

# The Freethinker

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Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

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RECENT EVENTS in Hungary have affected us all very deeply. We are — as John Donne so beautifully put it — “involved in Mankind,” and it is well that we should be. We cannot expect complete agreement in our interpretation of the situation, but we must — as Freethinkers — attempt some kind of assessment. It is far from easy. The facts are hard to come by; the reports difficult to confirm. Yet it behoves us to try.

Our guiding principles must be, I think, realism and humanity. Both are important. It is not sufficient simply to say that Russian tanks and guns have murdered Hungarian patriots, or, if Russia had not stepped in Cardinal Mindszenty would have

been in control, even if either of these statements be true. The first is lacking in realism, the second in humanity.

The British press, of course, has been generally condemnatory of the U.S.S.R. If we leave out of account the popular — and often unreliable — papers, we still have to consider thoughtful organs like the *Manchester Guardian*, *The Observer* and *The New Statesman and Nation*. We have also to bear in mind that the *Daily Worker* decided not to print Mr. Peter Fryer's reports after it had sent him to Hungary as a special correspondent. On the other hand, there is clearly an underestimation of the part played by the U.S.A. and the Church of Rome.

## A Pointer

A small, but significant pointer to the kind of American organised activity that exists in Europe, was given in a letter to the *Manchester Guardian* (13/12/56) from Miss Eva Fejer, who worked as an interpreter among Hungarian refugees. As refugees disembarked at London Airport — says Miss Fejer — they were seen to be carrying “a small blue holdall marked in white block letters ‘American Escape Program’,” which had been handed to them in Vienna. Critical readers must ask themselves how far this “program” extends.

Few readers of THE FREETHINKER are likely to regard Cardinal Mindszenty's interest in Hungarian developments as deriving from a passionate concern for human liberty. Indeed, he made no secret of his aim to restore feudalism, as well as the Church. It will be remembered, too, that immediately revolutionary uprisings were reported from Budapest, a Roman Catholic chaplain to the Hungarian free forces in Britain emerged — it seemed from nowhere — to collect donations. Obviously this was no mushroom growth.

## Important Roles

It must be concluded, I think, that America and the Roman Catholic Church have played important, though not always plainly visible, roles in the Hungarian tragedy. Most seemingly-reliable reporters, however, insist that there was a genuine people's uprising against a dictatorial regime; not merely nationalistic — though that element was present — but also demanding greater freedom. If we accept these widely testified reports, we have still — as

realists — to ponder whether the people's revolt would have retained its original character or have been perverted by American and Catholic influences. We can never know the answer to this, of course, but it is necessary to consider it. I think the danger was a real one. Yet the courage of the Workers' Councils in the face of Soviet strength, and their strongly Socialist sentiments suggest that they might well have withstood the threat.

The Russian intervention might theoretically be justified as a safeguard. But this would surely be naïve. Whatever may have been the danger at the time, however fine the original intention, subsequent actions of the U.S.S.R. remain hard to defend. As Mr. Nehru said

(*Indiagram*, 6-12-56), “It makes little difference whether there were some people there who might be called subversive elements or not, anti-social elements or not. There probably were. I have no doubt there were, I have no doubt people came from outside to encourage them. They did encourage them, but the basic and fundamental thing was that in Hungary it was a popular rising. This was suppressed militarily. . . .” And aside from actual fighting, how can one justify the overthrow of the Nagy government and the later breach of faith over the safe-conduct of its leader?

## N.S.S. Protest

On November 6th, the National Secular Society addressed a letter of protest to the Soviet Ambassador in London, which still seems to me to be a reasonable one. It read:

The National Secular Society believes that the Roman Catholic Church is the greatest menace in the world today and constantly says so in public. It does not wish to see the re-establishment of papal power in Poland, Hungary or elsewhere. Nevertheless, it firmly believes that each country has a right to determine its own form of government.

We confess that the facts about Hungary are not altogether clear. But, if the U.S.S.R. intends the reversion of Hungary to the position of a satellite state, rather than a free country able to decide its own future, we protest most strongly.

We consider, in the interests of the Hungarian people and the rest of the world, that your Government should immediately invite a United Nations commission to investigate the matter and make the facts clear to all. We are opposed to armed intervention in the internal affairs of another country.

The National Secular Society, we should add, has already condemned the British Government's action in Egypt and has sent a letter of protest to Sir Anthony Eden.

## The Last Word

There is little more to say. But our humanity must, I feel, have the last word. Our admiration and sympathy go out to the magnificent people of Hungary in their struggle for freedom and their terrible sufferings. How inadequate the words sound!

## VIEWS and OPINIONS

# Hungary: An Attempted Assessment

By COLIN McCALL



## Atheism in America

[Extracted from the recent Petition of Robert H. Scott in accordance with the Scott Decision of 1946.]

AMERICAN RELIGIONISTS in general, both lay and clerical, know that they cannot refute the arguments of the atheist. In this knowledge American religionists in general, though having access to radio and television and in some cases using those media of mass-communication to vilify and calumniate the atheist, use their political influence and financial power to keep the atheist from the "airways," which have become the most important part of the public domain. Ignorance and credulity always go hand in hand. Consequently public ignorance has ever been the treasured ally of organised religious tyranny.

The Rev. Edmund A. Walsh, Jesuit Vice-President of Georgetown University, in his testimony against the Scott Decision, declared at great length that atheism on the radio would be morally calamitous. Contrast Father Walsh's declaration with the assertion of the eminently honest Thomas Jefferson: "It does me no injury for my neighbour to say there are twenty gods, or no God."

Atheists are numerous in these United States and, even without access to radio and television, they manage, despite economic and social disabilities for open disbelief, to make their atheism so evident that it is frequently inveighed against over radio and television by clerical and lay religionists. Yet atheists are practically absent from American prisons and jails and institutions for juvenile delinquents, a situation which everywhere obtains.

Religious institutions have proved to be morally futile as well as intellectually bankrupt. This was to be expected. The least secure foundation for public and private virtue is the fear of punishment and the hope of reward supernaturally imposed or bestowed; for that fear and that hope may be weakened or lost. The only secure basis for public and private virtue is the knowledge that goodness in all its forms is its own ample reward.

Atheists are in a majority in the higher intellectual and cultural levels of society. An overwhelming majority of the greater American scientists disbelieve in the existence of a being or power to which the name "God" could properly be applied. (See James H. Leuba's revealing statistical report in *Harpers Magazine* for August, 1934.) It is because of their intellectual and cultural superiority as a class that atheists are among the first to perceive that, even without "a god to hear and to see," kindness and honesty and decency and all other virtues are the best assurance for personal happiness.

Among eminent American atheists, now dead, were Hiram S. Maxim, Clarence Darrow, Henry L. Mencken, John Dewey, Charles P. Steinmetz, Mark Twain, John Burroughs, Anton J. Carlson, a leading physiologist who had been a President of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Robert G. Ingersoll, who was admired as much for the nobility of his character as for his oratory and his ability as a lawyer, Ernestine Louise Rose, who played a prominent role as Abolitionist and reformer, and Frances D'Arusmont, who was a pioneer of women's rights. Among eminent American atheists now living are Oscar Riddle, a biologist and author and a former Vice-President of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Culbert L. Olson, who has served with distinction as a Governor of California, Corliss Lamont, an educator, author and defender of basic civil rights and liberties, Homer W. Smith, a physiologist and author, and Vashti McCollum, the valiant young mother who, at great personal sacrifice, obtained from the U.S.

Supreme Court its momentous and forward-looking McCollum Decision of 1948.

In his famous "Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom" in Virginia, a document in which he spoke for freedom from as well as freedom for religion, Jefferson said: "Truth is great and will prevail if left to herself. She is the proper and sufficient antagonist of error and has nothing to fear from the conflict unless, by human interposition, she is disarmed of her natural weapons, free argument and debate." In his first inaugural address he said: "Error of opinion can always safely be tolerated where reason is left free to combat it." And in one of his private letters he wrote: "It is error alone that needs the support of Government; truth can stand by itself." (Letter to Elbridge Gerry.)

Jefferson was right. And let it be noted also that Jefferson, who was Mr. Democracy himself, was an anti-Christian Deist.

In the United States today organised religion, though its adult membership is so largely composed of purely nominal adherents that the American people are constantly assailed with pleas to "Go to church," exercises an unprecedented domination over American political, social and educational institutions. This domination, which is potentially ruinous as well as injurious, has been achieved mainly because American radio and television have been from their beginning accessible for religious propaganda of various kinds, including anti-atheistic utterances, but closed to atheism and less advanced dissenting views in matters of religious belief, a monopoly of the American "airways" for religious beliefs and institutions which has been and is aided and abetted by corporate and personal wealth, monied interests and individuals that find it to their material advantage to support certain religious institutions and doctrines. As a result the masses of the American people, hearing on radio and television only the pro-religious side of the theism-atheism controversy, have been brought to accept as indubitable truths, as facts not seriously to be questioned, the existence of some kind of God and the possibility of some sort of post-mortem existence for human beings.

It probably is not to be denied that American atheists are a small minority in the national population. But the truth or the falsity of a given point of view is not to be determined by the number of persons who accept or who reject that point of view. The truth or the falsity of a given point of view is far better judged by the intellectual calibre and cultural quality, not the number, of those by whom the point of view is accepted or rejected. On this criterion the atheist shows to advantage.

### RELIGIOUS REVIVAL

THE eighth church has been closed since 1946 in Cardiff alone. It is reported that Methodist numbers in Wales show a further decline of 2,000 (registered) since 1950. Dr. R. Jones, speaking at Carmarthen Presbyterian College, has deplored the serious shortage of students for the ministry.

On concluding a performance to 5,000 teenagers, Lionel Hampton, American bandleader said, "Yeah, man! God was sure with me out there swinging tonight." Another effort by Mr. Hampton was stopped on the point of a riot; on that occasion God had evidently overdone it.

—NEXT WEEK—

An Atheist's Petition



# Epicurus in England

By F. A. RIDLEY

IT SEEMS the custom nowadays to rank the Americans as a people given over to religiosity and to Billy Graham. Such a judgment is one-sided and superficial. There is also a scholarly and critical America which has many admirable, if nowadays little known, works of critical scholarship to its credit. The American universities produce annually a remarkable output of learned monographs, many of them not only of a high intellectual order but as far as possible, in the critical view, from Billy Graham, or for that matter, Senator McCarthy. One finds many such studies in the voluminous catalogue of the British Museum Library, where quite by chance I recently came across a most illuminating but virtually unknown study of what is historically probably the earliest openly rationalistic and materialistic tendency to manifest itself in these islands. Under the comprehensive title, *Epicurus in England*, Mr. Thomas Franklin Mayo submitted in 1934 a thesis for his Doctor's degree to Columbia University, which appears to throw a flood of light on an intensely interesting pioneer phase in the evolution of English materialism and scepticism.

The Greek philosopher Epicurus (342-271 B.C.) was perhaps not the greatest but certainly the best known of the critical and materialist thinkers of the ancient world. He owes this position not so much to his extant works, originally voluminous but presumably depleted by Christian censorship, but to the founding of an important school of thought lasting several centuries and which has made "Epicurean" a household word, and also to the famous poem *De Rerum Natura* of his disciple Lucretius (first century A.D.), perhaps the greatest extant philosophical poem in any language. Thanks primarily to his disciples, Epicurus came at the Renaissance to occupy the position of hedonism and atheism, and the word Epicure is used by Shakespeare. The term atheist will pass as an approximation of his philosophy in practice — though technically the Epicureans were deists who believed in gods who did nothing except contemplate their own eternal perfection.

The theme of Mr. Mayo's able book is the arrival, or revival, of Epicureanism in the England of the late 17th and early 18th century, 1650-1725, an era corresponding with the definitive end of medievalism in Europe and the rise of a perceptibly modern outlook in science and philosophy. This was the period of a galaxy of great thinkers: of Spinoza, Descartes, Newton, Hobbes and Locke. Perhaps ultimately even more important for the diffusion of heretical thought, it was the precise period in which the repressive laws against heresy were repealed in this country, and in which the profession of theoretical materialism did not lead in practice to a material death in the fires of the stake. It was consequently in the 17th century that critical thought began to spread its wings. The late Chapman Cohen once stated to me, in one of the few conversations I was privileged to have with him, that in his opinion this century was the most important intellectually in modern times. It also witnessed what Mr. Mayo described as "a modest but perceptible revival" of the oldest extant system of materialist philosophy, that of the classical atomists of Ionia, as definitively summarised by their successor Epicurus and his philosophy of the "garden." (Epicurus held his courses in his garden.)

Mr. Mayo tells us:

Even a casual survey of the English press from Caxton's day to the middle of the 17th century must impress an observer interested in the English fortunes of the Epicurean philosophy with two remarkable facts: on the one hand the imposing array

from 1476 to 1650 of editions, translations, adaptations and imitations of most of the important writers of Greece and Rome; on the other, the almost complete absence during these two centuries of books concerned with Epicurus and his followers. Exploring further, one discovers that between 1650 and 1700 no less than 13 books appeared in England dealing, specifically by way of edition, translation, apology or interpretation, with Epicurus himself or with such classical Epicureans as Lucretius and Petronius. When finally the observer notes after 1725 a definite ebb — that between 1725 and 1800 no important Epicurean publications appear, it would seem safe to assert that the 75 years from 1650-1725 witnessed an Epicurean vogue, modest but distinct, in English book-making.

Our American author links up this temporary revival of Epicurean materialism and hedonism with the restoration of "The Merry Monarch" and his hedonistic aristocracy in place of the grim Puritans of the preceding Commonwealth, who in Macaulay's immortal phrase, banned bear-baiting "not because it gave pain to the bear but because it gave pleasure to the spectators."

This short-lived but quite considerable revival reached its height about 1685 when, as our author indicates, the aristocratic reaction of the Restoration also reached its height. Several famous names, such as Evelyn, Dryden and Hobbes, were either influenced by it or themselves took a hand in the translations. On the Continent Epicurus also had a vogue under the aristocratic regime of Louis XIV. The philosopher Gassendi expounded a modified and Christianised version of Epicurus, whilst the great Moliere, who seems to have been a quite definite freethinker, is said to have translated Lucretius but to have subsequently destroyed the translation (religious persecution in France was not yet extinct). In England the first translation of Lucretius was by Thomas Creech, a student of Wadham College, Oxford; its appearance in 1681 made a profound sensation and he was complimented by many literary figures. On the strength of this translation Creech was made a Fellow of All Souls, but his later career was unfortunate and he committed suicide. His Christian contemporaries were not slow to "point the moral." His epitaph was brief: "Creech, who died as he had lived, like a true atheist." Since the Epicurean gods do nothing, this school may be regarded as the first definite freethinking and materialistic tendency to exist in this country, perhaps excepting Sir Walter Raleigh, Marlowe and other eminent Elizabethans against whom the charge of atheism was, perhaps loosely, preferred.

In the Augustan — and orthodox — age of Queen Anne, Epicureanism fell out of favour. "All the writers against Christianity since the Revolution have been of the lowest rank among men in regard to literature, wit and good sense," scornfully commented Dean Swift. Mr. Mayo lucidly investigates the social causes for this passing of the "boom" in Epicureanism and ascribes it to the political and religious compromises which followed the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688 and the subsequent accession of the Georges. "Extreme" attitudes, whether in politics or religion, went out of fashion in a period when, as the Vicar of Bray aptly phrases it, "Moderate men looked big, sir!" The cult of Epicurus gave way even in critical circles to the more moderate cult of deism, the 18th century heresy *par excellence*. The devout and orthodox Addison noted with satisfaction, "Infidelity has been attacked with such good success of late years that it is driven out of all its outworks. The atheist has not found his past tenable and is therefore retired into deism and a disbelief of revealed

(Concluded on next page)



## This Believing World

The one outstanding piece of news at the moment in England — apart from Suez — is that in a little over a month nearly 50 million Premium Bonds have been sold in spite of the Christian opposition of people like the Rev. D. Soper and other Christian killjoys which the "lottery" brought out of almost complete obscurity. Even the various "sub-postmasters" who follow Methodism and similar antiquated forms of the One True Religion, and who refuse to sell the Bonds, have not been able to stop the sale of a single one, though they all have the powerful backing of Christ Jesus — as Mr. Soper would gallantly admit. Strange, is it not, that in this Christian country of ours, not only is the gambling instinct very powerful, but people love going to see "playacting," drink beer, and prefer having a good time on Sunday without the Church's blessing? Still, nearly all the gamblers, card players, theatre-going people, and Sunday offenders believe as fervently in Christ as even the late Mr. Spurgeon did. But that is all.

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A Maltese journal called "The Faith," which often does us the honour of replying to our contributors, mostly by pious exhortations to join the Roman Church, has just added a vital process to "Man's Effort to Conquer Outer Space," the title of a front page article in it. Man "must be guided by sound moral thinking, says the Pope." He must understand "the infinite grandeur of God." And to aid the good work, the Pope gave it his blessing. Effete materialists like ourselves cannot help wondering how much progress man would have made in the arts and sciences and exploration if we had been guided by Popes and their like? Most of the advances man has made towards a higher civilisation have been done in the teeth of religious opposition, whose one object was to prevent him — unless, of course, a place could be found for some of God's representatives on earth "to lead the way."

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This same Catholic journal, "The Faith," is also quite angry because we pointed out that if a Catholic doctor has to make the choice between saving the life of a mother or child at the birth of the child, he is obliged by Rome to allow the mother to die. This is literally true, and to say, "The baby has equal right to live as has the mother" is no defence whatever. Of course, the baby has a right to live; but its very premature death may cause no hardship to a family. The death of the wife and mother of a young family, for example, in general inflicts not only very great hardship on them all but causes far and away more sorrow in the home.

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A truly Catholic doctor, one who blindly follows the Pope, has no choice in the matter. And, we must repeat, for this reason he would cheerfully allow the unlucky mother to die so long as he is thinking of his religion. Naturally, as a man and a doctor, if he had no or little religion, the decision either way is a very difficult one in many cases; and no doubt whatever he would do his best to follow the most humane one. But not if he is a Catholic.

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In a "Nature-cure" magazine, *Health for All*, a Mr. Milton Powell tried the other month to give some advice to a very worried Catholic. The really surprising thing about it is — why should any Catholic be worried? Has he not got the Roman Church behind him? Can he not get the Holy Advice of a priest? This Catholic is worried about "doubts," and the brilliant Mr. Powell points out that "Doubt, especially religious doubt, often arises from a repressed sense of guilt." We like the word "often" here.

How does Mr. Powell know, and what is this awful calamity, "a repressed sense of guilt"? Those of us who long ago had finished both with religion and doubt — have we still "a repressed sense of guilt"? Most of us would roar with laughter at this childish nonsense, which actually comes from a professional psychologist. Perhaps the explanation is that he is still a Christian!

## The Rising Generation

XVI—WHAT JESUS SAID

WHEN a Christian bishop, parson, or priest, tells us what Jesus said, it is always worth while if possible to ask, how he knows? To say that it is in the Gospels in the New Testament may be a sufficient reply to most people; but if you press the question a little further, and point out that Jesus could not possibly have said what it says there in English, you will be immediately told — of course, that is only a translation. If you ask — a translation from what, you will be answered triumphantly, a translation from the Greek! And this should satisfy and does satisfy most people.

It should not satisfy you. You should try and get a definite reply to another question — did Jesus speak in Greek in Palestine? If he did not, in what language did he address his hearers? And most authorities are obliged to answer, in the current language the Jews spoke there, that is, Aramaic.

Who then translated the discourses of Jesus from Aramaic into Greek? Nobody knows. Nobody knows who wrote the Gospels in their present form at all. And even more than that — nobody knows who took down the famous discourses in Aramaic, and kept them so carefully that they were easily translated verbatim into Greek, and then into English, so that we now know word for word what "our Lord" really said in Aramaic. Everything regarding the exact words of Jesus is pure conjecture. You must take everything on trust. Or, in other words, on Faith.

In any case, it is as well for those of you who are Protestants to remember that your New Testament comes to you on the authority of the Roman Catholic Church which is, in general, despised by Protestants. It is Rome which preserved your Bible — and forced it on to you.

But there is still one thing you must never forget — what John says about the things Jesus did (John 21, 25): "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books which should be written." Ask your bishop to explain that!

## EPICURUS IN ENGLAND

(Concluded from page 415)

religion only" — while the deist viewpoint was tersely summarised by the greatest deist of the century, Voltaire, thus: "In London under Charles II people took great pride in being atheists. Having passed from the excess of cruelty to that of pleasure and corrupted their minds successively by war and by voluptuousness, they reasoned very indifferently. Since then the more Nature has been studied the better its author has been known."

"Atheism," in its first modern reincarnation as Epicureanism, vanished underground, only to reappear after the Industrial Revolution had produced further study and a more exact knowledge of Nature.

[*Epicurus in England, 1650-1725*, by T. F. Mayo, Columbia University, 1934.]



# 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.

CORRECTION.—Mr. Shipper's first definition (December 14th) should read: Atheist: One without invisible means of support.

## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (The Mound).—Every Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. CRONAN, MURRAY and SLEMEN.  
Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every weekday, 1 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, SMITH, CORSAIR and FINKEL. Sundays, 7.15 p.m.: Messrs. MILLS, WOODCOCK, and SMITH.  
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).—Thursday, 1 p.m.: R. POWE. 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 30th, 7 p.m.: A Lecture.  
Central London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, off Edgware Road).—Sunday, December 30th, 7.15 p.m.: G. PLUME, "Some Unique Gramophone Records."  
Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, December 30th, 6.30 p.m.: New Year Party.  
Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Wheatshaf Hotel, High Street).—Sunday, December 30th, 7 p.m.: J. R. HOWES, "A New View on Disendowment."  
Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Hall, Parliament Street).—Sunday, December 30th, 2.30 p.m.: L. HARRISON, "Automation: Abundance for Whom?"

## Notes and News

THE Lord's Day Observance Society no doubt prides itself on being the most influential collection of spoilsports in the country. Its latest ignominious exploit is to prevent the appearance of "Sooty"—the deservedly popular TV glove puppet—in a Sunday show at the Theatre Royal, Huddersfield, in aid of the Hungarian Relief Fund. The organiser of the concert, Miss Nita Valerie, rightly describes the situation as "absurd." "Millions of children," she points out, "can see Sooty on TV at five o'clock on a Sunday afternoon, but it is against the law for grown-ups to see him a few hours later." (*Daily Express*, 23/11/56.) Miss Valerie is to protest to her M.P. But a protest in itself is of little use; it is a change in the law that is required. And will her M.P. be prepared to advocate that? We sincerely hope so. Meanwhile, we suggest to Miss Valerie that she consider ways to circumvent the legal absurdity. The Lord's Day Observance Society is unscrupulous in its approach to the matter; its victims must retaliate in kind.

WE note with interest that the current issue of *La Nica Literatura Revue* (Esperantist) contains an article on "The City of Dreadful Night" by the freethought poet James Thomson. The writer, Mr. W. Auld, is also translating Thomson's poem into Esperanto.

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A NEW association has started in Oslo, Norway, which hopes to have groups all over the country. The inaugural meeting was attended by 400 people including Professor Anatol Heintz, Dr. Scharfenberg, Dr. Langfeldt, Professor Hygen, Dr. Kristian Horn and a number of other scientists, judges, and leaders of thought. The name chosen for the new association is Human-Etisk Forbund, which means Humanist-Ethical Federation.

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THE second half of the study course at 41 Gray's Inn Road, W.C.1, will commence on Friday, January 4th. Mr. F. A. Ridley will speak for six consecutive Fridays (7.15 p.m.) on "The History of Christianity."

## The Freethinker Bound Volume (1956)

WE SHOULD LIKE to draw the attention, particularly of recently acquired readers, to the annual publication of the bound volume of THE FREETHINKER. Year after year it finds its way to the bookshelves of some of our readers, but new orders stated now would be of useful guidance. Publication will follow in a few weeks, the price 27s. 6d., plus 1s. 6d. postage.

The past year saw the 75th Birthday number (enlarged) of THE FREETHINKER, containing messages of goodwill from kindred organisations and from eminent friends of freethought, including Margaret Knight (guest of honour at the N.S.S. Annual Dinner), Eden Phillpotts, Professors H. Levy, A. E. Heath and J. D. Bernal, Dr. J. Bronowski, Dr. M. Gompertz, Adrian Brunel and others.

The argument still used sometimes against THE FREETHINKER (always by non-readers) that it spends all its time knocking God down, is easily disposed of by reference to any of our annual volumes, and among subjects treated in 1956 were the Dead Sea Scrolls, the finances of the Billy Graham crusades, the remarkable affair of the London Diocesan Fund (of which we understand the last has not yet been heard), the current fascinating developments in astronomy, the Malthus controversy, the International Language problem, the press stunt claiming "the Bible was right," the question of blood sports and the Church, and the centenary of the birth of J. M. Robertson.

An adequately documented account of the infamous exclusion of our Secretary's recorded TV talk on atheism, with comments from various sources, will be found in the pages of several numbers at the time.

In an attempt to form a reliable estimate of the actual strength of militant freethought in the world we have, mainly through Mr. D. Shipper, procured first-hand reports from every European country with which we are not normally in contact, as well as from China, Japan, Argentina, Mexico and Brazil. Most of these have already been published. We have, too, a correspondent in Malta, whose reports to us have caused something of a sensation on that island.

We trust these are some of the grounds for hoping that the 1956 volume will keep old friends and make new ones.

G.H.T.

To the unthinking, uneducated mass, organised religion saves the trouble of finding scientific explanations for natural phenomena, and of seeking a way out of the hopeless problems of sordid life. It is at once a dope for the misery of the poor, and the conscience of the rich.—MACLEOD YEARSLEY.



# The Piecemeal Growth of Christianity

By E. H. GROUT

FOR SOME FOURTEEN CENTURIES the notion has been sedulously fostered in this country that Jesus was a holy man who went about doing good. Thousands of well-breeched parsons have been grossly overpaid for propagating this doctrine, which permeated much of the literature and art of Europe. It is not surprising, then, that the assertion that this Jesus never lived, that he was purely a mythical character, comes as a shock to people who have never thought out the matter. Even John M. Robertson, the chief protagonist of this view in Britain, found it such when this view was first presented to him.

Yet there is no more evidence for the factuality of Jesus than for the historical existence of King Arthur. This famous romance was first given to the world by Geoffrey Arthur of Monmouth about 1140 A.D. It had an astounding popularity, and without the aid of any priestly hierarchy it spread all over Western Europe, accreting fresh material. Its influence in Sicily is attested by the fact that the mirage of Messina is called *Fata Morgana*; the sister of Arthur was Morgan la Fée, the wife of the magician, Merlin. In later versions of the romance, Arthur was the lofty King of perfect purity, who inspired his Twelve Knights to devote themselves to the redress of wrongs. They sat at a Round Table so that there could be no disputing of precedence among them. Eventually, King Arthur was betrayed by a relative, Mordred, and a fierce battle was fought, all the knights being killed, except Sir Bedivere. The King was severely wounded, and departed to the happy country of Aviron, after restoring to the lake the magical sword that would not yield itself into any hands but Arthur's. But in the fulness of time King Arthur will come again to govern his people.

The Vatican put this romance on the Index, for it realised that it had the makings (under suitable guidance) of a rival creed. There are many people who would think that the virile King Arthur at the head of his doughty knights was more worthy of worship than the languid Jesus who flits ghostlike through the Gospels. And the way the romance has grown bit by bit is instructive and illustrative of the way in which the Christian creed has added to itself any doctrine that seemed likely to strengthen the faith and increase the membership and income. Important elements of the romance, e.g. the Round Table, Sir Lancelot of the Lake, and the Quest of the Holy Grail, are not in the original account by Geoffrey of Monmouth. Similarly, the main constituents of the Christian creed were not held by its founders.

Attempts have been made, some by learned men, to establish the historicity of King Arthur, but the evidence is too, too overwhelming. The Round Table can actually be seen in the Dining Hall of Winchester College, but, like the Cross of Christ, it has multiplied beyond all belief, and can be seen at Monmouth, near Caerleon, Maryborough and Stirling. The name of *Arthur* has been used for a large number of place-names, a fact which points to the popularity of the story, and not to its historicity.

Protestants are prone to attack Roman Catholicism on the ground that a large part of its tenets and practices have no warrant in the Bible. This assertion is obviously true of such modern dogmas as the Immaculate Conception of Mary, the Infallibility of the Pope, and the Assumption of Mary — these were not proclaimed official dogmas until 1854, 1870, and 1950 respectively. And it is also true of

the magical doctrine of transubstantiation, of the money-making scheme of indulgences, of priestly celibacy, and many others. But many of the doctrines of Protestants were not part of the original creed of the founders, although something may be found about them in the New Testament.

For an instance of the way the "sacred text" has been tampered with, turn to Mark XVI (R.V.), which has only twenty verses, but the last 12 of them have been interpolated, and the learned revisers have had to say in the margin: "The two oldest Greek manuscripts, and some other authorities, omit from verse 9 to the end. Some other authorities have a different ending to the Gospel." What was in those 12 verses that the organisers of Christianity wanted to get into the text? It was accounts of the alleged appearances of Jesus after his supposed resurrection, an attempt to give it greater verisimilitude — albeit quite clumsy and devoid of evidential value; also, all believers had the power to cast out devils "in my Name," and to handle serpents and drink deadly potions without harm. This is obviously magic, not history. (I've never met any Christians who claimed these powers, but I've met many who claimed that every word in the Bible was true, quoting II Timothy 3:16 — "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.")

Mark is considered to be the oldest of the four Gospels, and may therefore be the nearest to the primitive faith? The worshippers had got to the point of boosting Jesus as the long-expected Messiah, but had not troubled themselves about his pedigree. There is no mention of Joseph, husband of Mary, in the whole of Mark and John. But by the time Matthew and Luke came to be written it had occurred to the organisers of Christianity that the Messiah had to be a descendant of David, according to the Jewish prophets. So Matthew and Luke provide genealogies tracing the descent of Joseph from David, but in doing so they bungle. Yes, how they bungle! For whereas Matthew gives 28 generations from David to Joseph and Christ, Luke gives 43 generations for the same period. This shows what a made-up affair it was, and what bunkum it is to talk of it all being given by inspiration of God.

These genealogies must have been invented before the lynx-eyed collection-takers had decided to adopt the Virgin Birth idea — for there is no point in tracing Joseph back to David when Joseph is not the father of Jesus. This "Immaculate Conception" (reminiscent of the amours of Jupiter with Leda and Europa) was clearly a late addition to the Christian creed: there is no mention of it in Mark and John, nor in any of the epistles attributed to Paul.

These Epistles are considered to be older than the Gospels; they contain no reference to John the Baptist, or to Judas Iscariot, or to a trial of Jesus, or to the denial by Peter, or to any sayings of Jesus.

It becomes clear that the "primitive faith" was very like that found among the Oumram Sect depicted in the Dead Sea Scrolls, requiring strict adherence to the Jewish laws, and looking forward to the coming of the Messiah. Two schools of thought arose: one led by "Peter" wanted to confine their membership to Jews; the other, led by the newcomer "Paul," saw that the membership and funds could be vastly increased by admitting the teeming hordes of the Roman Empire. After a lively tussle, Peter saw the light, and his *volte face* is announced to the world by relating his dream of the clean and unclean meats. (Acts X.)



# A Freethinker Anthology for 1956

(Taken from articles in THE FREETHINKER during 1956.)

MARGARET KNIGHT: Argue with Christians as an intellectual exercise if you and they enjoy it, but if you are out to make converts, stick to the floating voters. (April 13th.)

JOSEPH LEWIS (U.S.A.): I am shocked at... making the phrase "In God we trust the official motto of the Government of U.S.A.... How many members (of Congress) have locks on their doors and how many have life and fire insurance?... Eisenhower owes his life, not to God, but to medical science. (October 26th.)

ANDREW PEARSE: We look back to the period when the Church controlled a good deal of family life. It was a period of long hours, sweated labour, the worship of profit and the subjection of women. (October 26th.)

LEONARD MARTIN (S. Africa): If, through its leaders, the Dutch Reformed Church says "No," no measure will ever become law. (September 14th.)

PAUL VARNEY: It is a very old and paying custom for all Christian countries, in carrying out the conversion of other nations to the way of the Lord Jesus Christ and more trade, either to buy off the leaders or to shoot them off. (November 23rd.)

ROBERT KUTTNER (U.S.A.): To a man dying of cancer it would take a large dose of theology to prove to him that his painful death is necessary to God. (August 3rd.)

J. HENRY LLOYD: The circumstances of Mr. McCall's suppressed talk and the long-delayed Christian-Humanist discussions... suggest that a struggle is going on in the BBC. (June 8th.)

REV. J. L. BROOM, M.A.: Routed at every turn, the Sabbatarian suddenly finds himself a Socialist making a last-ditch stand on the welfare of the worker. (February 3rd.)

JOHN BOWDEN (Australia): The ordinary believer will offer reasons for his beliefs when such beliefs are challenged, but such reasons are secondary; they follow, they do not precede, belief. (April 13th.)

H. CUTNER: Once you thoroughly believe in God there is an end to all reasoning. It just disappears.

E. HUSENBARK (U.S.A.): As religions came into existence they did not bring with them entirely new moral laws; instead they adopted well-tested customs already observed by the people. (February 10th.)

F. A. RIDLEY: Why have a Christian Queen at all as head of the Commonwealth?... Why not make the Queen as impartial in religion as the Federation over which she presides? (April 6th.)

R. READER (Belgium): Why is food always taken as the only yardstick for measuring human numbers? Why is attention never drawn to the other evils of overpopulation? (May 25th.)

C. MCCALL: Either Christianity is a supernatural religion, involving belief in miracles and other absurdities, or it is nothing. (September 7th.)

LEON SPAIN (U.S.A.): If religious instruction is such an indispensable element in the upbringing of children and guidance in daily living, why does it in practice turn out to be a divisive barrier? (December 7th.)

E. G. MACFARLANE: If we have the necessary courage and thoroughgoing logic we can replace local nationalisms by a form of world-nationalism which would abolish the possibility of international wars by teaching the people of the world to become fellow-nationals. (December 14th.)

HISPANICUS: In Spain today are being written some of the darkest pages of our history; and the world outside must be brought to recognise it. (July 6th.)

J. GORDON: From time to time one hears of a revival of

religion... Only the chronically sick need constantly reviving. (March 9th.)

D. SHIPPER: Congregation — an animal with many heads and no brain. (December 14th.)

J. C. GREGORY: Belief in survival after death came early in human history. It seems to have been promoted by such delusions as dreams of the dead. Religion cherished it and philosophy tried to rationalise it. (May 18th.)

G. I. BENNETT: Man, the last-comer, talking about creatures that lived on earth millions of years before him being "sent" for his especial benefit! It is astounding arrogance and astounding nonsense. (October 19th.)

C. G. L. DU CANN: How absurd are those Christians who, in face of the tenets and traditions of Christianity, pretend to believe we are all equal in the sight of God. It is a poor compliment to God's eyesight. (June 1st.)

H. DAY: "Testimony" of non-contemporary writers as to the existence of *Christians* is not evidence for the existence of Jesus any more than the testimony for the existence of Mithraists is evidence for the existence of Mithra. (August 10th.)

C. BRADLAUGH BONNER: Not more than one in ten is prepared to inconvenience himself to the extent of attending a church service save for "hatch, match and despatch." (May 18th.)

C. T. SALISBURY: It is amazing how religious bodies will twist facts in order to give "proof" of their claims, but more amazing is the fact that people with eyes to read with and brains to reason with will believe such "evidence" without troubling to subject it to scrutiny. (September 7th.)

F. H. GROUT: There is no more ground for the factuality of Jesus Christ than for this historical existence of King Arthur. (December 28th.)

F. A. HORNIBROOK: The Christian of today who would like to forget what his religion taught less than seventy years ago has to thank the unbelievers and the Freethinkers who helped to civilise his God. (January 27th.)

G. H. TAYLOR: The amount of dogma thrown out by enlightened churchmen makes the amount left over look rather silly as the basis for a great established and privileged state religion. (September 21st.)

## Widows for Burning

By ROYSTON PIKE

OPENING my newspaper the other day I found a report from its correspondent in Delhi of an attempt made by an Indian goldsmith's wife to commit suicide on her husband's funeral pyre at the instigation of her relatives. The police arrived in time to prevent her sacrifice and arrested three people for inciting the woman to throw herself into the flames.

Suttee, as this ritual widow sacrifice is called, was once widespread in India, and although it was officially abolished as long ago as 1829, it still occasionally occurs. Thus, in 1954, the widow of a chief official of the Maharajah of Jodhpur's household died on her husband's pyre, and was acclaimed as a holy woman in consequence. Then, only a few weeks later, a young Indian widow with four children was reported to have died in this tragic way, with her dead husband's head pillowed on her lap. When the police heard of it the sacrifice had been made; the woman had died in the odour of sanctity.

Suttee (or sati, as it should be written) was practised ages ago among the higher castes of Hindu society. The



word means a wife who sacrifices on her husband's pyre; it is a synonym for a "good woman," a "faithful wife." In its origin, no doubt, it had its root in the primitive belief that when a man dies he proceeds into a world that lies beyond the grave, where he has very much the same needs as he had when alive on earth. Among those needs is, it need hardly be said, the services and companionship of a devoted spouse, and so the wife has been sacrificed, together with the dead man's weapons, clothing, and other most valued personal possessions. Sometimes not only the wife was sent in this way to accompany her husband into the world of the shades but a number of his slaves, male and female, were killed as well.

The custom is not enjoined in the most ancient scriptures of Hinduism, but when the Brahman priests rose to power in the country they gave the rite their support and encouragement. It fell in excellently with their teaching that women are altogether inferior creatures to men, and that of all womankind the widow is the most to be hated and despised. A woman who has lost her husband is a thing accursed, they taught, since such a great and terrible misfortune can have been allowed to happen to her only because of the enormity of her sins in a previous incarnation. Now she must expiate those sins in pain and shame and suffering, and those of her relatives and friends who ill-treat and abuse her are in fact doing her a service, enabling her to build up a measure of unhappiness and misfortune in this life which may well improve her prospects in one of the innumerable lives that lie ahead.

Thus it is part of the accepted scheme of things in India that widows should be not pitied but humiliated and ill-used. A woman is not allowed to remarry, even though she has been bereft of her husband as a mere child. Of late years some reformers, greatly daring, have urged that virgin widows should be allowed to marry a second time, but this view does not commend itself to the strict Hindu.

Just how many unhappy women have died in this way it is impossible to say, but in 1817 it was reported that 700 widows were burned alive on funeral pyres in the province of Bengal. The most holy spots of Hindu pilgrimages are marked with the little white pillars which mark sites where the ashes of immolated widows have been interred, and devout Hindus address their prayers, their pleas for their intercession, to satis in very much the same way as devout Roman Catholics appeal to their patron saints. For superstition is not confined to any one religion, nor has it spread anything to do with the boundaries of geography.

(*The Liberal.*)

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## To The People of Malta

By OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

DURING RECENT MONTHS one could detect a considerable amount of activity in the lobby of the Franciscan monastery in Kingsway, Valletta. Amusing activity, too, for it is really amusing to watch a monk soliciting people to purchase raffle tickets, with cameras and kitchen utensils among the glittering prizes for the chosen few. The scene befits a pawnshop rather than a monastery. But the pursuit of money is endless. Appeals for funds are lodged in the local relay service; invitations extended to attend the stalls in the said monastery—to buy for the benefit of one's soul!

Such activities must perforce be endorsed by the ecclesiastical authorities. The raffling of Scotch whisky could hardly take place without permission, particularly as the priest is normally the foremost adviser against imbibing it. Whether one is to assume that the lucky winner of a bottle ought to pour the contents down the drain, I am not sure. Or is the noxious fluid automatically sanctified in passing through those anointed hands! It recalls the story of the returning Irish woman who said that her bottle contained holy water. When the liquid was detected as whisky by the Customs officer, she declared in feigned astonishment, "Glory be to God, a miracle!"

Those who are not resident in Malta may get the impression that the clergy sacrifice all for their beloved people. In truth, the priests aim, first and foremost, to keep the simple-minded people in their grip.

If you came to live in Malta for, say, six months, you would be plagued by demands for contributions towards a thousand schemes: to build a church here, a dome there, a Catholic Action centre somewhere else. All to ensure that not a single Maltese soul shall be lost.

I should like to appeal — through THE FREETHINKER — to the people of Malta, and especially to the young people. I urge them to rid themselves of the chains that bind them to the Roman chariot; to rid themselves of an antiquated clergy that is only interested in dominance over them. Instead of donating to the Church, money that is often sent abroad, use it for educational purposes at home; for travel overseas. Meet people and see for yourselves how others live free from clerical control.

Don't be afraid to speak your minds; resist religious pressure; boycott religious functions; think for yourselves, and you will find a new and better world opening up before you — a world free from the threat of eternal perdition, from a hell that does not exist. Life will be fuller for you; you will help to make it fuller for others. Like Ben Adhem, ask to be written, not as one who loved the Lord, but as one who loved his fellow men. Your motto should be: "Reject religion: further progress." I do not ask you to become fanatics; I urge you to use your brains for your own betterment and the betterment of Malta.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### "THE OUTSIDER"

As one would have expected, the Rev. John L. Broom's article on Mr. Colin Wilson's *The Outsider* was a masterly piece of criticism. Mr. Broom, however, should pick foemen more worthy. To confront a man of Mr. Broom's ability with the sophisticated nonsense of an overrated clown is like handing someone an elephant gun to kill a mouse.

JACK GORDON

### APARTHEID FOR ANGELS?

"WHAT right have we to demand that the angels in our children's Bibles should all be white angels? . . . Why cannot the Bantu have books with black angels?"—Dr. Nichol, at the recent Johannesburg Conference of Protestant Churches.