is, presumably, of the feudal ownership by which a handful of landlords owned most of the country, and in which, incidentally, the Catholic Church was the biggest landlord! It can hardly be an accident that the entire Catholic Church abroad, including the pro-Fascist Pope

in a radio message, so enthusiastically at once took up the cause of the "Free" Hungarians! The situation is still far from clear, but where Rome is concerned it is still true that "he who sups with the Devil needs a long spoon."

The Last Stand of the Gods

Today the Vatican in the West and Islam in the East are staging a "come-back," perhaps the last stand of the gods. Present events indicate this very clearly. Freethinkers in East and West alike must close their ranks against the simultaneous menace in both quarters.

Pound and Dollar Religion

By JOHN HASTINGS

AVRO MANHATTAN'S *Dollar and the Vatican* is certainly a most trenchant exposure of American "Big Business," and should be read side by side with Stein's *The World the Dollar Built*. Manhattan shows that a stage has now been reached in American history where the Roman Catholic Church has linked with the economic imperialism of the gigantic Trusts. In some ways, the link is natural. The R.C. Church is opposed fanatically to the Left in politics simply because it is itself a bulwark of the old order. Its opposition to Communism spreads over easily to any parallel Socialistic movement. One cannot forget, for example, that James Connolly, the protagonist of Irish Socialism, although an R.C. himself, was inevitably at loggerheads with the clergy. Its own ideological desires are also the practical wishes of the vast Trusts and it naturally supports them, despite their glaring social immoralities, in order to achieve its ends, just as the Trusts themselves turn to a natural and powerful ally.

But my comment would be that the picture cannot be restricted to America. Although certain aspects of industrial relationships may be more developed there, ecclesiastical links in the support of political reaction are equally operative in England. The R.C. vote in the Labour Party or in trades unionism is invariably on the side of reaction and has done much to hamper progress or to create witch-hunts. Roman Catholics have sponsored political reaction generally and have at times encouraged anti-Semitism. Indeed, Irish progressives make a big mistake when they imagine that they have an ally in the R.C. Church here. The "distributism" of publications like the *Catholic Worker* is simply a small-scale capitalism, whilst the much-vaunted "Catholic sociology" points straight on to the corporate state of Mussolini or Franco. Indeed, the Roman Catholic influence in England since the war, allied with the economic forces of "Big Business," has done much to prevent the development of harmonious relations with countries east of the "Iron Curtain." Those who are tempted to give it an ear might remember that they are listening to an inspired propaganda, a blend of capitalistic desire and religious fanaticism.

But the thesis does not end with the Roman Catholics. The Church of England is notoriously a body which is linked with conservative ways of life and thought. In the past, this meant a link with the landowner. Nowadays, it means a link with economic power and an attempt to use this power for its own ends. It comes down on the side of the ruling classes because they are its natural sponsors. As a result, it has to eat humble pie for it must not be over-critical of the anti-intellectualist and opportunist mode of life sponsored by these classes. It must still preserve the "old school tie" mentality and ward off progressive ideas on sociology and economics. Its moderation is accounted

for by the fact that it must not be too denunciatory over "sin" lest it causes offence. Thus, it gives a spiritual background to the Stock Exchange and the Church Commissioners do well on Trinidad Oil! If its diocesan finances are rocky, it defies the "credit squeeze" and goes in for big overdrafts. Under plea of reorganisation, its capitalises its assets. Schemes for reunion are put forward which are nothing more or less than businesslike trust-mergers. And, all the time, it is giving a moral support to the world of "Big Business" and throwing its influence against political and social progress. The recent comments upon the finances of the diocese of London in *THE FREETHINKER* and in *Reynolds News* are a microcosm of a larger and equally unpleasant picture.

The lesson is that religion should be severed entirely from the State and its administration. If people wish to follow an organised religion, they can do so as a private group. But an organised religion which grows powerful as a social force will soon exhibit all of the corruptions which spring from power and will become the equally corrupt partner of a State itself corrupted by the same germ. Manhattan certainly opens one's eyes and the results can happen here not only by way of the Vatican but also through our own home-manufactured product. Let us not forget that the World Council of Churches, a Protestant body, has overwhelming American backing and that John Foster Dulles is one of its leading lights. The British Council of Churches is linked with it, and together they provide a sort of Anglo-American Protestantism. Both the Vatican and this hybrid can link with the dollar and with the pound sterling to enter a class war on the side of that old order. I would suggest that the time has come to preserve a particularly watchful eye over both variants of the Gospel in this country and the activities in politics and public life of the official "men of God" of either variety.

QUIZ

1. What was the location of (a) the first Mormons, (b) the first Aryans, (c) the first astronomers?
2. Which famous Bishop in S. Africa produced a devastating criticism of the Pentateuch?
3. What was the first authoritative account, in English, of the circumstances of Hitler's death?
4. What was, or is, the relationship of (a) Charles Reade (the novelist) to Winwood Reade?; (b) J. B. S. Haldane to (i) Viscount Haldane?, (ii) J. S. Haldane?; (c) Julian Huxley to T. H. Huxley?
5. What is the etymology of "Charing" Cross?
6. Which were the two last legal burnings for heresy in England?

(Answers on page 387)

Richard Jefferies' "Last Words"

By G. I. BENNETT

THOSE WHO LOVE — and love passionately — the good earth, in all its seasons and moods, are seldom adherents of a religious creed. It is not so much that they think the matter out to the conclusion that all theology is false. It is rather that they sense intuitively it is false. Their temperament makes them impatient of those who would curb the natural gladness of being alive with solemn talk about "the sins of this sinful world" and the salvation that lies beyond it for them who are willing to sacrifice for salvation here and now. They feel that there is fragrance enough in life for him who will grasp it; that our world with its joys of sense and sound, of form and light and colour, is at bottom a beautiful world, in spite of its evils and ugliness; and that he who would turn his back on it in quest of something higher is making a shameful and profitless renunciation.

W. H. Hudson is one of those ardent spirits whose love of earth-life, of Nature in her elemental simplicity, for ever made distasteful for him ecclesiastical dogmas and articles of faith. In his South American romance, *The Purple Land*, he briefly voices his disapproval of religion that "steals shame-faced to hide itself in dim churches." If one would utter words of thanksgiving, then what could be better, he thinks, than to be "face to face with Nature on the vast hills at eventide"?

Generally speaking, Hudson had little to say about religion in his writings except in that most lovely of his books, *Far Away and Long Ago*, written near the end of a long life. There he tells how he lost, and never regained, the religious faith that his devout but dearly-loved mother had implanted in his child mind. And in *W. H. Hudson: a Portrait*, his old friend, Morley Roberts, wrote of him that "the man who loved birds believed as little as the birds themselves in immortality or the creeds and dogmas of the Church." (Hudson had, as readers of him will know, a feeling for birds approaching adoration.) Yet one fear haunted this great Nature-lover all the days of his life: he was somehow afraid of death; and, like Dr. Johnson, he dared hardly think about it, for to do so was to be plunged into wretched depression. Actually he died in his sleep, and in that event he was twice blessed. For one thing, he knew nothing of the weariness of dying bed-fast and nothing of the horror (as it would have been for him) of being conscious of an imminent passing. For another thing, his end coming suddenly, it was not possible for any priest or well-intentioned pietist to be ushered to his bedside to whisper to him sentiments from which he could have gained no comfort, or to extract from him in his weakness a word or two that could be interpreted as a return to religion in his final moments.

Richard Jefferies, with whom as a writer of exquisite observations on Nature and wild life Hudson's name is most naturally linked, was less fortunate. Dying at the early age of 38, he suffered in the closing months of his life from a physical weakness so great that it was impossible for him to hold a pen in his fingers, and his last essays come to us as pieces dictated to his wife, turned literary amanuensis.

Now Jefferies has been called a pantheist, a description I have always felt misleading — indeed, fundamentally false to the most characteristic expression of his spirit — and when some years ago I wrote on Jefferies* one of my objects was to draw attention to this. As with Hudson, it is

possible to read much of Jefferies without coming across any allusion to his attitude to religion; but where the subject does come before his mind he is consistently vigorous and outspoken in his repudiation of Christianity — and, in fact, of all Christian and theistic standards. In his most revealing and perhaps most remarkable book, *The Story of My Heart*, he wrote that Nature is the work of a "force without mind," not of deity; and that the universe "is designless and purposeless and without idea." "There is," he says, "no God in Nature, nor in any matter anywhere, either in the clods on the earth or in the composition of the stars." In human affairs "everything happens by chance"; "rewards and punishments are purely human institutions . . . No intelligence whatever interferes in human affairs."

On other pages we may read Jefferies' vehement abhorrence of asceticism, inseparable as it is from so much of religious teaching: "I believe all manner of asceticism to be the vilest blasphemy — a blasphemy towards the whole of the human race. I believe in the flesh and the body, which is worthy of worship — to see a perfect human body unveiled causes a sense of worship. The ascetics are the only persons who are impure. Increase of physical beauty is attended by increase of soul beauty . . ."

It is true, of course, that there is an element of mysticism in Jefferies' outlook that is engaging but not convincing to those whose thought does not run in the rare and eccentric channels of his. We cannot go into that here. What is, however, immediately important is that, whatever he may have thought, imagined, or felt, he had clearly put behind him any and every idea that would be of the least comfort to a theist, Christian or non-Christian.

In the light of all this, it came as more than a mild surprise to me the other day in reading Edward Thomas's half-a-century-old biography, *Richard Jefferies: His Life and Work*, to learn that, after his death, matter was published purporting to show that Jefferies departed this life a Christian! It was related of him that in his last months "the Bible was his constant companion"; and, but three weeks before his death when his wife was reading to him from St. Luke, he said, "Those words of Jesus are true, and all philosophy is hollow." And at another time, "I have done wrong and thought wrong; it was my intellectual vanity."

Edward Thomas gives the source of these alleged strange utterances as the *Girls' Own Paper*, December 21st, 1889. He also cites the *Pall Mall Gazette*, August 16th, 1887, for saying that Mrs. Jefferies had apparently told Mr. J. W. North that their time had long been spent in prayer together, and in reading St. Luke. And from that journal our biographer quotes: "Almost his last intelligible words were, 'Yes, yes; that is so. Help, Lord, for Jesus' sake. Darling, goodbye. God bless you and the children, and save you all from such great pain.'" He also quotes Sir Walter Besant as saying in his book, *Eulogy of Richard Jefferies*, that towards the end "the simple old faith came back to him" and he "died listening with faith and love to the words contained in the old Book" (the Bible).

Yet a few years later, Besant expressed himself differently in a letter to Henry S. Salt reproduced, according to Thomas, in the latter's book, *The Faith of Richard Jefferies*. I cannot do better than give the relevant parts of this letter:

"I stated in my *Eulogy* that he died a Christian. His wife

(Concluded on page 384)

*Richard Jefferies, *Plain View*, Spring issue, 1950.

This Believing World

We find it hard to believe that anybody these days can be rude to an Archbishop — and yet that it was Mr. Bulmer-Thomas, a Labour ex-M.P., was to — ye gods — Dr. Fisher. The *News Chronicle* calls it “a savage attack” on the Archbishop of Canterbury at a Church Assembly, and all because our Primate appears to do nothing “to save the churches” (not, be it noted, the other Christianities but the buildings). Mr. Bulmer-Thomas’s picturesque language in debate can be seen — “The cards were snatched out of my hand while your Grace held a pistol to my face and the Dean of Gloucester plunged his dagger in my back. . . .”

★

Needless to say, the clergymen present did not turn the other cheek, for they yelled “Shame” and “Nonsense,” but the Archbishop of York admitted he was “filled with shame and sorrow and dishonour to God that a fine church . . . should be torn down.” Not so the Dean of Winchester, who declared “that to retain ancient buildings because they were once churches would be absurd.” So, many churches are coming down, the sites sold, and the Church will pocket the money. And Mr. Bulmer-Thomas gave in. It was all so very Christian and Christ-like.

★

According to a Major Webb, writing in *Psychic News*, “spiritualism is a lovely word, the exact opposite of materialism.” In addition, it “has been a blessed boon to mankind — the sharp ploughshare which had to break the hard crust of materialism.” Well, it’s news to most of us that the hard crust of materialism has even been dented, let alone broken. But then Major Webb is one of those wishful thinkers who talks about God and Jesus as dear old friends, and who is quite certain that there is “something within us” that generates faith “rising triumphant in spite of all.” Columns of this kind of nonsense can be filled with case, but the fact remains that materialism has never been more strongly advocated than now — for it forms the basis of nearly all scientific thinking. It is Spiritualism that is ignored completely by scientists.

★

Although Rome has not yet made a definite pronouncement on the latest “miraculous” cure reported from Lourdes, it appears to be generally conceded in France that an ardent Communist (possibly an atheist) suffering from paralysis, was completely cured after one dip in the famous waters. This has caused a lot of heart-burning among Catholics who in millions make a pilgrimage every year and have to come away as ill as ever. Why does the good God thus discriminate? We give it up. Even in hospital wards, people get cured without the intervention of miracles, while other people regularly die not half so ill. But if Lourdes does not produce at least one miracle a year it may in the end have to close down. Like every business, it has to produce the goods.

★

At last — the “*Evening News*” reports a “Riddle of the Bible is solved.” So, after all, there are still riddles in spite of the fact that Science has proved the Bible was right. This particular riddle deals with the world-famous story of the Wise Men of the East who came to Jerusalem saying, “We have seen his star in the East and are come to worship him.” The riddle is “How could the Wise Men in the East see a star in the East and follow it westwards?” Had this question, now safely posed by the *Evening News*, been asked not so many years ago it might well have caused a shudder of horror in all believers, and the Law of Blasphemy brought into action. However, it now appears to be all a question of a wrong translation.

The “true” translation has been made by a Dr. H. J. Schonfield in his “Authentic New Testament,” over which he has spent 30 years, so it ought to be right. He answers the riddle by saying that the words ought to be, “For we in the East have seen this star.” This doesn’t seem so different from Moffat, who has, “We saw his star when it rose” — Moffat preferring to leave the words “in the East” out. But the point to note is the hopeless credulity of these believers. The sillier the story, the more true it is, is even now a Christian motto — as it used to be in Father Tertullian’s time 1,800 years ago.

★

It is all very heartbreaking but the Methodist Church — or its ministers — is complaining that, though incomes among its members are three times as high as before the war, the faithful are only giving what they used to years ago. This cry for more cash is not a modern phenomenon — even the saintly Peter lost his temper with poor Ananias and his wife about it, and after bumping them off, blamed God Almighty for it. Modern Methodists are lucky that Peter is not about.

RICHARD JEFFERIES’ LAST WORDS

(Concluded from page 383)

read to him from the Gospel of St. Luke, and he acquiesced. But, *I have since been informed*, he was too weak not to acquiesce, and his views never changed from the time that he wrote *The Story of my Heart*. For my own part, it surprised me to hear that a man who had written those pages should ever return to orthodoxy, but I had no choice but to record the story as it . . . was told to me. When a man gets as far as Jefferies — when he has shed and scattered to the winds all sacerdotalism and authority — he does not go back. . . .”

On which Salt’s comment was: “Herein is the simple explanation of Jefferies’ alleged conversion. . . . So long as he retained any slight measure of health and strength; so long as he was able, even at rare intervals, to enjoy that vital communion with Nature on which his whole being depended; so long, in fact, as he was Richard Jefferies, and not a shattered wreck, he was a freethinker. . . . His own published statements remain, and will remain, beyond dispute or question, the authoritative expression of his life-creed.”

It says much for Thomas’s integrity that he gives us both sides of this story of Jefferies’ last days and, finding the strongest, most telling evidence for Jefferies’ philosophy in his writings, sums up in the light of that evidence. “There are some narrow sectarians,” he writes, “who would ignore the work of Jefferies’ maturity, and lay stress upon words which might be paralleled from the condemned cell.” Here was no partisan, he points out, but one who pursued the truth as he saw it with singular sincerity of mind until “tripped up by death.” The last words of anyone in mortal pain, with perhaps a delirious and befuddled mind, afflicted with the anguish of parting from all he has most cherished and from those whom he has dearly loved, are not to be taken as testimony to another order of thinking, or as a recantation of what he throughout life fervently believed, or disbelieved.

“Those who would make capital out of these words of Jefferies,” concludes Edward Thomas, assuming their authenticity, “are already comfortable in their own conceit and need not this poor addition to their calendar. The majority will be those who, orthodox Christian or not, see in the work of Jefferies, when he was most alive, a force at one with the good that is in the world, with what makes for wisdom, beauty, and joy, whether it can usefully be connected with Christianity or not.”

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

- Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (The Mound).—Every Sunday afternoon and evening. Various speakers.
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.
West London Branch N.S.S.—Every Sunday, at the Marble Arch, from 4 p.m.: Messrs. ARTHUR and EBURY.

INDOOR

- Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Satis Café, 40 Cannon Street).—Sunday, December 2nd, 7 p.m.: Professor WOOD, "Science and Religion—Cold War or Friendly Co-operation?"
Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, December 2nd, 6.45 p.m.: Miss J. BELLAMY, M.A., "Literature and Life." Tuesday, December 4th, 7.30 p.m.: Debate with Rawdon Baptist College Students.
Cardiff Humanist Group (Bute Town Community Centre).—Friday, December 7th, 7.30 p.m.: D. SHIPPER, "International Freethought."
Central London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, off Edgware Road).—Sunday, December 2nd, 7.15 p.m.: M. JOHNSON, "Youth and Problems of Today."
Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, December 4th, 7.15 p.m.: A. BURALL, "Humanism and the Arts."
Head Office N.S.S. (41 Gray's Inn Road, W.C.1).—Friday, November 30th, 7.15 p.m. F. A. RIDLEY, "Comparative Religion" (fourth of six Study Classes). Subject this week, "Religions of India." Admission 1/-.
Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, December 2nd, 6.30 p.m.: K. E. WRIGHT (U.S.A.), "American Education."
Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Stork Hotel, Liverpool).—Sunday, December 2nd, 7.15 p.m.: C. T. SALISBURY, "Does Science Prove the Bible?"
Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Newcastle Chambers, Angel Row).—Thursday, December 6th, 7.30 p.m.: E. TAYLOR, "The Spread of Ideas."
Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Hall, Parliament Street).—Sunday, December 2nd, 2.30 p.m.: Rev. R. M. WARD, "Is Religion a Drug?"
South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, December 2nd, 11 a.m.: A. ROBERTSON, M.A., "The Roots of Modern Humanism."

—NEXT WEEK—

Some Candid Admissions

By H. CUTNER

THE FREETHINKER SUSTENTATION FUND

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £128 7s. 5d.; H. Pollard, 5s. 6d.; Mr. Kevan, 3s.; Mr. Parry, senr., 5s.; Mr. Parry, junr., 5s.; A. Millard, 2s.; Wm. McKee, 3s. 9d.; M. G. Clarke (North Rhodesia), 10s.; Mrs. L. Wells, 2s. 6d.; A. Hancock, 2s.—Total to date, November 23rd, 1956, £130 6s. 2d.

Appreciation

I find in THE FREETHINKER a perfect blend of scholarship and humour, vigour and grace, dignity with militancy . . . I wish I had encountered it earlier.—(Derby.)

Although I have only become a reader recently, I now look forward to THE FREETHINKER, as it provides such interesting reading and excellent ammunition in discussion.—(Bucks.)

Notes and News

AN unintentional tribute was paid to our Liverpool contingent of open-air speakers when an attempt was made to collect signatures to a petition with the object of banning the speakers of the N.S.S. from the site. The attempt was, of course, hopeless from the start, but here is direct evidence that secularist propaganda is having effect.

★
WHEN the Spanish Television Service was officially inaugurated in Madrid on October 28th, a new power was added to the forces of indoctrination. The ceremony was initiated by the celebration of Mass, and the Minister of Information stated his belief that television, "under the protection of God and of the Homeland," would become an efficient instrument for promoting the good of the Spanish family. However, in case God should forget to look after the families, the Spanish government will retain its present rigid anti-divorce laws.

★
THE newly-formed American Rationalist Federation held their first Annual Convention in St. Louis, Missouri, during the last week-end of October. The Federation is strongly internationalist in outlook, and also advocates the unification of the various freethinking (rationalist) bodies in the U.S.A. itself. We are glad to note that the A.R.F. have decided to join the World Union of Freethinkers.

★
IN S. Africa a conference was recently called to discuss ways of presenting Christian propaganda to the Bantu. The view was expressed that a strong point of contact would have to be sought with the "myths and legends of the Bantu" in order to facilitate his "spiritual adaptation to Christianity." (Translation: "We'll have to think up a good story.") But surely the myths and legends of Christianity are an adequate substitute for any other collection of fairy tales.

★
THE United Nations Population Division has produced a population estimate for 1980 which gives a maximum world figure of 3,990,000,000. In 1950 it was 2,454,000,000. The increase of 1,536,000,000 is more than the world population a century ago. Asia, which had a 1950 population of 1,320,000,000, is expected to reach 2,011,000,000 by 1980. At the moment only Japan and India seem alive to the dangers of this situation. A baby is born each second, looking at world figures as a whole. Unless something is done to arrest this development, future generations are likely to be overwhelmed by hunger and ignorance. Throughout the under-developed countries, the Catholics, with their pernicious teaching of "no family limitation," are battling for more converts.

The Portraits of Jesus

By H. CUTNER

IT IS REMARKABLE how many people have tried at various times to wean me away from what they call my obsession—that Jesus Christ never existed. Not, of course, Christians, who are as bitterly opposed to Jesus as a mere man as they are to Jesus as a myth. Rationalists, agnostics, secularists, and infidels generally sometimes bombard me with “How do you explain” this or that? My explanations are, however, never received kindly, and they can never understand why I am not content to agree that Jesus was a Man—never a man—who went about “doing good” and who was misunderstood even by his disciples.

One reader of this journal (who left Roman Catholicism for Buddhism) is quite certain that I cannot answer the powerful arguments put forward by Sir Wyke Bayliss in his *Rex Regum—the Likeness of Christ*. And as I have never dealt fully in these columns with this subject, I will try now in small measure to do so.

Sir Wyke Bayliss was a distinguished Victorian painter who never questioned the truth of Christianity. In his book, he takes everything in the Gospels for granted, of course, but he was not concerned with them. He made it his task to prove that the portraits of Jesus, as we have them from the days of the Apostles and the Catacombs, all follow the same pattern, and prove therefore that they must have been drawn from a living and well-known person—Jesus Christ himself.

Many books have been written, most of them illustrated, about these portraits; and it is up to any reader to go through them and see for himself if the claim of Bayliss is true. I say as categorically as I can that it is not.

Bayliss actually agrees that “certain of the Fathers, of the third and fourth centuries,” can be cited against some of the early portraits, but “they were overruled by the Church.” That should, of course, settle it—they were “overruled by the Church.” The Church could not possibly be wrong!

In his famous work, *Christian Iconography*, Didron gives an illustration of “Christ without a beard wearing a plain nimbus” taken from a fresco in the Catacombs from “the earliest ages of Christianity.” If this is one of the earliest portraits, it is no more like the “traditional” portraits of Jesus so strenuously defended by Bayliss than it is of Hitler. It looks exactly like a “traditional” portrait of Apollo or Adonis. It is literally Greek.

Now, if ever there was a Jesus, he must have been a Jew, and the Jews in his day were for the most part Arab-like in colour and appearance. They were certainly not white. Most of these people were “liquidated” by the Romans in the terrible war of 70 A.D., and the remnants possibly—we know very little about it—carried on an active proselytising campaign, like the early Christians, in Europe or among people who were more or less white. Hence, white European Jews. But white, the original Jews (or Israelites) were *not*; and the “traditional” Jesus put forward by Bayliss is that of a white man and merely a development of the idea Greeks gave of the appearance of their young gods—Apollo and Adonis. Nothing proves this more clearly than Didron’s illustration from the Catacombs.

Bayliss tells us that the favourite subject for the early Christians was “Christ as the Good Shepherd.” Of course. For the Greeks, the “Good Shepherd” had been Apollo for centuries—it was indeed part of the universal mythos of the time for the Sun, “the Light of the World” (as Jesus called himself) was in the Sign of Aries the Ram—

Lamb—at the time. In his *Monumental Christianity*, the Rev. J. P. Lundy says, “If Apollo was adopted by early Christian art as a type of the Good Shepherd of the New Testament, then this interpretation of the sun-god among all nations must be the solution of the universal mythos, or what other solution can it have?” He gives an illustration of Apollo with a lamb on his back, and another of Christ with exactly the same face as Apollo, but with a ram on his back. If there had been a real Jesus, as Bayliss contends, why did the early Christians almost always copy the portraits of Apollo?

Later, it was discovered that the sun was not really in the Sign of Aries, but in the Sign of Pisces; and immediately, Jesus was represented in early Christian art as a fish or as a fisherman. Lundy gives an illustration of “Christ as a fisherman with his net and fish, which looks like a dolphin”—but the face of Jesus is beardless, and he looks exactly like Apollo again. There is not a trace of the “traditional” likeness which Bayliss contends has come down to us from the earliest times. I should like to devote an article to Jesus as a fish for the reasons given by the Church Fathers making Jesus a fish “mystically understood” are most humorous.

In any case, Bayliss does not trouble about Jesus as a fish or as a lamb or as a shepherd or a fisherman. He maintains that there was a “traditional” likeness of Christ, and that we still use it. But I must repeat that anyone looking at the earliest representations of the beardless Jesus can see for himself that the artists were merely copying the “traditional” portraits of the Greek gods, Apollo or Adonis. How Bayliss could have missed this is beyond my comprehension. Yet it is a fact, and as far as I have been able to find out, no one, that is, no competent authority, ever goes to him for proof that there existed genuine portraits of a real Jesus. His book is just one of those excursions into “speculation” which we are faced with now and then.

Mrs. Jameson, who made the portraits of Christ the subject of two big volumes packed with illustrations, tells us at the outset, “We search in vain for the slightest evidence of his human, individual semblance in the writings of those disciples who knew him so well.” And she adds, “The possibility of his features having been in some way handed down through intervening centuries is a vision which a pious mind unwillingly relinquishes. Legend has in various forms supplied this natural craving . . .” Mrs. Jameson says that on the portraits of Jesus everything has been probably said—but not, of course, for Sir Wyke Bayliss.

The “familiar” portraits of Jesus actually differ with every artist, though at a hasty glance they may appear to be the same. They differ, in fact, just as much as the “familiar” portraits of Shakespeare. All of them are “speculations” on the part of the artist.

But Bayliss came across what he thought were very early portraits of Jesus; and though they were as clear types of a Greek of those days as could be imagined, insisted in his book that they must be Jesus. As an example, he gives one “attributed” to Luke which is in the Vatican. The legend which makes Luke a portrait painter is as authentic as the one which makes him a “physician.” Or to put it bluntly, when it comes to the early history of Christianity we are in something much more than mere legend. We are in a pack of deliberate lies. Not only is there a portrait of

Jesus from Luke but also one from Peter! I am sure if the Church had said that it had in the Vatican one from a Roman soldier present at the Crucifixion, Bayliss would have reproduced it as "authentic." In any case, he sadly admits that the portrait "attributed" to St. Veronica "is of the stuff of which legends are generally made."

Apart from the earliest representations of Jesus in the Catacombs, there is no need for me to deal with the portraits of Jesus which followed a more or less common pattern after about the time of Constantine. Nor am I going to discuss at the moment the part "symbolism" played in the early portraits of Jesus. Anybody who can contemplate Jesus as a fish or even as a lamb seriously is not worth discussing with.

There is no evidence that there ever was a Jesus. The early portraits are obviously those of Greek gods. And who were these gods? Most of them are "symbols" of the Sun. And that is exactly what is mostly behind the story of Jesus — the Sun-Myth.

Road Accidents

By R. READER

THE BALEFUL INFLUENCE of religious neurosis, controlling journalism, is well illustrated by a recent press review of the Report by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Road Accidents.

The Report, we are told, covers the last 46 years, and gives details of the deaths and non-fatal accidents in Britain during 1955. It does not, however, "attempt to analyse causes." (It is thus gently insinuated that the causation of road accidents is highly mysterious, the province only of the expert.) The reader, however, wants a plain answer to the questions "How many road accidents occurred in 1955?" and "Did more or less occur than in previous years?" Reluctantly, the review gives him this information: "Over a quarter of a million dead and injured — more than in any previous year."

Quickly, words and figures are marshalled to damp down rising indignation. "Fewer pedestrians were killed in 1955 than in 1938." (An obvious consequence of the increase in the number of motorists from 1938 to 1955 — accidents to whom enormously increased in number between those years.) The reader, however, who, even if a car-owner, is also, on occasions, inevitably obliged to use the road on foot, swallows the good news gratefully, and is immediately served further figures showing that speed limits in built-up areas have little effect on accidents. There follows a short classification of accidents according to the types of vehicles involved (a flattering invitation to exercise ingenuity and formulate a pet theory), and then the reader, somewhat appeased and flattered, is served the *plat de résistance*, the masterpiece of culinary journalism, the joyful tidings that "75 accidents occurred per 1,000 vehicles on the roads in 1948, but only 42 per 1,000 in 1955." And, if this is not sufficient, overwhelming proof that God's in his heaven, all's right with the world, "150 accidents occurred per million gallons of petrol in 1938, but only 114 in 1955." Grinning happily because "Things are getting better, better, better every day," the reader works out possibilities of acquiring this year's model.

Off-stage, however, there is ominous muttering. The injured and the bereaved families are saying an extraordinary thing. They are saying that there are *too many cars on the road* — that no matter what safety precautions are taken, accidents will continue to occur at their present rate, or even more frequently. These people, in fact, have simplified the traffic problem for the experts. They have reduced it to the level of the truism that one cannot pour

a quart into a pint pot without a pint overflowing. *And it is precisely in order to prevent this sentiment becoming general that facts and figures are twisted and distorted to present a one-sided view of the matter.* Why? The obvious reasons leap to mind. Motoring gives pleasure and the illusion of escaping from the bear garden as the road winds out behind one. National revenue is derived from car and petrol taxes. The personnel of car factories cannot be made redundant if there is to be full employment. The Government *must* stimulate car-purchase. And so on.

But these things are not the real reasons. *The real reason is that road accidents, although only one tiny facet of the world malaise, yet contain all the elements and data necessary for the solution of the whole.* And that solution is not acceptable to religious neurosis. Consider the situation. Mr. A., the father of three young children, is employed in a car factory. Cars are necessary for his children to survive. But Mr. B. also has three young children, who are obliged to walk to and fro from school. For those children, cars are a constant menace to life and limb. Both fathers, however, are car owners, and both, like the children, look forward to their week-end jaunts. Both wives love their children, but both also love motoring. We therefore have utterly contradictory and irreconcilable elements. To borrow a motoring analogy, it is like an engine with cylinders firing against one another. Something must give — and that something is the 49,000 children who give up their lives and limbs each year on the roads of Britain. *A road accident, in fact, is a biological drama—a material demonstration of the fact that, as the individual human life grows wider in scope and complexity, so, on a planet of limited size, the total number of human lives must decrease—even if that decrease is achieved in a welter of tears and anguish.*

Religious neurosis, however, controlling the sexual pattern of society, has seen to it that the total number of human lives never ceases to increase. And so, pending the utilisation of nuclear fission, which will redress the balance for all time, the automobile becomes the instrument of biology. It operates even against the motorist who is not involved in an accident, for there can be no doubt that by voluntarily restricting his exercise (in a society where nearly everyone lacks sufficient exercise) the motorist lays himself open to all manner of forces likely to shorten his own life.

The utterly calamitous nature of that religious sentiment which has overpopulated the world can best be seen when we consider the plight of the journalists themselves: Tongue in cheek, they are forced to sidetrack public opinion with words. Forced because they, as much as the factory worker, as much as the pedestrian, as much as the motorist, have to earn their living. They, as much as anybody, are the victims of the infamous "Increase and multiply."

ANSWERS TO QUIZ

1. (a) U.S.A. (early 19th century), (b) North India (c. 2800 B.C.), (c) Babylon (2234 B.C.).
2. Bishop Colenso (1862).
3. *The Last Days of Hitler* (Trevor-Roper).
4. (a) uncle; (b) (i) nephew, (ii) son; (c) grandson.
5. It is supposed, though not proven, that Charing is from *chère reine* (dear Queen), referring to Eleanor, wife of Edward I.
6. Legate (1611) and Wightman (1612). G.H.T.

PRIESTS LOOK BACKWARD

PRIESTS look backward, not forward. They think that there were once men better and wiser than those who now live, therefore priests distrust the living and insist that we shall be governed by the dead. I believe this is an error, and hence I set myself against the Church and insist that men shall have the right to work out their lives in their own way, always allowing to others the right to work out their lives in their own way, too.—GARIBALDI.

CORRESPONDENCE

RELIGIOUS NONSENSE

I think it was Burns who said that "of all nonsense, religious nonsense is the most nonsensical." One should add, I feel, that in the field of religious nonsense Roman Catholic nonsense "bears the gree," as Rabbie would say. Among some 50 pious invocations in the "Litany of the Blessed Virgin" occur such phrases as "tower of ivory," "house of gold," "ark of the covenant," "Gate of heaven," "morning star," etc. Fancy a lowly Jewish girl being all those grandiloquent things at once! In any case, in calling her "morning star," aren't they confusing her with Lucifer the "evil one"?

S. W. BROOKS.

JESUS IN DECLINE

The following was told me by a lady who was quite convinced it was genuine. The mother was reproaching her little daughter, who wished to leave off attending Sunday school and said "What would Jesus think of you?" when the child broke in, "Oh, for goodness sake, don't you start talking about Jesus. We get enough of him at school. Our teacher's crazy on him!" This way of looking at things may be present in the minds of many children, if not often expressed so succinctly.

On the point of Jesus being the greatest "this, that, or the other" of all time, we all know on the authority of Carlyle that Camille Desmoulins spoke of the "bon Sansculotte Jesus," but perhaps it is not so well known that Hébert thought that Jesus was the most radical Jacobin of Judea" (Herman Wendel's *Danton*). R. Somerset Ward, in *Robespierre, a Study in Deterioration*, says, "Hébert, who at this time feared Robespierre, hastened at the next 'purification' of the Jacobins, to deny that he was an atheist. He said that the Gospel seemed to him an excellent book, and that Christ was the real founder of popular societies." Wendel's remark may be a crystallisation of this."

A. W. DAVIS.

SCOTLAND'S SUNDAY

I fully endorse G. S. Brown's remarks on Sunday in Scotland. If Mr. Ridley has a tour round Glasgow I am quite sure he will not see any Bible-bashers at all. Many stores are open, doing good business, likewise cinemas, sports field, golf courses, etc.; in fact, Sunday is a festival days in many of the cities of Scotland. The modern generation have little time for Holy Ghosts and similar fairy tales. There are several areas in Scotland where there are still a few cranks left but some circus is liable to sign them up as freaks and that will be the end of them. Has Mr. Ridley seen the hundreds of Sunday workers pouring out of the shipyards and factories on the Clydeside, which I think proves beyond a doubt they are more interested in £ s. d. than harps or Holy Ghosts?

ALEX TALBERT.

THE SCHWEITZER LEGEND

As an old reader I appreciated Mr. Du Cann's deflating of the Schweitzer legend. Whenever one enters into a discussion with a Christian, Schweitzer is always trotted out for our admiration, and I think Mr. Du Cann's debunking was not in any way excessive. If, as Mr. Bennett says, Schweitzer's "inherent scepticism has stripped Christianity of all dogmas," it is not easy to see how he can still be regarded as a Christian.

Mr. Bennett continues in true "modernist" style, "In ethics Schweitzer is a force profound and far-reaching." However, to some of us that is not so evident; perhaps we suspect that the corrugated iron "hospital" in darkest Africa is no more of a sacrifice than any little doctor in a refugee camp. And certainly, this mystic appearing and disappearing into the heart of Africa with the accompanying well-posed photographs of the great man and the widely advertised write-ups are hardly of the same style as the meek and lowly Jesus.

Personally, I much prefer the clean honesty and straightforwardness of our old Freethinkers, who never advertised to the world how good and ethical they were, but fought Christian pretension with plain words and no verbal blather.

ROBERT F. TURNERY.

MORALISTS, HEAL THYSELVES

I was amused when passing St. James', Piccadilly, the other day to see advertised a course of addresses by the rector on the general subject of "What shall I do?" Readers of THE FREETHINKER will recall that this was one of the London churches where there is an "understanding" with florists who "subscribe" to the church funds in return for a monopoly contract! The rector might do well to recall that some are interested in what he does in connection with this subject rather than anxious to secure his directives for themselves. Indeed, he himself remarked delicately that the subject was one which was not suited to discussion in the public press! The effrontery of some of these people is amazing. They run up huge overdrafts at a time of "credit squeeze," sell out their assets under conditions which prompt parliamentary questions, reach "understandings" with local florists, and then expect that

ordinary citizens will turn to them to have their family life modelled according to their desires or to learn what they shall do.

A. CHALLENGER.

"FORENAMES" OR "CHRISTIAN" NAMES?

Here is a straw in the wind. The Post Office has substituted "Forenames" for "Christian Names" on forms dealing with Premium Bonds and Savings Bank transactions. P. H. LORD.
[Unfortunately, the wind has changed again, for the Postmaster General has decided to revert to Christian names.—Ed.]

N.S.S. EXECUTIVE MEETING

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 21ST.—Present: Messrs. F. A. Ridley (Chairman), Alexander, Arthur, Barker, Cleaver, Draper, Ebury, Gordon, Johnson, Shepherd, Taylor, Tiley, the Treasurer (Mr. Griffiths) and the Secretary. Apologies from Mrs. Venton and Mr. Hornibrook. New members were admitted to Bradford, Edinburgh, Glasgow, West London and Parent Branches (10 in all). Reports on Study Classes and Secretary's recent lectures and debates were given. Letters of protest to Prime Minister (over Suez) and the Soviet Ambassador (over Hungary) were endorsed. Requests for speakers and grants were agreed. Correspondence was dealt with. Instructions were given for the *N.S.S. Handbook* to be brought up to date, for a message to the Fifth Convention of Indian Nationalists, and for solicitor's opinion on literature selling in Bristol. Trade Union and Propaganda Committees were dissolved. Special meeting to consider Rules Committee's proposals was fixed for November 28th; next monthly meeting for December 12th.

THE MORTALITY OF STARS

NEW STARS are continually being formed out of the massive clouds of dust and gases that are whirling throughout cosmic space, says Dr. Allen R. Sandage of Mount Wilson and Palomar Observatories. But even the stars do not live for ever. According to Dr. Sandage, there are probably thousands of dead stars for every human being who ever lived on earth. Some stars expire in expansive red flares, and subside in hard cores that are still burning. Others end their careers in gigantic explosions, scattering their remnants through millions of miles of space.

A star is born when the whirling clouds of dust and gases condense into a more solid mass. Some stars—the white and blue ones—do not use up their fuel of hydrogen so fast and therefore continue longer. The red giants are constantly spewing out their substance at a prodigious rate. Out of this substance new stars are formed, or even new planets. Astronomers believe that our sun is an easy-going star. They say that although it is one of the smaller stars, it is likely to outlive many of its fellows because its rate of burning is comparatively slow and has probably not varied much since the birth of "our universe" some five or six billion years ago.

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