

The Freethinker

Vol. LXXVII—No. 4

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Fivepence

PERHAPS the most puerile of all the BBC's religious effusions is the early morning "Lift Up Your Hearts" series. With crafty logic, the pious programme planners time these five-minute talks at 7.50 a.m., obviously reckoning that most people will have their sets switched on at that hour, in order not to miss the weather forecast and news. Fortunately, the forecast for Scotland in which I am interested is given last, so I am normally able to delay tuning in until the daily indoctrination is over. However, recently, for the purposes of this article, I nobly subjected myself to the torture for six whole mornings. It proved an even more gruelling experience than I had feared.

The particular series of addresses that week was entitled "My Faith and My Job." Each day representatives of different professions came to the microphone to testify how Christianity (the BBC, of course, recognises no other faith) assisted them in their work. They proved to be six minds with but a single (wishful) thought.

God in the Lab.

On Monday we had a marine biologist, no doubt one of the "scientists" who, we are always being told, find no contradiction between Christianity and the pursuit of empirical knowledge. He informed us solemnly that he was divinely guided in the systematisation of the facts provided in his work. His research was controlled by God, and if he got the wrong answer it meant that the Almighty was leading him on to a new understanding of Nature. The idea of a perfect Being deliberately misleading his scientifically inclined children did not apparently strike the speaker as in any way absurd. What proof did he offer for his remarkable theories? None at all, beyond making the dogmatic statement that this was "God's world," in spite of the manifold evidences to the contrary.

God on the Farm

Tuesday brought a farmer to the microphone who began by assuring us that though he regularly attended church, he was not a better man because of it. Obviously, then, he should stop attending church, and devote himself to activities which *would* improve his character. However, he went on to contend that his "closeness" to creation and growth drove him to the conclusion that there is "something vast outside himself." God, he said, does 99.9% of the farmer's work. This fatuity reminds one of the story of the Scots minister who congratulated an aged gardener on his fine display with the words, "Man, Sandy, the Lord and you have made a grand job of this garden." "Mebbe so, meenister," replied Sandy, "but you ought to have seen it when the Lord had it tae himself." There can certainly be no doubt that a bad summer (which must also be attributed by the theist to the Almighty) may sometimes ruin 99.9% of the farmer's work. In fact, Tuesday's pious speaker did admit that he saw much decay and death down on the farm. But unperturbed he proclaimed that these

also brought him into close contact with God, which is a fine example of trying to have it both ways.

God in the Sky

Wednesday saw the fair sex having a go in the person of a weather observer. It may be ungallant to say so, but here we really touched the bedrock of superstition. The beliefs of savages were reflected in such statements as that the prayers of the faithful ensured misty weather to cover the retreat from Dunkirk, and that the Almighty is "up there" in the sky. We even had mention of that theistic platitude, the "miracle of spring," a natural occurrence no more wonderful than the cancer bacillus.

P.C. God

A representative of the police force appeared on the Thursday, presumably to give the weight of authority to the series. By this time it certainly needed some sort of support, but this particular "Bobby" lamentably failed to provide it. The gist of his argument appeared to be that as the police help people to solve their worries and problems, so God will always answer prayers for guidance. To this one can only reply that sensible people will continue to pin their trust in the material constabulary rather than in its spiritual counterpart. The Almighty's atrocities in nature and human life make the activities of the Secret Police in Nazi Germany and Eastern Europe look almost kindhearted in comparison.

God on the Stage

Friday's child was a Roman Catholic actress, who could hardly have been aware of the abominable heresies implicit in her utterances. She seriously pointed out that the Christmas-Easter story represented "a full cycle of pure drama." The late J. M. Robertson would indeed have been astounded to hear his myth theory confirmed from such an unlikely source.

The week expired in a fine blaze of question-begging absurdities from a headmaster on Saturday. He made the astonishing and indeed shocking statement that he would not be able to do his job without the "solace" of his Christian faith. "Humanism cannot release me from the constant strain of self-justification. . . . Man with only his own integrity to rely on can never relax. . . . The Christian can call on sources of grace to maintain poise" and so on. Such a confession of weakness from one in this man's position is disgraceful. Thousands of humanists have, in fact, lived relaxed and serene lives, trusting solely in their own integrity without any recourse to "sources of grace," whatever they may be. And such people are surely much more to be admired than those who in order to "maintain poise" have to ask for supernatural aid.

So ended my week's penance before the radio. As the head's absurdities mercifully gave way to the weather forecast on the Saturday morning I reflected with some satisfaction that if these six Christians were typical examples of the intellectual standards of modern "educated" believers, then the future of freethought is rosy indeed.

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

'Six Days Hard'

— By REV. J. L. BROOM, M.A. —

Freethought in the U.S.S.R.?

By D. SHIPPER

READERS who noted my earlier attempts to ascertain the position of Freethought (if any) in the countries of the Eastern European Communist bloc may have noticed the absence of direct replies from Czechoslovakia, Rumania and the U.S.S.R.

Although I did receive one reply from Radio Moscow, I was not able to contact any anti-religious societies or extract specific information from Russia. Trying another channel, I turned to neighbouring Finland and my corresponding-friend V. H. Suutari, leader of the Finnish Freethinkers, was successful in extracting a report from S. Hudjakov of the Soviet Information Bureau.

Mr. Hudjakov asserts that all religions in the U.S.S.R. possess legal equality, no one religion being accorded prerogatives or privileges of any kind. The result of this, he claims, is that the conflicts which formerly prevailed between the various denominations during Czarist times have ceased to exist. The differing faiths practise their religion in Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Lutheran churches, Moslem mosques and Jewish synagogues. Soviet citizens of these, and other minority faiths, are free to utilise religious ceremonies, weddings, christenings, etc.

He affirms, however, that the majority of the Soviet people profess no faith; Freethinkers enjoy complete freedom in the performance of educational work. Such educational work is done by the Communist Party, youth organisations, cultural institutions and by the association for propagating knowledge of science and political educational work. (Radio Moscow referred to a "Society for the Dissemination of Cultural and Scientific Knowledge." I believe an organisation of the same name exists in other Communist countries.) These activities take the form of lectures, reports and discussions in factories and community-centres. In addition are "question-and-answer evenings" and book exhibitions, dealing with various branches of science, visits to museums, planetariums and other places of interest. Apparently, at the "question-and-answer" sessions, which "always arouse great interest, factory and office workers present their questions in advance, and these are dealt with by experts in the field concerned, who answer with a concise lecture. Another form of enlightenment is the presentation of meetings known as "miracles without miracles." In these, scientists and professors give brief explanations of achievements in astronomy, physics, chemistry and other branches of science. Following this, experiments are performed which provide visual clarification of the ideas of dialectical materialism in regard to matter and energy.

In the educational field a prominent position is occupied by the planetariums. In these, lecturers explain the universe and its structure, lecture on astronomy and the movements of the heavenly bodies, answering any questions posed by the public. The Press also occupy an important place in educational work, says Mr. Hudjakov, as does literature dealing with religions, their origin and their "class character." Natural scientific phenomena are explained by the daily newspapers and periodicals. Included among books recently published are: "How Man Learns to Know the World Around Him"; "Is there an Immortal Soul?"; "Science and Religion in Nature"; "How Religions Were Born"; "Difference between the Scientific and Religious Philosophies"; "Religious Faiths and their Ideologies"; "The Christian Religion — Its Birth

and its Essence"; and others on similar lines. These books are published in editions of 50,000 to 150,000 copies.

In the Soviet Union, educational work performed by Freethinkers is not in the nature of a campaign against the religious-minded, or of a political struggle, but rather in the nature of a struggle for a scientific materialistic philosophy, as opposed to a pseudo-scientific religious philosophy. For this reason, educational work in regard to philosophy is based on "an exposition of the most important natural and social phenomena." This, affirms Mr. Hudjakov, creates an interest in the sciences, broadens views and promotes culture. I am deeply indebted to our Finnish friends for their help in translation and hope to have further questions answered by the Soviet Information Bureau later.

The Bad Shepherd

TWO YOUNG MAIDENS paid me a visit the other day. When I opened the door they inquired if there were any Catholics living in the house. Their Church is, it seems, carrying out a house-to-house census of its flock in Britain, and these two girls were doing their bit to help. You, too, may be visited soon. I therefore offer you my light-hearted musings on the matter.

Can it be that some of the faithful have strayed; that the shepherds have mislaid part of their flock? I can think of no other reason for the check-up. If the sheep are obedient to the shepherd, they will come at his call — and he calls them at least once a week! Some must not have answered. Perhaps they have grown tired of the old threadbare pastures, found the grass dry and bereft of nourishment. Perhaps they have left the sterile land behind them and sought "fresh woods and pastures new": pastures where the grass is lush and appetising.

Timid animals who have no desire for adventure — the height of whose ambition it is to be sheared and eaten by their shepherd, sacrificed to the greater glory of the Great Shepherd — will stigmatise their more adventurous fellows as "black" sheep. But the bold sheep may be any colour: their distinctive characteristics are, not colour, but bright eyes and general inquisitiveness.

It is admirable, of course, that a shepherd should show concern for the fate of his flock. Indeed, the mark of the good shepherd — in old lore — was that he "giveth his life for the sheep." But it was also said of him that he knew his sheep. These modern shepherds — of whom we speak — cannot *know* their sheep, else why should they have to send others to discover them? Sheep after sheep; or rather lambs after sheep. Poor wee lambs, scarce weaned, sent out into the dangerous world to search for the lost sheep! Forth they have ventured "harmless as doves," told perhaps to be "wise as serpents" and no doubt warned that there be some "which come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly they are ravening wolves."

What of the shepherds who have sent them? Shall we not say with the Lord God of Ezekiel: "Behold I am against the shepherds. . . . Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with wool, ye kill them that are fed: but ye feed not the flock. . . . but with force and cruelty have ye ruled them"? Shall we remind the bad shepherds that "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb"? J.W.B.

Racism Ancient and Modern

By F. A. RIDLEY

ON MY LAST DAY IN GERMANY I saw posters in Hamburg and Cologne announcing a monster meeting of the former S.S. Korps to be addressed by a former Panzer general, Meyer. The meeting was a "howling" success. An audience of some 10,000 of the former Nazi *élite* assembled at Minden on September 15th, wildly applauded Meyer's statement that the time had come to remove the veil of calumnies and lies which had so long enveloped Hitler and the regime, which had been foully slandered by contemporary historians. Nor was General Meyer alone, apparently, in the view. Reports have appeared of similar meetings, in other parts of Germany at which the ominous cry, "To the gas chambers with the Jews" was once again raised, this in a land where the charred remains of several million Jews have hardly had time to decompose in the surrounding earth. Perhaps, after all, such ideas are no more than the frenzied nostalgia of a lunatic fringe — and perhaps not? Germany has been called a land of extremes. Ideas in the land of Hegel and Nietzsche have a habit of being taken seriously. Have we heard the last of the race theory?

In her brilliant book, *Race and Racism*, the late Ruth Benedict has differentiated sharply between the concept of race and its illegitimate offspring "racism," in connection with which there is so much confusion that it is as well to recall the precise definition of this eminent sociologist.

"Race," she said, "is not 'the modern superstition'" as some amateur equalitarians have said. It is a fact. The study of it has already told culture-historians much, and further investigations for which as yet science has not the necessary basic knowledge or tests, may even show that some ethnic groups have identifiable emotional or intellectual peculiarities which are biological and not merely learned behaviour. For example, certain ethnic groups show different averages in measurements of some hereditary glandular or metabolic peculiarity.

"Race, then, is not the modern superstition, but racism is. Racism is the dogma that one ethnic group is condemned by nature to congenital inferiority and another group to congenital superiority. It is the dogma that the hope of civilisation depends upon eliminating some races and keeping others pure. It is the dogma that one race has carried progress with it throughout human history and can alone ensure future progress. It is a dogma rampant in the world today and which a few years ago was made into a principal basis of German polity.

What may be called the "natural history" of racism goes back, of course, to ancient times. The Greeks distinguished themselves sharply from the "Barbarians" and even so great a thinker as Aristotle was misled into defending the distinction. In India, of course, racism under a religious cloak has enjoyed over 2,000 years of unchallenged supremacy. It is no accident that the Nazi emblem, the Swastika originally derived from that Holy Land of Racism, India, with its caste system founded on the sanctity of the "Aryan" bloodstream, and Iran, "land of the Aryans." Hindu society represents the historic result of racial theory in full operation since almost prehistoric times; it has held its own in the Indian sub-continent against the peaceful reforms of Buddhism and the militant attacks of Islam, both non-racist creeds which reject caste and are cosmopolitan in tendency.

In the modern evolution of racism in Europe matters have been more complex. As Ruth Benedict indicates with appropriate detail, modern racist theory emerged in connection with a *class*, not a *race*. The early exponents of the sanctity of the Aryan bloodstream did so on behalf of a threatened ruling class, *not*, like their German successors, on behalf of a "chosen" imperialist *race*. To the famous

theorist of the chosen race, Count de Gobineau, author of the racist classic, *The Inequality of Human Races*, the modern pure-blooded descendants of the Aryan "supermen" were identified with a class, not a race with, in fact, the cosmopolitan aristocracy to which the Frenchman Gobineau himself belonged. *Political* racism emerged as a theory to justify feudalism on the defensive against the French Revolution: the threatened nobility put forward their "natural superiority," their Divine Right to rule, on a racial basis, as descendants of the conquering "Aryan" Indo-Germanic race, in opposition to the equalitarian claims of Democracy adumbrated by the French Revolution with its slogan "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity." Modern racism, then, emerged as a *class* theory.

The racism with which the 20th century is so painfully familiar did not emerge as a class theory but, at least ostensibly, as the ideological instrument of German imperialism. Racism and imperialism are not, of course, inevitably convertible terms. Roman imperialism was anti-racist; the great dissolvent of races in its world. Something similar may nowadays be said about the present British "Commonwealth of Nations," simultaneously a great dissolvent of exclusive nationalism, though there *was* a time — say in Kipling's heyday — when it was by no means obvious that this would be so. Racism flourished in Nazi Germany only because of the abnormal political and economic conditions then prevailing. It is not the least convincing disproof of racism that its own outstanding success in Nazi Germany was due ultimately to non-racial causes in international politics and economics.

The modern racist dogma, as foreshadowed by H. S. Chamberlain and advocated by Hitler and Rosenberg, was *not* a genuine scientific theory even in the estimation of its German protagonists, so much as a conscious political instrument of German imperialism. Rosenberg, the theologian *par excellence* of the Third Reich, certainly believed it, as did Hitler, at any rate at first, though he used the racist theory for his own ends in such a shamelessly opportunist way later on that one can hardly believe even the arch-apostle himself credited it. What are we to make of "Japanese Aryans"? The Nazis, in order to cement the military alliance with Japan, admitted these Mongolian "Aryans" to the White Race! And Japanese in Germany during the Nazi regime were exempt from the elaborate racist laws promulgated at Nuremberg. Certainly the cynical financiers who hoisted Hitler to power could not really have believed such balderdash. While the Nazi state had a high percentage of fanatics, its famous racist dogma belonged really to the sphere of *political* demagoguery rather than to that of even bogus science.

As Ruth Benedict so amply showed, the slogan of racial purity is brief but overwhelming in its appeal to its adherents: "I belong to the Elect." By virtue of my bloodstream I am, and always will be, your superior, and nothing can ever reverse this fact. Such a formula corresponded with the experience of such primitive races as the ancient Jews or the ancient German Barbarians; today it is an absurdity in our cosmopolitan age. As a slogan it still makes its appeal, however, as the brief but terrible episode of Nazi Germany showed so fearfully.

Today, if one looks at Europe, one does not note any considerable political movement which advocates racism. But who knows what tomorrow may bring? We have been warned! "The price of liberty is eternal vigilance."

This Believing World

Our sympathies go with the Rev. W. I. Bulman every time. He is the Vicar of St. Gabriel's Church, Cricklewood, and he refuses to marry young people in his church who never go there, who never go to church at all in fact, or get confirmed, or pay anything to any church, but who want a "white wedding" with the blessing of God Almighty in whom, of course, they thoroughly believe. This strikes us as sheer impudence. If people believe in the Lord, they should go to church, and follow the Church's teachings. In any case, they should be told that a marriage in church, even if called "white," is not valid unless it is properly registered; that is, the only *legal* marriage in this country is the *secular* one. This generally comes as a complete surprise to most people — though far more surprising is to meet people who insist on a church wedding yet are completely indifferent to religion in every other way.

★

Jericho is in the news again. A book about the famous "Walls" has just been written by Lady Wheeler describing the excavations there under Dr. Kathleen Kenyon during the last four years and, according to a review of the book by the well-known TV personality, Dr. Glyn Daniel, nothing whatever has been discovered of the famous "wall" which "fell down flat" when the Jewish priests blew their trumpets. In God's Precious Word is described how Joshua and his soldiers then went in and killed every man, woman, and child in the city, and then set it on fire. Of this Divine act not a trace has been discovered in the excavations — which is not surprising. Practically nothing has ever been discovered confirming *any* Bible story. The Bible is not history, but myth.

★

Shame indeed! Here is Mr. A. Barritt, a Catford man, a thorough-going Baptist, who is ready to assist anyone who 'phones him for spiritual advice — and yet in two years of intense evangelical campaigning, nobody has 'phoned. Really, this is too bad, for here is a gentleman filled with the Holy Spirit, eager to bring Christ into personal contact with sinners, and they obstinately refuse to meet "our hope and refuge." Yet we are sure that if Mr. Barritt had discovered an unerring way of winning big prizes in football pools, or if he could always name the winners of a big race — particularly in the 100 to 1 class — he would find it impossible to get away from his 'phone. Such, alas, is life in our secular, materialistic world!

★

Sheriff Frame of Ayr Court must have had the shock of his life to have a Christian minister before him, one who really believes in God and the Bible, refuse to take an oath on the Holy Book; though he was obliged to allow the Rev. A. Hutchinson to affirm. The reverend gentleman, however, based his refusal to take the oath on the well-known verse in the Sermon on the Mount — "But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne." But the delightful point about this is, as the late Dr. Joad used to say — it all depends on what you mean by "oath" and "swear." After all, there used to be and still is plenty of both in the Army, where most of the conversation is preceded by "Gorblimey" or "Oly Jesus." In fact, the more emphatic the speech, the more it is backed up by appeals to the Lord and his Son as if that settled the matter. Perhaps Mr. Hutchinson has got a bit fuddled as to whether an oath in the Bible means kissing the Bible in the dock, or using heavenly but notoriously

blasphemous words in (and out of) the Army. But we are glad that in court he prefers to use "the Atheist's Oath."

★

We are pleased to note that, at long last, our Spirit Mediums are kicking against their poor pay for value received, and are now going to press for higher pay and overtime. To do this, they are forming a Union which will insist on a higher pay packet. After all, it is more difficult to raise a spook from the mighty deep than it is to spray paint on a motor car; and those people who want their spooks to come along should be prepared to pay for the privilege. As a world-famous medium, Mrs. Bertha Harris, pointed out — "Without mediums there would be no Spiritualism"; while Mr. H. Edwards, the famous healer, added that "mediumship is poorly paid." All the same, the new Union is not going to affiliate with the T.U.C., a sad blow for that famous body.

The Rising Generation

XVII—THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

IT IS ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE to mention the religion of Jesus Christ without somebody dragging in the Sermon on the Mount as the greatest that has ever been given on conduct and morals since history was recorded. It was given, we are assured, exactly as we have it in the Gospels, word for word, and Christians generally refer to it with baited breath as if it were even too holy to mention at all. No doubt some of the maxims—which in any case are purely secular — can find a place in any system of ethics; but this is not because they are supposed to come from Jesus, but because they are, or were, the common property of many nations. There is hardly one maxim which is new; or to put it another way — whatever is true in the teachings of Jesus is not new; whatever is new, is not true.

In any case, there are actually two Sermons "reported," one by Matthew and one by Luke — it is Luke's which is called the Sermon on the Plain. In Matthew, Jesus "went up into a mountain" to deliver the Sermon; in Luke, he "stood in the plain." But practically all commentators admit that the two sermons were really the same, and the differences are due mostly to very bad reporting on the part of the infallible Apostles.

One of the most famous sayings is, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." In Luke, this becomes "Blessed be ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." Both are the quintessence of downright stupidity. The idea of recommending to us "the poor in spirit" as our ideal is fantastic. And to promise "the poor" the "kingdom of God" was cleverly worked up by our Christian priests when they invariably promised the most beautiful "pie in the sky" to the poor so long as they humbly gave thanks to God for keeping them in their place as "the poor," and never, never, wanting to be rich. Luke even went so far as to promise those "that weep now," that is, to those who are having a rotten time on earth now, that after they are dead, "they shall laugh." And he even went further — "Woe unto you that laugh now; for ye shall mourn and weep." Sheer nonsense could hardly go further.

No wonder that Jesus is still called "the Man of Sorrows." If only a sense of proportion and, above all, a sense of humour had pervaded the Sermon on the Mount, it might have had more weight. As it is, one gets bored with its continuous "Woe" this or that. But modern ethics have far outmoded many maxims which now can hardly be defended even by the stoutest of Christians.

H.C.

THE FREETHINKER

41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.
Telephone: Holborn 2601.

THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, £1 10s. (in U.S.A., \$4.25); half-year, 15s.; three months, 7s. 6d.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

Correspondents may like to note that when their letters are not printed or when they are abbreviated the material in them may still be of use to "This Believing World," or to our spoken propaganda.

M. HEATH.—To say "the Bible has been woven into our literature" does not mean it is true, or has been an influence for good. The life of Hitler is interwoven into 20th century history.
H. CRAIG.—Lysenko's success during the war in inducing peasants to adopt commonsense methods of agriculture made him an important Soviet personage, but his mistake was in claiming that the increased yields were the result of the application of Lamarckian principles.

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).—Monday, January 28th, 1 p.m.: Public Debate—"That Man is the Product of his Environment." For: R. POWE (N.S.S.). Against: Rev. W. BRENTNALL. Thursday, 1 p.m.: R. POWE. Friday, 1 p.m.: R. POWE and R. MORRELL.
West London Branch N.S.S.—Every Sunday, at the Marble Arch, from 4 p.m.: Messrs. ARTHUR and EBURY.

INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, January 27th, 6.45 p.m.: A Lecture.
Central London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, off Edgware Road).—Sunday, January 27th, 7.15 p.m.: R. V. HARVEY, "Exact Science."
Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, January 29th, 7.15 p.m.: Dr. H. D. JENNINGS WHITE, "A Criticism of Colin Wilson's *The Outsider*."
Head Office N.S.S. (41 Gray's Inn Road, W.C.1).—Friday, January 25th, 7.15 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, "The History of Christianity" (fourth of six Study Classes). Subject this week: "The Protestant Reformation." Admission 1/-.
Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, January 27th, 6.30 p.m.: E. TAYLOR, "The Coming of Iron."
Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Wheatshaf Hotel, High Street).—Sunday, January 27th, 7 p.m.: R. SPEARS, "Religious and Social Aspects in Poland Today" (with film).
Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Hall, Parliament Street).—Sunday, January 27th, 2.30 p.m.: W. PAUL, "Pavlov and his Work."
South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, January 27th, 11 a.m.: A. BRUNEL, "The Commonsense of Thomas Paine."
Wales and Western Branch N.S.S. (Bute Town Community Centre, Cardiff).—Tuesday, January 29th, 7 p.m.: WYNDHAM JONES, B.S.C., "Science and Religion."

NEXT WEEK

MEMORIES OF CHAPMAN COHEN

By H. IRVING

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £171 5s. 8d.; In Memory of A. Brooks, 10s.; A. O'Donnell, 10s.; A. Hancock, 2s.; W. B. Sunley, 5s.; F. Arkell, 5s.; W. H. W. Bullast, £1 1s.; W. J. Bennett, £1.—Total to date, January 18th, 1957, £174 18s. 8d.

Notes and News

READERS will be sorry to hear that Mr. H. Cutner is at present indisposed. Apart from the time he underwent an operation (a few years ago) Mr. Cutner had not missed a day at the office through illness in 35 years. He has given remarkable service to the paper and we wish him a quick recovery.

★

By 1961 India plans to have 300 urban and 2,000 rural family planning clinics, which are each intended to cater for 50,000 people, and the Government has allotted £3½ millions to aid this campaign to check India's yearly 5,000,000 increase in population. Out of 27 deaths per 1,000 annual rate, 50% are children under five, a high rate of juvenile/infantile mortality. The scheme is strongly opposed by devout Hindus, who firmly believe that they can only achieve salvation if a son performs his father's funeral rites and mourns him, therefore they have as many sons as possible.

★

COMMENTING on the Pope's Christmas message, Moscow radio made the obvious allusions to Papal hypocrisy, but mixed these with the following rather enlightening observations: "The Pope did not make the speech of a religious leader. . . We must admit we have not found in this document [the Pope's speech] any excess of the Christian spirit." This means that in the official Communist view Christianity is a good thing but the Pope has fallen short of it! This, we think, amply bears out the opinion recently expressed in a letter from Mr. J. Gordon in these columns, that it is not the intention of Communism to oust Christianity but to use it for political ends.

★

THE POPE would seem to have lost a little popularity in America during the last twelve months; Auxiliary Bishop Fulton J. Sheen, on the other hand, has gained in favour. According to a poll compiled by Dr. George Gallup, President Eisenhower is the most popular man in the United States—and has been for six of the last seven years. Sir Winston Churchill occupies second place and Bishop Sheen is third, the Pope being placed seventh. Last year Sheen was eighth and His Holiness sixth. Oh!—we nearly forgot—Billy Graham is ninth in the list.

★

HIS HOLINESS recently set what the Irish *Standard* (11/1/56) describes as "a historic precedent" by receiving the winner of a beauty contest. The lucky lady was 19-year-old Maria Paola Carletti, who was chosen the "ideal woman" at Macerati, Italy. It was the first time in history that a Pope has received a winner of a beauty contest as such, but Vatican sources hastened to state that it represented no departure from the traditional disapproval of contests based only on physical beauty. We are informed that cooking ability, morality and culture were also taken into consideration by the jury, but we are not told *how*. Were the contestants asked to bake cakes, enter the confessional, and recite Dante, as well as parade in bikinis? The *Standard* should know that it is those extra details that provide the "human interest."

Scientific Tests of Free Thinking

By G. H. TAYLOR

HOW EASILY do you change your beliefs under social pressure?

How often are you persuaded to abandon beliefs which you have arrived at through experience and reason?

What is the strength of your convictions faced with a majority opinion hostile to them? What is their durability when greatly outvoted?

We are supposing, of course, that no arguments whatever have been advanced against your belief; we are simply positing a case where there is a simple and straightforward opposition of forces. On the one hand there is a belief which you hold on grounds which satisfy you as reasonable and sufficient. Against this we are presuming nothing more than sheer weight of numbers.

In such a situation, of course, the freethinker does not capitulate. He surrenders his beliefs only to superior argument, extra evidence, deeper analysis.

But how many of the population at large are capable of genuinely independent thinking? Some months ago I contended in an article, "Freethought Signs among Children," that the number of children capable of resisting majority pressure was extremely small. With adults there have been certain well devised tests which provide some exact figures based on experiments conducted in U.S.A. and reported in the *Scientific American*.

The general method of testing is as follows. A human guinea-pig is used inside a group undergoing routine tests for other purposes. The odd man out does not therefore suspect anything untoward. (If he *does* "get wise" the tests are abandoned.)

A pair of white cards are shown, one with a black line on it and the other with three black lines, one being the same length as the single line on the other card. The group are asked to note which one it is. The cards are then withdrawn and the group, in turn, declare which was the matching line. Then another pair of cards appear and so the tests go on till a large number have been made, enough to give statistical information.

The guinea pig is lulled into an unsuspecting attitude by several tries in which the whole group "play straight"; that is, they give the right answer. No tricks yet. Then after a few such tries the real testing begins. The whole group proceed calmly to give the wrong answer deliberately. The guinea pig is near to the end of the line. By the time it is his turn the wrong answer is becoming unanimous. Against his better judgment he is thus subject to majority pressure.

The same situation recurs at irregular intervals. The real tests are interspersed among the pot boilers so as not to arouse suspicion. In all cases the matching line was made conspicuous enough to rule out the possibility of mistakes through defective vision.

Without here going into too many statistical details, the general result was that the human guinea pigs joined the majority 36.8 per cent. of the trials. About a quarter of those tested (usually students) *never* sided with the majority.

Tests were also made to see what difference the *size* of the majority made to the warping of individual judgments. With only three being tested, the majority of two (erroneous) to one (correct) the latter changed his opinion on 13.6 per cent. of the occasions (not the same individual, of course; we deal in averages). Confronted by three wrong opponents the weakening took place on 31.8 per cent. of the trials. Increases above this were slight, with the final average at 36.8 per cent.

When the trick was laid bare to the guinea pigs their reactions were noted. Many said they "knew they were right all the time." Others in various ways tried to "play down" the extent to which they had been fooled. This playing down would appear to take place in 100 per cent. of the cases.

It is also interesting to note that in cases where the guinea pig did *not* succumb to the wrong majority vote, he sometimes stated afterwards that he quite frankly supposed he was wrong, purely on the basis of being in a minority of one, but that he preferred to be wrong on the available evidence than right by accident.

Other effects were also tried out in the tests. For instance, a third opinion would be introduced, similarly by pre-arrangement. In some cases this third opinion would be half way between the guinea pig's right answer and the group's wrong answer. In other cases the group would be intermediate between the guinea pig and the third opinion.

Then the effect of small support would be tested, and the results here are of immense significance to THE FREETHINKER and to our Freethought movement as a whole. Given the support of one other, so that he was now not on his own but in a minority of two, the yielding to mere weight of numbers was lessened considerably.

Thus we have experimental support for what THE FREETHINKER has contended since its foundation. There is a huge number of people ready to become our allies once they realise they are not alone in their unbelief.

Religious Revival?

I AM GRATIFIED that a large number of readers agree with my views on the hot gospellers who spout their nonsense night by night from Radio Luxembourg. After all, most of this hot gospelling is a highly profitable business, some of it existing to sell religious newspapers. As it is therefore just a commercial business, it is proper, I suppose, that it should buy programme time from this commercial radio station. These ranting, religious revivalists and would-be spell binders do not achieve much. When W. Graham was over here, for example, the effect of his perfervid oratory was very short lived. People flocked to see him, not because they wanted their souls saved, or that they were in need of spiritual redemption, but purely as a matter of curiosity.

—*Practical Wireless*, January '57.

★

THE Bishop of Bristol bemoans the fact that the Church "has not been able to build on the scale and at the speed of the civic authorities. But now, thank God, we are beginning to do the same." It is not surprising that the list of those waiting for houses in Bristol is such a lengthy one. No wonder a Bristol councillor stated, in a recent debate on whether the public parks and playing fields should be available to the public on Sundays, that it was "time to throw off the stranglehold of the Church."

★

"THE MASSES do not want Religion" is the headline from the recent Methodist Conference at Nuneaton.

In the words of its President, "There never was a time when religion was less wanted by the masses, and never a time when it was more needed." In many places, he went on, the gulf between the Churches and the people was very wide.

A Devout and Elderly Message

By ANDREW PEARSE

UNLIKE, we imagine most readers of THE FREETHINKER, we have a feeling for things ecclesiastical, and Church literature never passes us by unread. The biographies of leading ecclesiastics have taught us much. Indeed, it was from them that we learned first in detail of the attitude of past bishops towards social and political reform, culminating with the praise given by a former Archbishop of Armagh to the government of Mussolini! Parish magazines are dull reading but they tell us not a little about the poverty of mind and finance which pertains at the local church. We have read more fatuous remarks in them, and more intellectual howlers, than in any other class of literature, a sad comment upon the mentality of their clerical editors! But diocesan magazines are our especial favourite for in them the local bishop himself holds the fort and passes his comment upon things in general. It is from them that we are able to learn of the level of intelligence with which the Church of England faces its problems at the local level. The outpourings of London and not a few other dioceses pass under our ken and help us to meditation, the end which presumably they are expected to achieve, although not always the type of meditations which their editors would desire.

We have just received the Christmas number of the *London Churchman*, from which we can learn much of the clerical happenings at the centre and, thrown in for nothing, get a portrait of the Lord Bishop himself. His Lordship's monthly message to his diocese is concerned with those who do not go to church. He urges that newcomers to the parish should be welcomed by Churchpeople, and his concern also extends to the hours of service. He points out, quite correctly, that there is nothing sacrosanct about these hours. He suggests that the local vicar should explore the situation and change them if they prove to be unsuitable. Among the reasons he gives for a changing climate is the fact that cheap domestic labour is not available any longer, as it was when these hours were fixed. We can almost hear the sob in the episcopal voice and we thus get the fullness of his message.

As we laid down the magazine, our feeling was one of amazement. This journal is the official publication of the metropolitan diocese. It was Christmastime, a festival which goes to the roots of the central Christian doctrine. The article in question admits the failure of large numbers to attend church and is anxious to meet the question. Yet it can produce nothing more telling than this jejune stuff. But, as we thought it over, other criticisms arose in our mind. In the first place, it seemed strange to us that Churchpeople had to be exhorted to be friendly to strangers. A great deal of talk about love and brotherhood accompanies Christian preaching. In the Gospels themselves there is more than one injunction about the duties of neighbourliness. We seem to have heard of a parable about a Good Samaritan. Yet, two thousand years afterwards, the Bishop of London is forced to direct his exhortations to this subject. The very fact that it is raised does not say much for the impact which the preaching has made upon the Christian centuries. Our own impressions have been of a rather different type. As we have drifted around, we have often received a hearty handshake and a request to come again, the type of welcome that any other tradesman gives to a customer whom he hopes will become a regular client! But we have found Churchpeople turned into personal enemies when their own pet prejudices and

doctrines are challenged. It is then that they hiss and spit like a mother-cat fighting for her kittens, the more so as the prejudices can rarely be justified intellectually, usually extend to social and political subjects, and are, almost invariably, of the most reactionary type. It is here that one of the fundamental reasons may be found for the empty churches. Nor have hours of service anything much to do with the subject. Many clergy have been experimenting with changing times of service for years, even before the war. The Bishop of London seems to be a little behind-hand even in the more elementary of his suggestions!

But we were intrigued by the reference to cheap domestic labour in the past. It is, of course, true, and it raises the whole question of the relationship of the Church to exploitation, a field in which the Church of England had a particularly bad record. The agitations for shorter hours, better wages, trades union negotiation, the equality of the sexes, the raising of the status of labour, very rarely received church or clerical support. It is possible to discover a whole series of pious resolutions, such as those passed by the bishops at the Lambeth Conference of 1908, but it is more than difficult to trace out their implementation. To this day, the Church has not too good a name as an employer and trades union negotiations have not entered far into the matter. It is, of course, true that, with the rise of the new industrialism and the evolution of the middle-class society in the last century, the status of domestic servants was degraded and, in smaller middle-class homes, the servant was all too frequently overworked and certainly underpaid. The market was glutted as many girls had no other outlet in life. Times have changed and the market is no longer glutted, a new society with widening opportunities had dried up the older sources of supply. We should have thought that this was a vast social improvement, but we gain no hint of the fact when it is raised in the bishop's pastoral letter. Perhaps wrongly, we get the impression that there was a sob in the voice as he thought of the past and looked with disfavour upon the growing equalitarianism of our age. If so, we can understand how superficial is his talk of handshakes and the like. The old class barriers would still be there. They would still permit of economic exploitation and the like. Society would still be forced back upon the more reactionary and unprogressive features in the present social structure. The place of bishops would be properly understood and they would not be regarded as mere irrelevancies, the view which is frequently taken of them in a society increasingly scientific and secularised. We do not know how many people will trouble to probe beneath the surface of these words uttered by the devout and elderly one. But those who do would do well to ask themselves whether this sort of thing is not in fact at enmity with the development of a just social order based upon scientific foundations. If so, it is certainly not to be encouraged as being harmless, for it seeks to check sociological developments with a nostalgia for a society in which oppression and injustice reigned in the political and economic spheres, actively supported as it was by those who talked most of the glory of God and went off to church whilst some overworked and underpaid skivvy had to cook the dinner for the well-fed and prosperous family.

The issues of our day are clearly of a kind which go down to the fundamentals. Physical science has reshaped the whole of our thinking concerning the universe and the

old certainties of traditional theology lie in ruins. Biblical criticism has upset the place of the Bible in traditional Christian thought. It has done much to remove the documents from the sphere of history and has illustrated the background of Christian origins. At this moment, the Dead Sea Scrolls are in process of creating another furor in these matters. In a recent book, Professor Willey has resurrected the reverent and agnostic doubters of Victorian days, such as Francis Newman, "Mark Rutherford," John Morley, Frederic Harrison, J. A. Froude and others. They left their mark and people like the Bishop of London often forget that the criticisms of today commence where their milder doubts ended, for they were never answered. In the sociological field, the politics and economics supported by the Church within the last few centuries have come in for some very heavy criticism, whilst the social impact of the Church of England is one which has alienated many members of radical and working-class movements quite as much as have the more incredible of its doctrines. As a result, the whole subject is no longer a living issue to a large number of people. They are not concerned to justify themselves for not going to church, as their parents tended to do. But they are in a position to demand of people like the devout and elderly bishop that he should justify his position to them and show why it should call for their support. As we read the article, we could understand why his diocese is overdrawn badly at the bank and why churches and sites are being sold up to keep things going. A handshake and the change in times of services seems but a small reward for the acceptance of an outworn theology and a reactionary sociology. Perhaps the Bishop of London will give his readers some month his reflections in these fields, having tried to understand for himself why not a few people regard the positions for which he apparently stands with contempt and hostility.

CORRESPONDENCE

"ESSENTIAL" RELIGION

The average atheist's conception of religion is as anthropomorphic as any fundamentalist's. You really ought to learn to distinguish between the *accidental trappings* of religion and the real *essence* of religion; that is, its *central idea*. You ought to be able to conceive the philosophical notion of infinitude and omnipotence without automatically picturing a fearsome old fellow hurling thunderbolts about. When considering the Bible, try to penetrate the enveloping curtain of myth and parable, and get to grips with the *essential message*. This message is: "Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God, the Lord is one."

All the rest: the exodus from Egypt, the military exploits of Joshua and Gideon and Saul and David, Elijah's "showdown" with the priests of Baal, the lion-taming of Daniel, is mere commentary on this text; elaboration and embroidery of this theme. It does not make any difference if Moses and the rest are fictitious or apocryphal figures; in any case they as individuals are subordinate in importance to the message they are employed to illustrate. They are merely the mouthpieces through which Jehovah is made to declare: "I am the Lord and beside me there is none else."

S. W. BROOKS.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY 51st ANNUAL DINNER

followed by a Dance

ALL SATURDAY, 16th FEBRUARY, 1957

Welcome at the MECCA RESTAURANT

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RECEPTION 6.30 P.M. DINNER 7.0 P.M.

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Guest of Honour: H. J. BLACKHAM

TICKETS 17/6 each from the Sec., 41 Gray's Inn Rd., W.C.1

ONCE A CATHOLIC...

I note that the 1957 Catholic Directory gives the number of Catholics in England and Wales as 3,270,800, which is an increase of 122,300 on last year's figure. But it is a well-known fact that in the eyes of the Church of Rome, "once a Catholic, always a Catholic." Hence, those who lapse or leave the Church are still counted as members.

It reminds one of the figures given a few years ago by the Church regarding the total number of Catholics in a certain country. This exceeded the total population by quite a margin. In view of what appeared in the Catholic press last year, a true picture would show a decrease, not (as listed) an increase.

ROBERT MORRELL-

J.M.R.

Mr. W. E. Nicholson has the hardihood to assert that J. M. Robertson "was the essence of lucidity." I have had great admiration for J. M. Robertson for fifty years; nevertheless, I assert that he was the most stodgy and pedantic writer that the Freethought movement has ever had. His later books were better in this respect.

E. H. GROUT.

N.S.S. EXECUTIVE MEETING

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 16TH.—Present: Messrs. F. A. Ridley (Chairman), Alexander, Arthur, Barker, Cleaver, Ebury, Gordon, Hornibrook, Johnson, Shepherd, Taylor, Mrs. Venton, and the Secretary. Apology from Mr. Griffiths. Mr. G. W. Warner (Dagenham) was elected E.C. representative for Wales. New members were admitted to the Central London, Edinburgh, Manchester and Parent Branches (seven in all). Miss Jane Glyde (Keighley) was made a life member. Humanist Council, Society for Abolition of Blasphemy Laws and Secular Education League reports were given, and it was decided to have a chair named after Charles Bradlaugh in the Thomas Paine Center, Philadelphia. Annual Dinner arrangements were given and items of correspondence dealt with. It was resolved that nominations for the E.C. to the next Conference would have to be on the basis of the old Rules; that the new rules (if passed) could only come into operation after the Conference. The next meeting was fixed for Wednesday, February 6th, 1957.

OBITUARY

ARTHUR BROOKS

WHEN he died at the age of 95, on Thursday, January 3rd., 1957, Arthur Brooks was possibly the oldest reader of this paper; he was certainly the oldest member of West Ham and District Branch N.S.S. Brought up a Methodist, he forsook religion at an early age and became associated with the Society in the days of Bradlaugh and Foote. He retained his interest in Freethought until his death, and a letter from him appeared some months ago.

A Secular Service was conducted by the General Secretary of the N.S.S. at the City of London Crematorium on Tuesday, January 8th.

H. V. CREECH

THE National Secular Society has lost a most respected member with the death of Harold Creech; many of us have lost a valued friend. For some years Mr. Creech had been in poor health but he remained a regular attender at all Manchester Branch functions. Writing to the office last September, he said, "We must keep the flag flying." We shall, but it will be harder to do so without Harold.

C. McC.

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