

The Freethinker

Vol. LXXVLL No. 8

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Fivepence

AT THE WORLD CONGRESS of Freethought at Luxemburg in 1954 I read a paper on what I then termed "The Counter-Reformation of the 19th Century", dealing in some detail with the sociological, as distinct from the purely theological, evolution of the Roman Catholic Church: the sequential stages in that extraordinary evolution were indicated in its successive support for chattel slavery in antiquity, for Feudalism in medieval times, and for capitalist forms of society, both Fascist and Democratic, in recent years. I concluded by asking the pertinent question, Have we actually reached the concluding stage of the evolution of political Catholicism, or will Rome change her line again? Will the future see Rome do a deal with its present intransigent enemy "godless" Communism?

French Catholicism

At the Luxemburg Congress, at which, of course, the various national sections of the World Union of Free thinkers were represented by their most competent exponents, rather to my surprise the French Freethought Federation appeared to share my point of view. M. Cotereau, the eloquent exponent of militant radicalism in the religious sphere, ascended the rostrum immediately my paper was concluded, and delivered a lengthy speech in support of my contention, pointing out that ever since the now distant days of Pope Leo XIII French Catholicism has flirted with leftist movements. Pope Leo officially recognised the then French Republic which his predecessors had repeatedly condemned with ferocity. Whilst his present successors hide their reactionary aims under such political disguises as "Christian Democracy" and even "Catholic Socialism", M. Cotereau even quoted a statement in a French Catholic periodical, demanding "a civilization based on Labour" to replace the present one founded on money values!

So far, so good. When, however, on a subsequent visit to Germany I discussed the same supposition with German freethinkers I found a different attitude. While there are certainly Catholic elements to be found in the anti-militarist, anti-Adenauer left wing groups, officially German Catholicism stands solidly behind the Catholic chancellor Adenauer. In the German Federal Republic Catholicism, at least if we are able to judge by the pronouncements of the hierarchy, and political conservatism, are virtually synonymous terms: the Dean of the German hierarchy, Cardinal Frings of Cologne, regularly on the radio ferociously denounces "godless Communism", nor has the German Left forgotten the close collaboration between German political reaction and the Vatican which originally installed Hitler in power. At the secret meeting (Dec., 1932), in Cologne, where it was definitely agreed that Hitler should be Chancellor, only three people were present, all Roman Catholics: Hitler himself, the Centre (Catholic) ex-Chancellor von Papen, and the great Cologne banker, von Schroeder. German radicalism nowadays regards

German Catholicism as Hitler's effective successor as the force behind political reaction.

Hungary and Poland

The present political dilemma that confronts the leaders of the "Black International" is clearly indicated by recent events in Poland and Hungary, and by current reactions in the Vatican. The precise nature of the Hungarian Revolution last October represents a still hotly controversial question and a complex one at that. It appears reasonably clear that whatever the ultimate

justification for the original revolt against "Stalinism", foreign influences, including certainly the Vatican "muscle in" on the upheaval and sought to use it for their own ends. From the point of view of the Vatican the restoration of the old Austro-Hungarian monarchy of the Hapsburgs has been a permanent feature of Vatican policy ever since its downfall in 1918. Cardinal Mindszenty, who had previously been convicted rightly or wrongly, for his pro-Hapsburg intrigues, immediately came out as the champion of Hungarian conservatism. Mindszenty is a prelate of the old school: for him Rome remains in the social sphere the intransigent champion of class rule and "the sacred rights of private property."

A Gospel Axiom

The Church of Rome, however regardless she may be of much in primitive Christianity, has at least studied the Gospels attentively. Amongst other Gospel injunctions the one that enjoins not to let one's right hand know what one's left hand is doing is strikingly illustrated in the Vatican's present religious practice in its political application. Whilst Cardinal Mindszenty demands a return to the ancient regime in Hungary his next-door neighbour, Cardinal Vishinsky of Poland, also a former prisoner of Stalin, openly does a deal with the Titoist (national Communist) regime of Gomulka. The actual date of the recent General Election in Poland, Sunday January 20th, which, with apparently the active support of the Catholic Church in Poland, returned an overwhelming majority for Gomulka, may be said to mark a red letter day in the political evolution of Rome, for it marks a fundamental change in political strategy, being positively the first time a professing Communist and Marxist-Leninist Party, as that of Mr. Gomulka still officially is, has ever been officially endorsed and officially supported by the Vatican. It constitutes a red letter day in the political evolution of Catholicism; one can relevantly add that the fact that representatives of Catholic Action were apparently included on the Gomulka list of successful candidates also indicates a *black* day for Poland and for its now ambiguous future.

Quid pro quo?

Like the proverbial Yorkshireman, Rome gives "nowt for nowt". If, we may assume reluctantly, the present virulently anti-Communist Pope, the former crony of the Fascist

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

Rome Changes Her Line

— By F. A. RIDLEY —

dictators, granted permission for such a switchover on the part of the Polish Church, then he expects a *quid pro quo*. The Vatican is a realistic institution; it realises, what indeed in my opinion is obvious to anyone not blinded by prejudice, that Communism has come to stay! Like everything else it evolves, not always necessarily forwards progressively! The Catholic Church, or at least a growing party within it, evidently realises that the age of crusades is over: in an age of atomic war crusades are apt to become double edged weapons. Rome now perhaps proposes to try one of those turning movements of which clerical strategy affords so many cases?

An Era of Compromise

Is the compromise so recently effected in Poland an isolated event or a precedent? The prelude to an era of compromise between world Catholicism and world Communism? The question at issue is one of the most important of our era. Such an outcome could hardly start under the present

Pope, a relic of the era of Catholic-Fascist collaboration, but Pacelli is old and his successor may not be an Italian and may be a man of a more liberal type.

In the evolution of Papal policy sharp changes of political outlook have often been effected by successive Popes. The chief obstacle to such collaboration lies in the atheistic theory of Marxism — but is that a sacrosanct dogma of Communism any more than private property is an unalterable Catholic dogma? Actually it was Protestant reformers such as Calvin who were most conspicuously associated with the rise of capitalism. In my view, such a Catholic-Communist compromise as is indicated in Poland probably represents the next stage in the long political evolution of the Vatican. Such a compromise would have certain advantages; it would certainly lessen the present danger of war and it would clear the field for a clean-cut struggle between Rome and the one foe with whom she can never compromise, militant atheism.

Catholics or Hypocrites?

By Our Maltese Correspondent

THE Roman Catholic Church in Malta continuously boasts that the Maltese are, and always have been, fervent Catholics. On the face of it this would seem to be true. It is undoubtedly true that many of the Islanders fanatically adhere to the preaching of the clergy. But we should not be satisfied with a superficial view. In Malta — as in other Catholic-dominated countries — most of the people, and more especially the younger generation, are only nominally members of the Church.

A child born in Malta is pushed into the Church when only a few days old: he is baptised when he is incapable of resisting (though he not infrequently complains quite loudly in the only way he knows!) and the ceremony enacted by the priest is so formulated that the sponsor and even the vergers are made to reply in the name of the baby. As expected of them, these persons reply in the affirmative to the priestly promptings.

Then the game starts, with the child as the ball. Parents, directed by the clergy, start coaxing — and sometimes forcing — the youngsters into the waiting net. The habit of churchgoing is strengthened through membership of the many societies sponsored by the ecclesiastical authorities. The child is moulded to a set pattern and grows up almost afraid not to go to church.

Because of its small size, Malta is well suited to the Catholic game and it is hard on anyone, especially a young-

ster, who is caught showing signs of refusal to comply with the wishes of the local Church authorities. All the available forces are alerted for action. Parish priest, parents, relatives, friends and teachers will endeavour by every means (fair and less-fair) to impress on him the magnitude of his errors; the seriousness of laxity in religion; not forgetting to warn him that he is in danger of losing his soul.

It is scarcely surprising that most of the Maltese youngsters give way under such pressure — give way, at least outwardly. Inwardly, though, they often build up a grudge, sometimes amounting to a hatred of all that appertains to the Church. The Maltese, in fact, include many hypocrites who profess a religion which they detest. Externally they may be of saintly demeanor; secretly they often abuse most of the laws and rules of their religion. When they are found out they find solace in the confessional.

Freethinkers in Britain can have little idea of the determination with which the Church sets about its task of “netting” the Maltese from birth. In the Church and its multifold organisations from childhood, he is later deprived of literature that might encourage his full mental and physical growth; literature that he most urgently needs.

Malta has been termed “the Island Convent”, but its inhabitants yearn for more than the religious life. Perhaps the Freethinking organisations of the world can give them what they want.

Chosen Question

It is no use pretending to be freethinkers in one breath, and denying children religious instruction in the next. You say, “Let the child make up his mind when he leaves school.” Now, how on earth can he make up his mind on any subject — religion or anything else — without knowing something about it? How can a jury give a verdict without hearing evidence? Surely there is a place for religion in school, and only by disregarding your freethought principles can you deny it.

LIKE MANY CHRISTIANS who argue in this way, our correspondent is unwittingly putting the case for the teaching of Atheism in schools. What the jury make up their minds on is the evidence for and against. Thus, if Christians *really* desire that the child shall be equipped for controversy, they must include the propagating of anti-religion equally with that of religion.

Of course, nothing is further from their aims. What they say and what they mean are two very different things. What they *say* is “Teach religion so that the child can have

the basis for his own decision.” What they *mean* is “Teach religion *as true*.” Which is, of course, loading the scales from the start.

The notion that schools should teach religion so that the child can decide whether religion is true, carries with it the corresponding proposition that the child should be taught Atheism so that he can decide whether Atheism is true.

There is, of course, a legitimate place for religion on the school syllabus, but it is in the history and geography lessons. Religions are facts in history and should be placed as such — all of them. As they have varied from age to age, so have they varied from climate to climate. The sun-gods are elevated in lands where the sun's infrequent appearance makes it a precious rarity. In tropical regions the sun-god is often regarded as fierce and vengeful. Rain spirits are benevolent in lands of drought, and so on.

Yes, there is “a place for religion.” It is as part of the equipment of general knowledge, and not of indoctrination.

G.H.T.

Aspects of the Jesus Build-up

By E. H. GROUT

It is of, course, possible that originally there was an actual Jesus who was put forward as the long-expected Messiah. There was no lack of models for such a part in those times: two of them are mentioned in *Acts V* — Theudas, who boasted "himself to be somebody", and Judas of Galilee, who "drew away much people after him." (Both of these are mentioned by Josephus in his *Antiquities*). In *Acts VIII* is mentioned the better-known instance of Simon Magus, who gave out that "himself was some great one."

If, however, there was some actual man Jesus, his manhood has been so overlaid by alleged godhood that the result is quite a fiasco—actions that befit the one rôle are ridiculous in the other. For instance, there is the text (*John XI: 35*), "Jesus wept"—so often used as the occasion for pietistic sentimentality. It is quite absurd and hypocritical that Jesus should weep at the side of the dead Lazarus when he knew that in a few moments he would raise Lazarus from the dead. An even more glaring instance of incompatibility is provided in *Luke IV*, where the devil is alleged to have tempted Jesus for forty days, and to have taken Jesus up a high mountain, and "showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time". What sort of a god is it that is thus taken about by the devil? Isn't God supposed to be all-good? If so, he couldn't be tempted—there is no temptation where there is no inclination to evil.

The fact is that a real bodily Jesus would have been a grave embarrassment to the organisers of Christianity. They were trying to jostle their Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah. The first thing that the crowd asked for was a sign. Even John the Baptist wanted to be re-assured that Jesus was really "He who should come:" this was not quite nice of John, for he had heard the Almighty Father say from the clouds that Jesus was His beloved son. Now it is all very well to write interesting paragraphs about giving sight to the blind, healing lepers, raising dead folk to life, but it is not easy to perform these deeds when challenged to do so. The "sacred text" talks of Jesus being unable to do his miracles in certain cities "because of their unbelief." That's it—you've got to have the belief first, then you can see the miracles. Just as in the modern *seance*, the spirits cannot act in the presence of a sceptical inquirer.

But the movement cannot be kept going by always talking about the wonders that the hero worked in some other place. "Let him work a few now!" is the natural demand; and as it could not be satisfied, the only resource was to kill off the hero. He was much more useful dead than alive, we could always talk about the miracles that he performed when he was "in the flesh". So they killed off Jesus in his early thirties, and when they resurrected him they took care that he did not remain on the earth long to be the subject of investigation. By another paper miracle, Jesus was packed off to Heaven to sit "upon the right hand of God".

The early Christians thought they were doing quite well for the faith in piling on what they thought to be god-like attributes. The human side was not developed. The Messiahship, that had been the connecting factor with the old Jewish religion, was dropped or kept out of sight when the Christians made their bid to convert the Gentiles. In the meantime they had started building up their own body of "Scripture" and were less dependent on the Old Testament.

However, with the growth of the scientific spirit and the onslaughts of Freethinkers and Higher Critics, the supernatural side of Christianity is seen by the sincere thinkers to be unsustainable. Whereupon, ecclesiastics in the

endeavour to save something from the wreck try to boost up the *human* side of Jesus. The hallucination built up by so many centuries of propaganda and tradition is so profound that some Rationalists are unable to shake off the belief in a historical Jesus. F. C. Conybeare, for instance, avers the incredibility of

- (a) Jesus being born of a virgin, without a human father;
- (b) Jesus walking on the sea;
- (c) Jesus quelling a storm by upbraiding it;
- (d) Jesus restoring dead persons to life;
- (e) Jesus returning to life after being dead;
- (f) His apostles having seen Jesus thus restored;
- (g) Jesus ascending into the heavens.

There are many other incredible stories about Jesus in the four gospels.

Conybeare also points out in *The Historical Christ* that

- (i) There are no monuments of Jesus -- no letters or commentaries;
- (ii) Little is known how the aphorisms and wise sayings attributed to Jesus were transmitted;
- (iii) It is barely credible that any of the New Testament writers, except perhaps "Paul", saw or heard Jesus. (I see no reason for excepting Paul).

After all this, Conybeare still tried to argue for the historicity of Jesus. This was a stylistic error. One might just as well look for the actual wolf that had a bone stuck in his throat in the fable told by Æsop, or discuss in which language the wolf and the crane spoke together. In the world of the fabulous it is artistically wrong to look for reality.

Then there are those wistful Agnostics who look back upon their religious days with poignant nostalgia — "It hurts me more than it hurts you". W. R. Greg (*The Creed of Christendom*, p.cxii) was of this type: in compensation for his attacks on Christianity he lavishes excessive praise on Jesus, whom he assesses as of incomparable moral worth. This he attempts to prove by reference, not to deeds, but to texts uttered by Jesus. McCabe and others have shown that the substance of these had appeared before Christianity. Greg has to admit that he still loves the errors and dogmas that his reason has refuted. His is a case of infantilism, longing to snuggle up in the bosom of the Church, supported by his family and friends—and enjoying now his rhetoric and self-pity.

As for the meek and lowly Jesus, the friend of little children, who went about doing good, most of this has been built up *outside the Gospels*, and especially in the hymns. The Gospels depict Jesus as an irritable person, much given to cursing. He set a little child in the midst of the audience one day, and on another occasion restrained his disciples from sending off some children: seldom has so big a reputation been built on so slight a foundation. Face the matter squarely; even if all his miracles were really performed, what do they amount to? The whole are not worth so much as Edison's invention of the electric lamp, for the benefits of that are worldwide. Lord Lister with his antiseptics, Simpson with his chloroform, and such discoveries and inventions show up the "doing good" of Jesus to be very parochial and not at all comparable with the work of the scientific benefactors of mankind.

Horfield Prison, Bristol, has just been provided with a new chapel, specially blessed by the Bishop of Clifton, for the spiritual sustenance of Roman Catholic prisoners. We expect it will develop into one of the most popular and, perhaps, the best patronised, of R.C. churches in Bristol.

This Believing World

The "Church of England Newspaper" has discovered that after all, in attacking Christianity, Freud did that religion the greatest possible service. This is true especially in the domain of "sex" — which, though nobody ever discovered it before, was exactly like that of "the Founder of Christianity". This acute judgment makes, not Freud, but Jesus the greatest Psycho-Analyst the world has ever seen, and adds one more to the hundreds of "greatest ever" which distinguish "our Lord" from so many other Gods.

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Of course Freud had the greatest possible contempt for Christianity including that of the distinguished Founder himself. What drivel "our Lord" could be made responsible for can be seen in this gem of Divine Wisdom — "Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." If Jesus had had his way with this, the country would be packed with Divorce courts.

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Although we are implored by all Church leaders on the B.B.C., T.V. and I.T.V., to follow Christ Jesus in every possible way—such as, to take no thought for the morrow, not to lay up treasures on earth, give all we have to the poor, and so on, we note that, according to the *Daily Mail*, "the Church does a £195,000 deal". This deal does not mean that the Church is giving away £195,000 to the poor. Not on your life! All it means is that it is selling 800 London ground rents, and investing the money in "real estate" so as "to add several thousands a year to the clergy pay fund". In other words, it is a good old business deal such as other firms have to do and proves what utter nonsense the sheep have to swallow from Christ Jesus, while the Church laughingly throws "our Lord" and his advice overboard whenever it possibly can.

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Strange how so many people want to be considered authorities on something they so often know so little, or nothing whatever, about. Here we have Air Chief Marshal Lord Dowding writing on "immortality" in the *Sunday Times* claiming that he "can speak with some authority", that is, on "the ultimate Intelligence to which we have given the name of God"; on the process of "involution"; on "Spirits clothed in human form"; on "the Wheel of Rebirth"; and on that "Unity through realms whither our human minds cannot follow it". Lord Dowding has packed his article with similar imbecilities including our "etheric double", and "astral and finer grades of matter".

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Needless to add, Lord Dowding has had *personal* experience of all these things holding many communications with spooks who, when in this Vale of Tears, were soldiers, sailors, and airmen. We now know, on his unimpeachable authority, that there is an "astral world" and also that there is a Paradise, as well as "the darkest depths of Hell". We also know that lots of the spooks he talked with "did not even know that they are dead". By mixing this kind of "evidence" with scraps of "Ancient Wisdom" (known, he tells us, before the birth of Jesus) Lord Dowding has proved "Immortality"—though he sadly complains, "so few should be interested"! Really!

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In one of their brilliant advertisements designed to bring Americans back into the fold, the "Supreme Council" of the Knights of Columbus tells us that "All the books of the Bible, we know, had not been written until about 63 years after the death of Christ." Some of us, no doubt in our detestable ignorance, actually thought that all the books

of the Old Testament at least, were written centuries *before* that sad event, but we are always learning.

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This particular advertisement, however, was meant to prove not that the Supreme Council knew elementary facts about the Bible, but to show that "Christ left us a Living Witness", obviously the Roman Church. How do we know this? Well, Christ said so in the Bible — upon Peter, "I will build my church", with Peter as the first Pope. Who guarantees the truth of this story in the New Testament? Why, the Church of course. Thus the Church guarantees the New Testament, and the New Testament guarantees the Church. And it forms one of the prettiest ways known in Logic of arguing in a circle. Still, if you want to know more about the Roman Church, do please write to the Supreme Council.

Freethought in Poland

ACCORDING to a Warsaw report in the *Manchester Guardian* a discussion group of Polish atheist intellectuals has been founded in Warsaw. The founders, who have been active since October, point out that the organisations of Polish freethinkers were unlawfully disbanded by the Stalinist regime and that atheists should again have the right of free expression. The purpose of the new group is to make contact with other atheist organisations in Poland and to prepare a national conference of Polish atheists which would set up again the former Freethinkers' Association.

In Warsaw an Association for Secular Schools has been founded, consisting of teachers, parents and social workers. The inaugural meeting passed a resolution urging that at least one school in every Warsaw district should be without scripture lessons, and that religious symbols and practices should be banned, including crosses on the wall and morning services.

The work of this new association will be to offset, so far as able, the recent great advantages won by Roman Catholicism. Religion is to be taught in Polish schools where the majority of parents want it, and such is the hold of Catholicism on the people that of 108,000 schoolchildren in Warsaw, only 19,000 are not to have scripture instruction.

A strong organised Freethought movement would seem to be an urgent need for Poland.

An Historical Note

ALTHOUGH this year's National Secular Society dinner is advertised as only the fifty-first, it is interesting to note that it had a predecessor, the annual *National Reformer* Soiree and Ball, held late each autumn throughout most of the latter third of the nineteenth century. The *National Reformer* was, of course, the weekly paper Charles Bradlaugh edited. The twenty-second such "Soiree" is perhaps typical. It was held at the society's headquarters, the Hall of Science in November, 1881, the year in which *The Freethinker* was born. The dancing began at 8.30 and was interrupted now and then by such diversions as a violin solo by one young man, a song by another, as well as by selections sung by the London Secular Choral Union. Bradlaugh himself, as well as Mrs. Annie Besant and Dr. Edward Aveling, his co-workers, delivered "short and appropriate speeches." It must have been a gay occasion because the dancing, we are told, "continued with unabated vigour until three a.m." The admission fee, incidentally was one shilling.

W.L.A.

THE FREETHINKER

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

All Articles and Correspondence should be addressed to THE EDITOR at the above address and not to individuals.

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.

Details of membership of the National Secular Society may be obtained from the General Secretary, 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1. Members and visitors are always welcome at the Office.

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.

PAUL VARNEY.—You have produced no evidence whatever for your grave charges against the Government.

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.
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, February 24th, 7 p.m.: W. W. MILLER, "Progress in Education?"
Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute). — Sunday, February 24th, 6.45 p.m.: A Lecture. Tuesday, February 26th, 7 p.m. (at Laycock's Café, Albion Court, Kirkgate): Debate, "Christianity is a Reasonable Faith". For, RAWDON BAPTIST COLLEGE. Against, BRADFORD N.S.S.
Central London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, off Edgware Road). — Sunday, February 24th, 7.15 p.m.: KITTY LAMB, "Women and Secularism".
Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1)—Tuesday, February 26th, 7.15 p.m.: DR. C. KNIGHT MACDONALD, "Should Voluntary Euthanasia be Legalised?"
Head Office N.S.S. (41 Gray's Inn Road, W.C.1).—Friday, February 22nd, 7.15 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, "The History of Civilisation" (second of six Study Classes). Subject this week: "Relations of Church and State." (Admission 1/-).
Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, February 24th, 6.30 p.m.: J. M. YOUNG, "Freedom in a Planned Society".
Manchester Branch, N.S.S. (Wheatshaf Hotel, High Street).—Sunday, February 24th, 7 p.m.: C. T. SALISBURY, "Lost Atlantis—Myth or History?"
Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Hall, Parliament Street).—Sunday, February 24th, 2.30 p.m.: R. SHAW, "Stalinism and Bolshevism".
South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, February 24th, 11 a.m.: A. ROBERTSON, M.A., "Poisoned Wells of Knowledge".
University College Union (Gower Street, opposite Hospital entrance).—Monday, February 25th, 5 p.m.: J. N. ALEXANDER (N.S.S.), "The Necessity of Atheism."
Wales and Western Branch N.S.S. (Bute Town Community Centre, Cardiff).—Tuesday, February 26th, 7 p.m.: COLIN MCCALL, "B.B.C. and Religion".
West Ham Branch N.S.S. (Community Centre, Wanstead, E.11).—Thursday, February 28th, 7.45 p.m.: J. L. SHEPHERD, "Mental Deficiency and Civil Liberty".

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £188 5s. 6d.; A. Hancock 1s.; A. H. Briancourt, 10s.; Wm. MacKee, 3s. 9d.; A. A. Cope (Canada), £1; H. Kemp, 2s.; Mrs. Simmons (In memory of Mrs. Mary Parry), £1—Total to date, February 15th, 1957, £191 2s. 3d.

Notes and News

THE PIONEER PRESS has just reprinted Chapman Cohen's fine study of Ingersoll and Bradlaugh published first in 1933 (their centenary) and which has been out of print for a number of years. *Bradlaugh and Ingersoll* is enhanced with a number of illustrations, including reproductions of Richard Sickert's memorable pen drawing of Bradlaugh and Tenniel's cartoon from *Punch*. It is beautifully bound and should make a handsome addition to your library. Price 6/-, postage 6d.

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THE Humanist Council (comprising the Ethical Union, Rationalist Press Association, South Place Ethical Society, English Positivist Committee and the National Secular Society) is to hold a social evening on Friday, March 8th, at 7 p.m. in the Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1, and it is hoped that readers in the London area will give it their full support. Light entertainment has been arranged and refreshments will be provided for an inclusive charge of two shillings — a low price made possible by generous offers of help and the waiving of a rental fee by the South Place Ethical Society. This will be a splendid opportunity for Freethinkers to mix on a friendly and informal basis, and tickets are obtainable from the National Secular Society, 41 Gray's Inn Road, W.C.1

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WE have just received the first issue of *Spanish News*, a Bulletin of Information issued by the C.N.T. in Britain from 159 Ledbury Road, London, W.11. In the words of the Editorial, this new publication "will try to express the unrest" of Spaniards who "like the Hungarians, have left behind them families and homes, with the hope of seeing their countrymen freed one day." The bulletin, giving "inside" information on Spain and reprinting neutral reports, will surely fill a need. From *La Tribune de Genève* (Geneva) we learn that a Spanish national Baptist youth conference in Alicante was stopped by the police during the second of its intended five days, those who had arrived from other towns to the conference being given twenty four hours to leave. If they did not do so, the church would be shut. *Spanish News* also reports (among many items of interest) that in Barcelona a birth takes place every 21 minutes, a death every 43 minutes, and there is an average of 14 immigrants daily.

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WE referred recently to the formation of a Humanist Society at Queen Mary College. Mrs. Margaret Knight was their first speaker and an ideal choice to give the new venture the right start. To quote from the College Union Society's journal:

Mrs. Knight came prepared. Her aggressive remarks were largely confined to what she considered fallacious Christian precepts, but her whole object was to show the possibility of morals without religion. This she managed to do despite many irrelevant or ill-considered questions, and even sermons, from the floor

Her style of exposition and her extremely tolerant approach to every aspect of the problem were perhaps even better advertisements of humanism than the extremely lucid arguments she put forward. Judging from the questions put, the majority of her audience were practising Christians, but her very matter of fact and courteous indication of some inexplicable gaps in Christian thinking must surely have given them food for thought.

The National Press and Spiritualism

by H. CUTNER

NO DOUBT WHATEVER that Mr. Hannen Swaffer is right when he declared recently in the *World's Press News* that "as a result of his crusading, spiritualism gets more publicity in the newspapers than any other religion". Even the Editor of *Two Worlds*, Mr. M. Barbanell, tells us that he has heard "hard-boiled editors and reporters say that there must be something in Spiritualism because Swaffer accepts it". I can well believe it.

But the one thing we are not told is — how much do these people, hard-boiled or not, know of the *history* of Spiritualism? It would be safe to say, practically nothing.

Reporters are out to get a "story" which will not only interest regular readers, but induce more people to buy the paper they represent. Editors have to judge what the public wants and they do everything to supply that want.

If Jehovah's Witnesses get somehow into the news, editors come in with a wealth of material either as a result of "swatting" it up from books or from interviews, and a few photographs of "baptisms" add to the interest and no doubt help to sell the journal. Princess Grace's baby ousted even the Suez problem in popularity appeal.

Editors know that most people resent death and therefore welcome more than anything else "proof" that they will never die — that is, if unluckily they do die in this world, they will immediately reach immortality in another "vibration". Better still, in "Summerland", especially if Summerland is unmistakably like it is down here, even if we are more often like Winterland.

So if our hard-headed Editors do give Spiritualism plenty of publicity it isn't exactly because the "Pope of Fleet Street" believes it to be true and enthusiastically advocates it, but because it may make a good "story" for the paper.

That some newspaper men think there must be something in Spiritualism because "Swaff" believes it, doesn't exactly prove that there really is. How much do they know of "Swaff's" beliefs?

Almost thirty years ago, Mr. Swaffer wrote an article in which he contemptuously dismissed unbelievers unless they were prepared to debate the question on a public platform. Some of us then thought it would attract a crowd if we could induce the late Chapman Cohen to meet him — and, of course, that redoubtable debater would have only been too pleased. Alas, as soon as the great Spiritualist heard who was to be his opponent, he discovered that he "hadn't time". He was far too busy *writing* about Spiritualism to take part in such a debate. I suspect that the real reason was that it is one thing to boast about what one could do with an opponent, and quite another thing to do it. Mr. Swaffer very wisely decided that discretion is the better part of valour.

In the article to which I refer, the Pope (of Fleet Street) said that he had a seance in his flat and his piano rose up in the air and exploded into pieces. This is just the kind of thing which would even convert hard-headed Free-thinkers, let alone hard-headed Editors. But somehow such phenomena *never* come our way. *We* always impart into the proceedings an impenetrable barrier which even the most active and intelligent spook cannot overcome. We are often — at least I am — implored to come to a seance filled with pure Faith and we are bound to be converted. Even a pinch of Faith rather than a ton of doubt would do the trick.

In actual fact, of course, I have often done my utmost to get Spiritualists to produce "phenomena" with me in control. For example, what about a spot of spirit Photo-

graphy with *my* camera — which incidentally is not a plate camera but a miniature one? I can guarantee that its film cannot be "switched" — like plates. I am aware that the late William Hope is one of Mr. Barbanell's heroes, but a more unmitigated fraud never developed a plate. He was exposed time after time—as indeed are all "spirit" photographers when they meet someone who knows the tricks of their sorry trade.

What about a message tapped out on a typewriter held on *my* knee? As every Spiritualist will tell you, "automatic" writing means simply that it is a spirit guiding the hand of the medium to produce literary masterpieces from completely illiterate people. If a spook can do this with a pen, he can do it with a typewriter — it has been done of course, but it would be interesting to see it done again with an unbeliever.

What about a few "levitations" — like those of D. D. Home, whose adventures in this field were once seen by three members of the aristocracy? At least, this is the contention of all Spiritualist historians — though it is *denied* by one of the aristocrats.

Now whether Mr. Swaffer or Mr. Barbanell likes it or not, *all* mediums who have been properly investigated have been convicted of fraud. I want to emphasise "properly" investigated. I say here as I've often said in these columns the biggest fools to conduct any investigation into Spiritualism are "men of Science". Why an eminent astronomer or physicist should be considered also capable of exposing a wily medium is something fantastic. How many of them, for example, would be able to penetrate the secrets of some of the magicians who entertain us on television? Most of the marvels I have seen even confound fellow magicians. The great Houdini always said he preferred an audience of know-all scientists, it was so easy to hoodwink them.

It is fortunate for us that so many world-famous mediums have been exposed as frauds and charlatans and we have records of how it was done. And it is to those we can go when we meet people like "Swaff" no matter how much he has impressed hard-boiled Editors.

In *Two Worlds* (for Jan 19) Mr. Barbanell quotes an "attack" we made on Mrs. Hughes in connection with bringing up a dead wife to her husband and he adds that what we said about it would make Chapman Cohen turn in his grave—"if he were there to turn." Incidentally, C.C. was "a doughty champion" whom Mr. Barbanell admired. He certainly was a doughty champion, but he had no illusions about Spiritualism. He preferred to deal with those cases which could not be proved as fraud — if there were any. The others, the fraudulent ones, he always asserted, never brought back a Spiritualist to sanity any more than scientific exposures of particular "miracles" made Free-thought converts from all-believing Christians.

But Mr. Barbanell should cultivate a little sense of humour. The reference to a "fee" in the paragraph about Mrs. Hughes refers to one paid by *The People* to the *spook*, not to the medium. Personally, I am all in favour of paying adequate fees to mediums as well as to parsons. If their services are wanted, they should be paid for.

I think it is fair to say that this paper of ours — THE FREETHINKER — is about the only one in the country which actively campaigns against Spiritualism as it does against religion. We oppose the lies and fraud which surround them both. Spooks and spirits, myths and miracles, devils and demons — what are they but expressions of ignorance and credulity?

REVIEW

Catholics in Industry

Catholics and Industry (Andrew Gordon, s.J. Catholic Truth Society, 4d.).

THIS pamphlet is yet another C.T.S. publication, informing the Catholic worker how best he can apply his religion to his daily work, thereby ensuring his own spiritual advancement and the material advancement of the One True Church at the same time.

In the introduction, it is explained to us how the change of attitude towards Christianity by the proletariat has resulted in the swollen litigation of the divorce courts, the flagrant increase of sexual immorality, etc., etc., and most important, in the "general decay of religious observance and worship". Naturally, this decline in morality and religion is the result of the "widespread advance of materialism and neo-paganism."

Most of us, the author asserts, have little or no appreciation of the struggle between Christianity and materialism. This is because we are bent on securing for ourselves whatever benefits we can obtain from "what is euphemistically called the Welfare State". Like the Roman Empire, (in its declining days) this relies on "bread and circuses" for the people. Being the "last refuge of humanitarian materialism," however lofty its aims, it is "pagan in its culture and effects". (It does not even believe in the life-giving power of the Word of God). It is, of course, necessary to draw a distinction between Communism and "real Socialism" (the Socialism which is in conflict with Catholic social teaching). As Communism denies the Universal Fatherhood of God there is no need to examine *that* further. But strip Communism of its "aggressive atheism" and "exaggerated ideas of a perfect paradise on earth" and — hey Presto! — we are left with Socialism. But not for long!

Excessive compulsion will be needed, the terror of the Police State and the Communist State will, in practice, have arrived.

Incidentally, states Mr. Gordon, "Religious Socialism, Christian Socialism" are expressions implying a contradiction in terms. No-one can be a sincere Catholic and "a Socialist properly so called" (Freethinkers have been aware of this for some time). Explaining that the abuses of Capitalism led to the creation of the proletariat, maldistribution of wealth, class war, injustice and exploitation of the working classes, the author insists that the "core of these evils" is the huge proletariat! Pope Leo XIII, that far-seeing man, knew a solution could not be found without religion and the Church. The State cannot "act the Fairy Godmother all the time." Pope Leo, realising this, did not condemn Capitalism as such (he censured its abuses) he wanted, "not Monopoly Capitalism, nor Democratic Socialism, but Democratic Capitalism." (Presumably of the type existing in Catholic democracies like Spain and Portugal where the "huge proletariat" has been abolished — or, at least, suppressed.)

We are reminded that, "God does not intend all men to be equal, or He would have made them so" and Trade Unionists (especially the materialistic ones) will be surprised to hear that they admit this by supporting wage differentials.

A perusal of this pamphlet will convince secularists that the role of the Catholic Actionist is, in fact, to be a Catholic Fractionist, dividing the labour movement into two sections, believer and unbeliever.

D. SHIPPER.

Superficial Religion

By OSWELL BLAKESTON

ONLY yesterday I heard a woman say on a bus: "I suppose she's clever, my dear, but she's superficial. Now I really have a religious nature." And so it goes on — the old unthinking assumption that there is something "profound" about religion.

In fact, religion is made up of immediate primitive reactions — fear of the unknown, the instinctive wish to escape from the personal responsibility of thinking for oneself, early undifferentiated emotions of awe, etc. Nothing could be less profound.

The mystic does not progress toward some deeper truth but falls back into the vegetable state of being. Do we speak of profound marrows? Ah, it is enjoyable enough, the vegetable marrow state of trance diffusion of consciousness warmed by the rays of an enervating sun! But profound does not mean a spiritual snooze!

The active religious is not profound because of his creed. He may have knowledge and skill apart from his superstition, but that is another matter. In so far as he is religious, he is being dragged back to primordial twitchings.

Neither do the virtues belong to the superficial level of religion. Charity belongs to the evolution of mind coping with the complex of reality. Religion is the great simplicity that cannot offer a true and constant basis of ethic. One needs to be profound to find this, to realise something deeper than a vague religious outline of charitable gestures.

Religion is not something reached at the end of a long search, but is a habit retained from infancy or an escape in later life. If one wishes to study the function of religion

in "filling up time", one has only to attend the meetings of the esoteric cults. How they draw the rich and idle old women to them!

It is by progressing from the easy primitive feelings that we sharpen the intellect for knowledge and virtue, that we learn to use time and not to "fill it up" with vain superficialities. "How many angels can stand on the head of a pin" was indeed a very suitable subject for theologians.

Yet only recently a critic wrote: "This poem is religious because it deals with the great endurances of birth, life and death." Well . . . if words are to be stretched, atheism and religion become one. But note the subtle way in which the myth of "profound religion" is spread and maintained.

Freethinking can be profound; but religion is in essence superficial.

So let us at every point oppose the automatic assumption that religion deals with profundities. Let us take every opportunity to stress that religion deals with superficialities — and makes no attempt to go further.

It may seem very obvious to us; but if we observe others, we will see that they reflect the conditioned distortion.

MOTHER'S DAY in Spain, says *Informacion Española*, is "gaining in popularity each year." This is quite understandable; with the present Catholic teaching on family life, there are more to celebrate each year!

—NEXT WEEK—

IN DEFENCE OF DIVORCE

By C. G. L. Du CANN

CORRESPONDENCE

POSITIVISM

The account of Positivism in Brazil in the *FREETHINKER*, No. 51, page 412, is inaccurate and misleading.

Comte did not "reject" Christianity; he attempted its evaluation and gave it its relative position in the evolution of man's mind and social activity.

Not only did Comte include the contributions to his religion of such as Socrates and Newton, but he included at least twenty-seven saints, headed by St. Paul and more than fifteen other luminaries of the Catholic Church.

Your correspondent says "*the positivist movement may be regarded as at least a step in the freethought direction.*" May I ask him just where positivist thought ceases to be freethought and where freethought gets to after ceasing to be positive?

J. C. HORUS

[Mr. Horus asserts that Comte did not "reject" Christianity. In the résumé issued by the Brazilian Positivists, Article 7 affirms that they are "against clericalism, material predominance of the clergy and the granting of aid by governments in this direction," and Article 10 that they "do not believe in the objective existence of gods, nor of devils, nor of spirits," furthermore, that "theological beliefs were institutions created by humanity, spontaneously, in its infancy."

This seems, to me, to imply rejection of Christianity, or, for that matter, of any other religion which appoints a priesthood, also of a personal God. That Comte "attempted an evaluation" of Christianity I do not doubt. This is not the point; the point is whether in saying Positivism "rejects Christianity" I am "inaccurate and misleading."

Now "a step in the freethought direction" does not, to me, seem to imply that the Positivists are Freethinkers. Surely, the Catholic doubting the physical presence in Transubstantiation, the Protestant doubting the "virgin birth," are taking "a step in the freethought direction"? I am not claiming them as Freethinkers.—D. SHIPPER.]

MALTA

The article "On the Mark Again in Malta" is, in my view, a perfect example of the mailed fist in a velvet glove. It will be interesting to see what "Jupiter" can do by way of a reply—that is, if he can ever recover from such a knock-out blow! E. LEAR.

JOHN M. ROBERTSON

I read with some astonishment the articles by Mr. Cutner in praise of John M. Robertson. I first met Robertson about 1905 when he was editor of *The New Age*. I lived in the same flat with him for some time and came to know him well. His methods of argument were extremely dogmatic. His reasoning powers and freedom of thought collapsed completely on the outbreak of war and later he was almost raving about conscientious objectors. I remember being in the National Liberal Club in early August 1914, lunching with Mr. Young, editor of the *Japan Chronicle*, when John M. Robertson joined us and, without any provocation at all, began raving about the Germans in such a manner as to amaze Young, who said that, had he not heard these declamations, he would never have believed a man of Robertson's intellectual capacity could have descended to such senseless vituperation. Young was keen enough to see that Robertson was directing his attack at me, as my lack of enthusiasm for the war and the policy leading to it were fairly notorious in the N.L.C., though I had not uttered a word on the subject at the lunch, knowing that the word "German" at that period reduced Robertson to a state bordering on political delirium. Not much credit to a life of "free"-thinking, I reflected to myself, especially as Robertson had been a strong critic of Grey's policy all the years he had been in the House till he joined the Government as Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Trade. He had considered resigning with Burns and Morley, two other freethinkers of a sort, but Asquith talked him over.

His books were very uneven in reasoning power. His *History of Free Thought* disappointed me very much and was inferior to Professor Bury's shorter book on the same subject. His book, *Letters on Reasoning*, which was written for the edification of his two children, is gravely defective in reasoning, in my opinion, in many ways, being rather a pale reflection of the line of thought adopted by Morley in his pragmatist book *On Compromise*, Robertson's edition of Buckle, on the other hand, contained some useful emendations and corrections of that fine book. His books on Shakespeare were simply absurd; but his defence of the principles of Free Trade showed acuity of economic analysis at its best. His *Fallacy of Saving* is an interesting book, especially when one sees everywhere exhortations to save for the benefit of the country. I do not know whether he would have changed his opinions, but they convinced me so thoroughly that these National Savings appeals to this day elicit no response from my mind or pocket! Much of his other writing was journalistic pot-boiling. I cannot agree that Robertson's approach to the diverse subjects he handled was a

particularly scholarly or logical one. I used to chaff him mildly on his taking the oath of allegiance to Edward VII (of all people) when he was a professed Republican. C. H. NORMAN.

FROM A BULGARIAN

As a regular reader of *THE FREETHINKER*, an atheist and a Bulgarian, I find that the information received by Mr. Shipper from Radiodiffusion Bulgare does not reflect the real situation there.

Bulgaria needs an anti-religious organisation as much as any other country. But the existence of such would endanger the peaceful co-existence of Government and Church, both of which are directly responsible for the enslavement of people's minds in Bulgaria. Religion is the opium of the people: hence the need to build up the state of obscurantism which is the policy of the present Communist government.

There is no such thing as freedom in a country changed into a concentration camp. Freethought is persecuted with as much religious zeal as it is in the Spain of Franco.

Let Radiodiffusion Bulgare explain why publications such as *Free People, Workers' Thought, Socialist Youth* and others were suppressed. What happens to their editors?—not to mention Sveti Ivanov, who died in prison, tortured by Red inquisitors. These publications were, in greater or lesser degree, anti-religious, and in fact the only existing outlet for Freethought. With them died the last spark of Freethought in Bulgaria. Why were such books as *Proofs that God does not Exist* and *Religious Pest* confiscated?

It is true that no one is persecuted for his religious beliefs; he is only persecuted for freethinking ideas.

If you publish, please use only my initials as I fear the persecution of my relatives. G.F.

OBITUARY

WE regret to announce the death, on January 29th, 1957, of Mr. A. O'Donnell, aged 71. For many years "O'D" was the Secretary of the Union of Post Office Workers (Manchester) and an ardent Trade Unionist. He had been one of the leaders of the "work to rule" movement in 1931. He had been ill only a few weeks and his letters to the Branch Secretary expressed how much he was looking forward to the warmer weather in order to support the Branch at Platt Fields.

A cremation service took place at Manchester Crematorium on Friday, February 1st, 1957, when Mr. F. Edwin Monks, President of the Manchester Branch and friend of "O'D," read the secular service.

Our sincere sympathy is extended to Mr. O'Donnell's relatives. H.M.R.

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