

The Freethinker

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Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

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THE *Daily Express* has recently given what it describes as "the most exclusive club in the world" an extensive front-page publicity. The club certainly deserves its title, for it is not, as might be imagined, a club *exclusively* reserved for the idle rich or for similar aristocratic or plutocratic nonentities. Its small *clientele* is *really* exclusive. It is open only to people who have been dead and have come alive again. No! one will not meet Lazarus there; nor even Jesus! The

resuscitated corpses who will attend its reunions owe their return to this world to science, and not to theology; to modern surgeons, not to ancient wonder workers.

"When we dead awaken"

The above was the actual title of one of the later plays of Henrik Ibsen; but nowa-

days it has a meaning quite divorced from the mystical associations with which human resurrection has usually been connected in the past. In recent years, modern surgery—in particular, modern heart-surgery—has made possible the actual resuscitation of people whose hearts had actually stopped beating; who had actually been dead, sometimes for several minutes or even hours on end. There have been several such cases in recent years, and it is the survivors—or some of them—who have formed themselves into a kind of club, the membership of which is certainly "exclusive" in any meaning of the term. The present writer feels an almost personal interest in this exclusive circle of resuscitated corpses since, though not technically qualified to join it, he was unfortunate in childhood to undergo a rather similar experience; a fall over a steep cliff in the Yorkshire Pennines having rendered him *hors de combat* and totally oblivious of the world around for nearly a week. I shall carry the resulting scar to the end of my days. During that week I underwent, presumably, the same experiences—or lack of experiences—which all our clubmen describe as part of their *post-mortem* period. I may, perhaps, on the strength of this similar experience, apply for, at least, an honorary membership of the world's most exclusive club.

The End of Experience

It has been usual in rationalistic circles to refer to the phenomenon of death, not as a thing, not as an experience, but as the end of experience; or, as the Greek materialist, Epicurus, put it twenty-two centuries ago: "the absence of sensation." This philosophical definition is fully confirmed by our reanimated clubmen, who all describe their period of death as a complete blank upon which no physical or mental any kind intruded, and into which no physical or mental sensation entered at any stage. Their subsequent return to this world had nothing miraculous about it, but merely testified to the growing empire of scientific knowledge. In this respect, as in so many others, science appears to move quicker than religion. It took three days for God to raise Jesus from the tomb, whereas three minutes appears to have been sufficient in recent heart operations. As a "Science Report" on the BBC recently indicated, the physical connotation of death may come to be differently defined in the future.

Exit the Soul

The extension of surgery to the point where it can push back the boundaries of death and revoke the previously irrevocable, must be regarded as an epoch-making event. It disproves empirically one of the two cardinal dogmas, not only of Christianity, but of all supernatural religion, the dogma of the Existence and Immortality of the Soul. For, according not only to Christian, but to Hindu,

Muslim, Jewish, and Buddhist theologians, the soul is indestructible and capable of surviving the death and dissolution of its material framework, the body. We know what fantasies have been described in relation to the post-mortem existence of the immortal soul, whether

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

The World's Most Exclusive Club

— By F. A. RIDLEY —

it be the raptures of the Muslim Paradise or the sultry terrors of the Christian Hell. Now the whole vast structures erected by religious imagination have vanished simultaneously. For people nowadays do actually come back from the "bourne" whence "no traveller returns," and report—nothing! The theologians are in much the same dilemma as a traveller who, having climbed an enormous mountain with high hopes of a splendid view, found the summit securely covered by an impenetrable wall of mist.

Post-Mortem Theology

The practical effects of the prospective extension of the reanimation process by modern surgery can hardly fail to be revolutionary in both the practical and theoretical spheres. For *post-mortem* theologies of all the "Higher" religions not only insist on immortality as a fundamental dogma, but are quite explicit regarding its nature. In Cardinal Newman's famous religious poem, *The Dream of Gerontius*, the flight of the soul of Gerontius into the supernatural domain of purgatory begins, and is vividly described by a master of language immediately after Gerontius has "shuffled off this mortal coil." Gerontius begins to describe his *post-mortem* sensations even before the priest has started praying over his dead body. Nowadays, Gerontius, with a bit of luck, might be back on earth, applying for membership of the world's most exclusive club and giving an exclusive interview to the *Daily Express*!

God and Immortality

In all the world's major religions (except perhaps the traditional Hinayana form of Buddhism) the two basic dogmas are represented by God and Immortality. Logically to disprove the existence of God is obviously difficult, perhaps impossible: how can one logically disprove a negative, and one, at that, the nature of which must remain for ever unknown? I would confine myself to Bradlaugh's line of reasoning, *viz.*, that "God" represents an idea in the human mind which in practice is always found associated with discredited moral attitudes or fallacious intellectual arguments; and must be rejected along with them. Immortality, the twin basis of supernatural religion, is in a different category: spiritualists have sought to prove it, and heart-surgery is now empirically disproving it. What will happen to supernatural religion when this fact seeps

through to the masses, as all major scientific discoveries eventually do? How will, say, Masses still be said for "the souls in purgatory" when it becomes generally known that "there ain't no sich place"? If and when it can be scientifically "proved" that sensation and experience end at death, the only form of immortality which might still be tenable would be that species of impersonal immortality suggested by the ancient Eleatic philosophers: the doctrine of the Eternal Return, in which an infinite material universe reproduces all forms of material existence in an endless

recurrence — a non-religious supposition which, on the face of it, seems not necessarily incompatible with materialism. All specifically religious immortality would go by the board.

On the Resurrection Morning

Well, there it is! Somewhere in the infinite universe perhaps the clarion call may go out to the joyful reunion "on the resurrection morning." But, "when the roll is called up yonder," *Homo sapiens*, at least, will not be there!

'Life', Marriage and the Virgin Mary

By W. L. ARNSTEIN

THE CHRISTMAS ISSUE of *Life*, the most popular of American picture weeklies, is devoted to the subject, "The American Woman: Her Achievements and Troubles." As usual, the issue is skilfully produced and the pictures are well selected; the articles, partly serious and partly humorous, vary in quality, but are generally worthwhile. Nor is it surprising to find that the editorial is entitled "Woman, Love, and God." Since *Life's* editorial writers rarely let a week go by without indicating their personal acquaintance with the deity, and since the latter — it would appear — invariably approves *Life's* policies.

What is, at first glance, surprising, however, is to find the Virgin Mary chosen as the symbol of "married love . . . the bliss of earth." Now if for the moment we ignore the question of the lady's historicity and accept her existence on *Life's* own terms of popularised neo-scholasticism, the choice is still singular. For, even if we agree that it was generous of her to grant what *Life* calls her "free assent to Gabriel's message," hers was hardly a typical marriage, and her relationship to her lawfully wedded husband was, to say the least, an unusual one.

We may then ask, why did not *Life* choose some other biblical woman as a symbol for modern American women? Why not Eve, for example, "the mother of us all"? The difficulty is that, aside from leading her husband astray in the matter of eating apples, and having produced one son who turned out to be a murderer, she mothered a family about which there continues to linger a suspicion of incest. God did, after all, use up only one of Adam's ribs in the process of creating women.

If we turn to other biblical families, such as those of Abraham or perhaps David or Solomon, another difficulty arises. *Life* is looking for a symbol for monogamous marriages, and unfortunately the gentlemen under discussion, good husbands as some of them may have been, tended to marry a considerable number of wives. The scriptures do assert, to be sure, that "no man may serve two masters," but the examples of polygamy are too many to be ignored; the contradiction must stand.

When we turn to later biblical figures, we find that most of them, such as St. Paul, far from advocating a happy married life as an ideal, do not particularly care for women, and make it their highest ideal to keep away from them as much as possible.

So we can sympathise with *Life's* editorial writers in their search for a biblical symbol for an ideal with which we can all sympathise, happy family life, though we may prefer it uncluttered with dubious symbols and a hazy philosophy. We can understand then why the Virgin Mary was chosen — she was at least superior to Eve and other biblical characters. One might suggest, though, that if

modern American women were to model themselves too closely upon her example, the population would soon tend to decline steeply. Direct divine intervention has, after all, rather gone out of fashion.

Quotes from a Jesuit

GEORGE TYRRELL was an Irish Jesuit priest who left the Roman priesthood in 1906. He was born an Anglican, but joined the church of Rome in England when he was 18 years old. He is famous for his open letters to Pope Pius IX. The following are extracts from *George Tyrrell's Letters*, by M. D. Petre, London, 1920:

"The wish to be carried in another's arms, to be led blindfold, to be delivered from one's inevitable responsibilities, is more natural than supernatural, and it is one on which a priesthood of any kind is naturally tempted to trade". (1903)

"There is nothing in the Catholicism of Canada, or Ireland, or Spain, to hold out against modern education, and the Clericals know that well enough, and put all their trust in ignorance and obscurantism". (1904)

"I often thank God I was not born and bred a Roman Catholic, and therefore know experimentally that the substance and the most vital truth of religion does not stand or fall with the Roman Church". (1908)

QUIZ

1. Fit these events to their dates: (a) Proclamation of the People's Republic of China; (b) Death of H. J. Laski; (c) Festival of Britain. Abdications of (d) King Farouk; (e) Queen Wilhelmina; (f) King Michael of Rumania. 1947, 1948, 1949, 1950, 1951, 1952.
2. Why were Jews allowed a good measure of freedom at Rome under the medieval Popes?
3. What is Nihilism? When and where were its associations?
4. Which of these scientists is connected with (a) salivary reflex in dogs; (b) Darwinism; (c) sex psychology; (d) hypnotism; (e) behaviorism? J. B. Watson, Sir Arthur Keith, Milne Bramwell, Havelock Ellis, Ivan Pavlov?
5. How many Biographies of G. W. Foote have been published?

(Answers on page 96)

—NEXT WEEK—

REPORT FROM POLAND

I.T.A. and Religion

By COLIN McCALL

AS MANY OF US are only too painfully aware, Independent Television — like the BBC — affords a regular medium for the dissemination of Christian propaganda. A few months ago the National Secular Society requested the Authority to grant time to the opposition: to allow free discussion of religious subjects between recognised exponents of the Christian and anti-Christian attitudes. Readers may be interested in the details given below.

On January 5th, 1957, a letter was sent to the Director of Programmes, Associated Television Ltd., London, asking if there was any possibility of the "principle of freedom of expression . . . being extended — on Television, as it has in open meeting places — into the religious sphere." "What we have in mind" — the letter continued — "is a programme along similar lines to 'Free Speech' but dealing specifically with religious questions, with a panel of speakers representing Christian and anti-Christian viewpoints. It seems to us that such a programme would extend the freedom of speech principle in the important television medium; that it would be of considerable help to those many millions whose religious ideas are, to say the least, confused (the millions, we mean, who never attend a place of worship but who would describe themselves as 'C. of E.' if admitted to hospital or called up for military service); that, above all, it would be popular." It added that, "For our part, we should be prepared at any time to provide a representative of the anti-religious persuasion."

The reply was as follows:

14th January 1957.

Dear Mr. McCall,—Thank you for your letter of the 5th January. For over a year now each Sunday evening at seven o'clock we have been presenting a religious programme and many times the programme has been along the lines you suggest. We have had an "open-air meeting" in the Studios, a discussion with an agnostic and many disillusioned young people, many of them representing very anti-Christian viewpoints.

The next time we present a programme along these lines — which will not, I am afraid, be in the immediate future — I will do my very best to get in touch with you.—Yours sincerely,

(Signed) Michael Redington,
Producer, Religious Programmes,
Associated Television Limited.

By a curious coincidence, on the day that I received Mr. Redington's letter, I also received a telephone call from a gentleman I had never met, Mr. H. M. Sparrow, of London. He, too, had written to ATV asking them to allow time for the expression of Freethought. He, too, had received a reply that day, and it was also signed by Mr. Redington. Mr. Sparrow kindly sent me that reply, with permission to use it as I thought fit. It read:

Dear Mr. Sparrow,—Thank you for your letter. It was kind of you to write and take such an interest in our religious programmes.

The type of programme you suggest is always uppermost in our minds, and I hope very shortly to be presenting a programme bearing your idea in mind.—Yours sincerely,

(Signed) Michael Redington, etc.

On January 19th I wrote to Mr. Redington, and I give the letter in full.

Dear Mr. Redington,—Thank you for your letter of 14th January, in response to my request that a programme similar to "Free Speech," but dealing with religious issues from both the non-religious as well as the religious side, be tried on your service.

You say that many times the regular Sunday evening religious programme has been along the lines I suggested. I am not aware that our own Society, the Rationalist Press Association, South Place Ethical Society, or any similar organisation has been asked to supply a speaker on any of these occasions. Yet it is surely to these organisations that a request should be made. If you require a Roman Catholic speaker you would, I am sure, go to an official

Catholic body; if a Buddhist, to the Buddhist organisations in England; and so on. The Secular and Rationalist Societies are represented on the Humanist Council of the Conway Hall, London, W.C.1, and the Council, or the individual bodies would readily supply an official — as opposed to an unofficial — speaker.

I am moved to make these observations in the light of a letter which has been received by Mr. H. M. Sparrow, 337a Bromley Road, Catford, S.E.6. This letter, signed by you, was received on the same day (and written on the same day) as mine. Mr. Sparrow tells me that he objected to the seven o'clock religious programmes already mentioned. In reply you say: "The type of programme you suggest is always uppermost in our minds, and I hope very shortly to be presenting a programme bearing your idea in mind." Mr. Sparrow's idea was, I understand, that the Freethought point of view be given expression. As you hope to do this very shortly, I consider, in all fairness, that the bodies I have mentioned should be approached.

I think I should say that your reply to Mr. Sparrow (whose request was basically similar to my own) is hardly consistent with the reply to me, where you stated: "The next time we present a programme along these lines — which will not, I am afraid, be in the immediate future — I will do my very best to get in touch with you."

Mr. Sparrow, incidentally, is not a member of the National Secular Society, and, indeed, I have never met him. He sent your letter to me as being of interest, and so it has proved. But my principal concern is that the Secular, Rationalist, non-religious point of view should be given fair expression over the air. I feel that it is a reasonable request which has not yet been complied with. It would interest a considerable section of the population of this country. But it should be an official expression, given by representatives of bodies holding the views to be expressed.

May I look forward to a reply and, perhaps, a statement on this all-important matter of approaching responsible bodies rather than individuals who may or may not be competent to put forward our case?—Thanking you in anticipation,

Yours sincerely,

(Signed) Colin McCall.

Mr. Redington has not replied and, two months having elapsed, I think I am justified in publishing the correspondence with a few words of emphasis. These centre on two points: the contradictory statements to Mr. Sparrow and myself, and the question of "official" presentation of our views. The contradiction is glaring: "The type of programme you suggest is always uppermost in our minds, and I hope very shortly to be presenting a programme bearing your idea in mind"; and "The next time we present a programme along these lines — which will not, I am afraid, be in the immediate future — I will do my very best to get in touch with you." It is difficult to understand how the same person could write those two letters on the same day. Perhaps Mr. Redington himself cannot explain. Perhaps that is why he hasn't replied to my second letter.

The second point, however, is the more important. As the *Daily Mail* had it recently, it isn't fair to pit a Bishop against a Bargee (though no doubt some bargees could play havoc with the beliefs of some bishops!). And ATV — like the BBC — often does this. Occasionally — very occasionally — it does go a little further. Mrs. Margaret Knight is, I think, the "agnostic" who had the discussion with "many disillusioned young people, many of them representing very anti-Christian viewpoints." Few members of our movement will cavil at the choice of Mrs. Knight on this occasion, but the fact remains that she was an unofficial representative. Moreover, adult programmes are called for with straight talks or straightforward discussions in which the Freethought case can be expressed. The only way to ensure its adequate presentation is by the ATV's recognition of the Humanist Council. That is the immediate goal.

This Believing World

With tremendous courage, the Bishop of Coventry and the Rev. R. Walls, of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, faced a determined factory worker, Mr. Arthur Davies, before our ITV the other Sunday. Mr. Davies had to put questions on the Bible—and his undoubted qualifications for the job were his own apologetic remarks that he didn't know a thing about the Bible and he couldn't read it; at least, what he did read was quite unintelligible and boring. And the baffling queries were—where in the Bible does it deal with labour disputes, such as differential wages, strikes and similar difficulties from the Trade Union Movement?

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Both the eminent experts were not by any means dismayed. They laughingly admitted that parts of the Bible were boring, and that, anyway, it did not deal with such shattering problems as working to rule—but what about Christ Jesus? As the Bishop good humouredly insisted, was not the Life and Death of Jesus Christ the Greatest this World had ever seen? And once set on this vital topic, there was no stopping them—they overwhelmed Mr. Davies with tributes to their Deity, leaving him breathless and dumb. It was the most glorious victory we have heard thus far against that fast-dying and ignorant people known as infidels, and a glorious triumph for the Bible. Such victories must even shame the Devil in his sinful Hell.

★

All the same, it was heart-breaking to hear the Rev. N. Micklem repudiating, in a school broadcast on religion, the good old Heaven of our fathers. He—more or less—hotly denied that it was a “place” to which you would go when dead; and in a welter of words, it looked suspiciously as if he even threw overboard the famous “Life Everlasting” so long associated with Jesus and the Bible. Mr. Micklem was trying—and heavens, how he tried!—to explain what the Kingdom of God was, and he gave us in himself a particularly bright example of how an intelligent man can get into a Divine muddle when he tries to deal with a religious imbecility. The only point which came out of his broadcast was that he was quite unable to tell us. But didn't “our Lord” know?

★

So, according to the Rev. R. Garrard, the Vicar of St. John's, Wimbourne, there is “anarchy” in the Church of England. We are not surprised. Unlike the Church of Rome, its members can do or think almost anything they like, so long as they mouth Jesus often enough. We have Anglo-Catholics, “Romeward” members, Evangelical Churchmen, High and Low members, and some are not averse to Free Church members. They nearly all differ on points of ritual, marriage and divorce, and some even are not altogether in favour of the Virgin Birth, or a Heaven and Hell as “places.” They differ about “Holy” Communion and the Real Presence as much as they differ about Confession. Still, with all its faults, the Church of England is miles ahead of the Church of Rome.

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Bournemouth “Echo” has been having some pretty hot discussions in its columns on the Churches and what they believe, with some incredibly silly letters from believers who believe because they believe, or because they have been told to believe, or because the Bible says something or doesn't, or because Christians won't read the Prayer book or the rubrics, or because “Evangelicals” haven't or have a cross in their churches. Most of these letters come

from members of Christian sects, some sillier than others. of course, but all exposing an extraordinary lack of simple thinking. Their solemnity can only be called *funny*.

Criticising J. M. Robertson

By H. CUTNER

IN ALL THE YEARS that I have read anything by Mr. C. H. Norman—and I seem to remember reading him before World War I—he always appeared to me to be a man with a grievance. He was always “agen” something or other, or “agen” somebody. I carefully avoided any controversy with him, though I myself am not perhaps altogether aloof from a discussion.

Why he waited—as far as I know—24 years before writing his absurd diatribe (February 22nd) I do not know, but a good deal of it is simply the mutterings of a garrulous old gent remembering, or trying to remember, what somebody, differing from him, may have said or thought 50 years ago. In any case, there was always a small minority before World War I who angrily declared that never would the dear Germans start a war; and if Mr. Norman differed from Robertson about this, the fact remains that Robertson was absolutely right, and Mr. Norman absolutely wrong. I never have learnt anything from Mr. Norman—and I cannot remember anything that he has ever written of any value whatever.

How little he remembers even about Robertson can be seen when he makes him the Editor of *The New Age*: and how little he knows about Freethought is shown when he cannot even quote correctly the title of Robertson's monumental *History*. He is so fuddled that he confuses Freethought with free thought. And, of course, some comparisons are quite “oderous.” Prof. Bury's little work, *The History of Freedom of Thought*, has a thoroughly deserved reputation, but it is no more to be compared with Robertson's four volumes than “Cavalleria Rusticana” can be compared with Wagner's “Der Ring des Nibelungen.” Surely Mr. Norman is old enough to have even a little sense of proportion? In any case, what does he really know about Freethought? Is he a Freethinker at all? I doubt it. I cannot remember that he has ever done anything for Freethought—but I am always pleased to be corrected.

In the same way, I cannot remember Mr. Norman ever writing on Shakespeare problems. That he may have read some of the plays and, with the help of Bartlett, even quoted them, I am ready to believe; but when he tells us that Robertson's “books on Shakespeare were simply absurd,” we have a right to know if he has ever read them—and if he has, could he answer them? If he knows as much about Shakespeare as he does about the Germans, his opinion here is completely worthless.

This is a free country and Mr. Norman has a right to express his opinions about anything as freely as any of us, but they should be backed by some knowledge at least. He tells us that except for the very few books he names, much of Robertson's “other writing was journalistic pot-boiling.” This is the acme of balderdash. Robertson was a journalist, of course, and proud of it; but are books like *Pagan Christs* and *Christianity and Mythology* and *The Saxon and the Celt* “pot-boiling”? Besides, what exactly is meant by “pot-boiling” when used by Mr. Norman? Robertson wrote magnificent studies on all sort of subjects, some no doubt purely ephemeral, but always marked with his wonderful encyclopædic knowledge based on enormous reading. Are books like *Pioneer Humanists* and *Modern Humanists* “pot-boilers”? If so, we could do with a whole crowd of them.

(Concluded on next page)

THE FREETHINKER

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All Articles and Correspondence should be addressed to THE EDITOR at the above address and not to individuals. THE FREETHINKER can be obtained through any newsagent or 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.

To those of our readers who keep sending us cuttings from newspapers, etc., we wish to tender our warmest thanks. We only wish we had space to deal with the many religious aberrations these cuttings disclose. But we hope that even if what is sent is not always used, this very useful ammunition will continue to be sent.

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

- Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics Institute).—Sunday, March 24th, 6.45 p.m.: W. EGAN, "Modern Myths."
Central London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, off Edgware Road).—Sunday, March 24th, 7.15 p.m.: Mrs. M. RITTER, "They are not as daft as you think." (The Problem of the Sub-normal Child.)
Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, March 26th, 7.15 p.m.: Closing Meeting. Social Interval. Debate: "Is the I.H.E.U. a Religious Movement?" H. J. BLACKHAM — No. J. HUTTON HYND — Yes. Chairman: Dr. W. E. SWINTON.
Glasgow Branch N.S.S. (Central Halls, Bath Street).—Sunday, March 24th, 7.45 p.m.: GEORGE STONE (Editor, *The Socialist Leader*), "Newspapers and the People."
Head Office N.S.S. (41 Gray's Inn Road, W.C.1).—Friday, March 22nd, 7.15 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, "The History of Civilisation" (fifth of six Study Classes). Subject this week: "The Church of England." (Admission 1/-.)
Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, March 24th, 6.30 p.m.: C. G. SHUTTLEWOOD, "M.O.U.S.E. and Beyond."
Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Hall, Parliament Street).—Sunday, March 24th, 2.30 p.m.: T. L. PEERS, "Anatole France."
South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, March 24th, 11 a.m.: JOHN LEWIS, B.Sc., Ph.D., "Is Nature Hostile to Man's Ideals?"
West Ham Branch N.S.S. (Community Centre, Wanstead House).—Thursday, March 28th, 7.45 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, "Evolution and the Idea of Progress."

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £201 9s. 2d.; A. Hancock, 1s.; A. F. Fenton, 5s.; G. L. Brown, £2; G. Swan, 5s.; T. Benton, 2s. 6d.; F. Baker, 3s.—Total to date, March 15th, 1957, £204 5s. 8d.

Notes and News

THE Social organised by the Humanist Societies on March 8th last at Conway Hall was a great success, for it gave their members a splendid opportunity to meet each other and exchange views and opinions. There was plenty of music—a series of songs by Schubert, Brahms and Wolff, as well as some folk songs from various countries by Madame M. Mislav-Kapper; and the ladies responsible for refreshments deserve the thanks of all who were present for the hard work they put in to make them also a success. The speeches by Messrs. Ashton Burall, H. J. Blackham, J. Hutton Hynd, Hector Hawton and Colin McCall were short and to the point. It is to be hoped that our Humanist Societies will get together again and arrange for more socials in the future. Too long have Ethicists, Rationalists, Secularists and Humanists been "apart."

World Union of Freethinkers

AS WE BRIEFLY NOTED last week, the 1957 International Congress of the World Union of Freethinkers will be held in Paris from Friday, September 6th, to Tuesday, September 10th. The President of Honour is Bertrand Russell, O.M., and the Vice-Presidents are Dr. R. P. Paranjpye, formerly Indian High Commissioner in Australia, and M. Jean Rostand, scientist son of the famous dramatist, Edmond Rostand, whose *Cyrano de Bergerac* will be known to all. Mr. Charles Bradlaugh Bonner, President of the W.U. of F., has tabled the official programme as follows:

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 6TH.—Afternoon: Unveiling of a monument to the Chevalier de la Barre, replacing the one removed by the Germans. Evening: Opening meeting at the Salle Saunier, Grand Orient, rue Cadet.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 7TH.—Discussion of "Population, Religion and Freethought," with papers by Prof. S. Chandrasckhar, M. Jean Cotereau, etc.

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 8TH.—Morning: "The Vatican Concordats and the Charter of the United Nations." Afternoon: Outing.

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 9TH.—Morning: Continuation of Discussions, Regional Reports, etc.

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 10TH.—Coach Tour.

It is hoped that there will be a good contingent from the British Isles, and readers who would like to be present at the Congress should write to Mr. Bonner at 23 Streathbourne Road, London, S.W.17. Please state also if you can speak a foreign language, as linguists in each national group will facilitate translation.

CRITICISING J. M. ROBERTSON

By H. CUTNER

(Concluded from page 92)

Robertson must have been enormously amused at any "chaffing" by Mr. Norman, whether over the oath of allegiance or not. When Mr. Norman tells us that the word "German" reduced "Robertson to a state bordering on political delirium," he is really describing himself. And I cannot fancy anything deadlier—to himself.

It would be useless to ask Mr. Norman to grow up, but we surely now can be spared these disgruntled mutterings of a very disappointed man.

The Two Contemporaries—2

By H. CUTNER

AT THE AGE OF 18, Chapman Cohen was giving lessons in philosophy at Toynbee Hall in the East End of London, under the late Canon Barnet; soon after, he discovered the National Secular Society, though actually he was an Atheist long before he began to lecture for the N.S.S., and before he had any knowledge of the contemporary Free-thought movement. He never had a religion, never had a God, and when he came in contact with both — God only at second-hand so to speak — he could find nothing but good-humoured contempt for the credulity and superstition they engendered.

It was very different with McCabe, who, under Catholic priests, was also studying philosophy as well as logic, metaphysics, and natural ethics. All Chapman Cohen's ideas on philosophy gravitate towards Berkeley's Idealism, accepting that thinker's views on "matter" almost without reservation. On the other hand, McCabe was obliged to accept the Church's views on the existence of the material world "against the Idealists," as he points out in his *Twelve Years in a Monastery*. This is very interesting. All his life, Cohen accepted Berkeley and his Idealism, but because he resolutely refused to go all the way with Berkeley, he "toyed," so to speak, with the term "Materialism." McCabe, on the other hand, was taught the reality of "matter," but had as a priest bitterly to reject Materialism. Cohen refused to accept any theory of "matter" which set out to tell us what it was — his "Materialism" consisted of what may be put quite simply, an absence of Vitalism. I shall deal more fully with this later.

As far as it went, that is, for the average priest, the scholastic philosophy McCabe was obliged to imbibe was a fine "mental discipline," but it was too narrow and antiquated when compared with modern systems, as he later found out. Unlike Chapman Cohen, who read what he liked before and after he was 18 — and it must be admitted his philosophical ideas hardly changed thereafter—McCabe was literally forced to learn what Rome insisted upon; that is "that the scholastic system is so clearly and uniquely true that all opponents are either feeble-minded or dishonest," with dishonesty only too frequently urged. It was only when he himself became a professor of philosophy — in the Church — that he realised the rank dishonesty of much he had been taught.

It is also interesting to compare the views of McCabe and Cohen on the Bible. In a general way, Chapman Cohen was not particularly interested in books on the Bible, for or against. For him, the science of Anthropology had settled the question of the origin of the God-idea as being nothing more than based on the fears and superstitions of primitive man. The Bible was a collection of tracts, sponsored by priests working on the fears and credulity of believers, and hardly deserved the intense scholarship which had been poured out by thousands of devoted men to prove its "truth." He could never have written a book like *Bible Romances*, into which Foote put all his great knowledge of Biblical criticism. Perhaps he felt that it had been done so well by Thomas Paine, Ingersoll, Bradlaugh, and Foote, nothing more from him was needed. Of course, when the occasion demanded, he could put some of the most unpleasant aspects of the Bible into any discussion with Christians, but he preferred to leave the Bible alone.

McCabe also did not write against the Bible as some of his anti-Christian predecessors had done. He also never

attempted to produce a work like *Bible Romances* — or even like Cassel's *Supernatural Religion*. In any case, he was taught (like all or most Catholics are taught) that the Bible is absolutely true, but must be interpreted only by the Chosen of God — that is, by priests. Not that even priests knew what to teach about the Bible, for in truth very few Catholics are quite sure what is the truth about it. Certainly at one time there was a tendency to accept some of the Higher Criticism and, if necessary, not a few Catholics were ready to drop the Old Testament, or would have liked to do so. One can see this tendency in the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, which now frankly admits that "modern theology" claims that Matthew "was mistaken" in saying that the famous passage in Isaiah about a Virgin producing a child was a "prophecy" of Jesus Christ.

Thus, neither of our contemporaries troubled themselves too much in writing detailed attacks on the inerrancy of the Bible, though no doubt both could have done so if required. At the same time, McCabe had a far more thorough knowledge of the Catholic religion in detail than Chapman Cohen had — in actual fact, only a Catholic brought up in a Catholic home could have this knowledge, and not always even then. McCabe gives instances of the mistakes even Zola made in his books, *Lourdes* and *Rome*, on Catholic practice and doctrine.

Whatever were the shortcomings of the Catholic education McCabe received as a priest, it did in the ultimate help him in many things which may not have been possible or so easy had he been self-educated. Just as, given equal ability, a good big boxer will always beat a good little boxer, so a university-trained man will in most cases be able to write a better book than one not so trained on subjects which require special knowledge. Geniuses like Dickens and Burns and others are, of course, excepted.

Chapman Cohen had no religion to shed, so that he was able to come to Freethought with what can be called a clean sheet. McCabe had to unlearn a good deal of what he had imbibed with great time and patience; and knowing little of the case for Freethought, had painfully to examine the evidences for Christianity when, at long last, he began to see how thoroughly he had been hoaxed by his Church. He did not find Newman, who was the greatest name in Catholicism, of any use whatever in helping him to shed his doubts; and he quotes from Newman's famous philosophical work — a work much more quoted by its title than actually read — *The Grammar of Assent*, "Not by logic hath it pleased God to save his people," as proving that Newman was the "last guide to choose in philosophical matters." The great Cardinal was, in McCabe's opinion, quite "unscientific" — and "no guide for a serious scientific mind." McCabe could find no help either in Dr. Ward, though he was "an able dialectician, a subtle metaphysician, and a vigorous writer," nor in the famous Roman Catholic Evolutionist — who, I believe, was later excommunicated — Prof. Mivart who, McCabe notes, "laughed at the doctrine of the miraculous birth of Christ."

It was not easy in any case for McCabe to secede from the Church, and in the book I have quoted there is a chapter on "secession" which makes very painful reading. None of this came Chapman Cohen's way. He was lucky in being without religion at any time, so, unlike McCabe, he had nothing to unlearn. Nor had he ever to meet the deliberate lies manufactured by the Church of Rome which have to be faced by all its seceders in general and by an

ex-priest like McCabe in particular. Protestants never invented bigger lies and libels against Thomas Paine than Catholics did against Joseph McCabe — and they gloried in it. No dirty lie indeed was too foul for the Roman Church; and Freethinkers at least — they are liable to feel it now an old story — should never forget this.

Is there a Freethought Party?

By E. G. MACFARLANE

TWO RECENT STATEMENTS in THE FREETHINKER have attracted my attention as being of urgent importance. First there was the letter from W. E. Huxley in the issue of 8/2/57, in which he complained that "the N.S.S. took sides in a political issue which in no way concerns Secularism." Secondly, there is the statement in "This Believing World" (15/2/57), in which it is asserted that "there is a Freethought party in the world, that it is active, and that its object is to abolish the ignorance, the credulity, and superstition which surround every religion."

My position is this. I want to be able to say that the latter statement is correct and that I am an active member of this Party. I have become more convinced with the years that this is what is required to put human affairs right at their roots. The idea of having a "Freethought Party in the world" — that is, a party which recognises no limitations of local nationality or ties itself to any ancient religion or modern religion — is something which breaks at a single stroke with all the existing political parties because these have all been formed or have grown through exploiting local and traditional prejudices of belief and patriotism which were born in an earlier, less scientific era.

Scientists think in terms of "homo sapiens" when they are discussing biological affairs, but what happens when they turn to political affairs? There we find persons like Bertrand Russell praising Royalty in a visit to New York in 1953 or John Boyd Orr rallying to the Union Jack in 1952.

If these people were thoroughgoing in their philosophy of human unity they would immediately dissociate themselves from all ideas and political parties which are identified with Crowns and national flags and religious movements, because to remain identified with these things immediately makes them incapable of adopting a fair attitude to all members of the human race. Moreover, the day of the priest is, or should be, past. No educated person nowadays has any need for authoritative pronouncements on what he should believe or what he should consider moral or immoral. The only reason priests do continue to exist is muddled thinking, and those who exploit the credulity and uncertainty of thought which has characterised the past, do their utmost to maintain the conditions of education and public information which encourage priestcraft.

Given a truly scientific and enlightened policy of education, and public information services which give free rein to all points of view, we could very soon spread the spirit of Freethought all over the world and create for the first time in the history of the world the necessary basis for a world-wide human civilisation. The world will not be civilised by accident. There is no God to wave a magic wand and dispel the divisive prejudices which inflame the minds of local patriots and fervent preachers of various gospels. No, the mental preparation of men for the attainment of a world civilisation is essentially a task for human intelligence and human ingenuity. The sane mental approach is the prerequisite for the political action to abolish national sovereignties, with all their monarchs and

flags, and to replace them with a proper constitutional unity for the world.

But what constitutes political action? Certainly not the kind of action complained of by W. E. Huxley. That is mere wordy propaganda which he complains about. Real political action is the result of the assertion of a deep general purpose which is so important that it can allow differences of opinion about the froth of affairs. Real political action will send candidates for "a Freethought Party in the world" to the polls to challenge those who think the world is all right as a battleground of nations and faiths. Who is with me in making this the pattern of our freethought activity?

The Passing Show

By D. SHIPPER

THE LORD'S DAY Observance Society held an exhibition to commemorate the 125th anniversary of its inauguration in 1831. The Society has a glorious history of interference with the basic enjoyments of life and are to be commended for their saintly stand. Congratulations and Many Happy Prosecutions!

* * *

Christian Missionaries have been attacked in Madhya Pradesh. The charge has been made that the Christian faith means to re-establish Western supremacy in the country.

It is certain that the Catholics regard infiltration and Eastern indoctrination as of primary importance. As the missionaries preach the protection of God, is it not surprising that God did not extend His protection to the unfortunate missionaries?

* * *

The 400 delegates to the 7th International Astronautical Congress were received by the Pope, who kindly gave them his solemn blessing and benediction and said; "The more we explore into outer space the nearer we become to the great idea of one family under the Mother-Father God." The Vatican, of course, is not only interested in discovering Satellites, but also creating them.

* * *

With education controlled by Fascist-Catholic authorities, the opening of more schools in Spain means a rigid channelling, during the formative years, of youthful enquiring minds in the direction opposite from liberalism. In 1936 there were 42,741 schools; in 1953 there were 60,714. It is now announced that 25,000 schools are to be opened within the next five years, a welcome gift to the Papal indoctrinators.

* * *

The Society of Catholic Action Youth in Italy (founded 1867) now has a membership of over *three millions*, an increase of 107,000 on the previous year. The members are drawn from youth organisations, professional bodies and universities.

* * *

Writing in the *Irish Independent* (9/1/57), Maurice Kennedy, who visited an American Youth camp, reports in shocked tones that the atmosphere was "completely atheistic." Worse still, "The Director openly stated that religions divided people as did patriotism." Only with great difficulty was the sorely-tried Maurice able to hear Mass on Sunday, no religious facilities being provided for campers. The article has large headlines: "Holiday Camp for Boys Where Atmosphere was Completely Atheistic." This intrepid traveller was, no doubt, glad to return safely to the Emerald Isle, where, we think he will have adequate religious facilities.

CORRESPONDENCE

N.S.S. AND POLITICS

Mr. W. E. Huxley in your issue of February 8th said something that badly wanted saying and raised a question that has never been faced by the National Secular Society. One wonders how many Atheists have refused to join the N.S.S., and again, how many have left because of the political twist that dominates the Society. Before the war there was always an argument at the Conference when the annual report persisted in condemning the Gestapo's activities in Germany but just as persistently refused to condemn the Communist slave camps in Russia. I know, because I took part in several and moved amendments accordingly.

The Plymouth branch was not a large branch but it was self-supporting for money and speakers for some five years prior to the alterations to the wording of the "Principles" at the Manchester Conference. We averaged 24 meetings each winter in an area where Atheism required preaching, and had received quite good support. The report of the Manchester Conference, which surrendered to the small number of persistent Communists in accepting the reworded "Principles," was the last meeting of the Plymouth Branch. I made no secret at Manchester that there could only be one result if this change was carried through, but the political trend outweighed the purely secularist.

The last two sentences of Mr. Huxley's letter should, in my opinion, be the basis of the National Secular Society's activities, instead of which it is being towed along as an adjunct to the left wing Socialist and Communist parties, and hence a large number of Atheists are outside and intend to stay outside whilst this continues.

H. H. HICK.

ATHEISM AND MORALITY

While many people agree that Christianity is founded on myths and fables, they are somewhat apprehensive about discarding it altogether. They point to Godless Communism and ask: "Is that the road you wish us to take?"

In vain does one argue that it is possible to be agnostic or atheist without being a Communist. I believe if you were to have a series of articles in THE FREETHINKER on this point, they would be welcome and helpful.

I may say I enjoy THE FREETHINKER very much, but I suggest you let us have more articles on the subject of morals without religion.

J. THOMSON, JNR.

SECULARISM IN POLAND

As a member of the N.S.S. I was particularly interested in certain comments contained in the February edition of "Polish Facts and Figures." Evidently, in spite of Poland being a Roman Catholic country, several hundred teachers and parents have decided to press for the establishment of a Secular School Society.

These teachers and parents are ensuring that their children shall be isolated from the almost indelible influence of religion. After all, the restoration of war-torn Warsaw is being achieved by sweat and tears and I believe the bitter lash of experience has taught them the futility of the "bended knee."

Freethinkers have always contended that religion belongs to the infancy of nations. One may deduce that when Mr. Khrushchev spoke of Poland's "political maturity," the significance of his remarks applied to more than political considerations.

Equally encouraging is the establishment of the "Atheists Club" in Warsaw in order to resurrect the "Freethinkers Society."

THOS. HOGAN.

THE MARXIST CONCEPTION OF HISTORY

With regard to Mr. F. A. Ridley's article in the issue of February 22nd, although it is closely reasoned, this reasoning is based on a fallacy inherent in the Marxist conception of history. It is the assumption that modern history follows the pattern of Feudalism, Capitalism and Industrialism; in that order of time. In point of fact, Feudalism and Capitalism are parallel developments and not successive as the Marxist implies.

A little study of the position will show from about 1400 onwards the Church acquired her leaders more and more from the great Italian banking and commercial clans until they became the majority party within the Papacy, i.e. the Medici and Dela Rovarii, etc., etc.

The Protestants, on the other hand, acquired their strength from the landowners, and town bourgeoisie of North Europe, who adopted the Capitalist system perfected in Italy under the ægis of the Popes.

The Church supports the strongest side irrespective of its economic foundation, and as Mr. Ridley points out, Communism has come to stay and is in the process of becoming the strongest side. Therefore a Comino-Papal alliance seems likely as both sides are experts in the art of intellectual manipulation. A little theological juggling should present no difficulties. It is easy to see the Church

moving to the left. But can the Communist Internationale move to meet it? The answer lies, I think, in the old slogan, "Religion is the opium of the masses." It is just as important for a "Dictatorship of the Proletariat" that the masses should be opiumed as it is for a Capitalist or Feudal Government. As the acknowledged supreme in spiritual dope peddling, Rome should be received with open arms.

It is Mr. Ridley's final remarks which cause me real anxiety. A permanent alliance such as he outlined would mean the eventual extinction of freedom, which at the moment flourishes because of the disunion of its two most powerful enemies. But should it become the nut in the crackers of clergy and Commissar all freedom, Militant Atheism included, will be crushed.

I cannot help but feel that the party would make an excellent "Secular Arm."

P. F. MOORE.

ANSWERS TO QUIZ

1. (a) 1949, (b) 1950, (c) 1951, (d) 1952, (e) 1948, (f) 1947.
2. Jews were not subject to the Christian ban on dealing in usury: the Popes needed money. So far from being full of Christian charity, then, the Popes were merely short of cash.
3. Literally belief in nothing. Acting as a sort of physic in the intellectual field in Russia a century ago, it helped in preparing the way for the eventual revolution.
4. (a) Pavlov, (b) Keith, (c) Havelock Ellis, (d) Milne Bramwell, (e) Watson. 5. None.

G.H.T.

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