

The Freethinker

Vol. LXXVIII—No. 23

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Fivepence

THE BOLSHEVIK REVOLUTION of 1917 overthrew the old regime in Russia and installed the Communist Party in power. The aftermath of the first World War saw the new regime firmly established in Russia, henceforth officially known as the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics. During the second World War, the Soviet Union, under the leadership of Stalin, successfully resisted the German *Drang Nach Osten* (Eastern Expansion). The aftermath of the second World War has witnessed the expansion of Communism on an inter-continental scale—implying, that is, by the term Communism the type of State Socialism now officially endorsed in Russia, China and in Eastern Europe. (In official Communist theory Communism is a higher phase of Society which still lies in the future.) One can probably affirm that 40% of human beings now exist under the Red Flag of Socialism east of the Iron Curtain, the invisible but most highly effective political Equator of our time.

Religion

The World Union of Freethinkers is a non-political organisation and here, as elsewhere, the Freethought movement includes all shades of political opinion. We claim, in fact to be the only movement in which thought is entirely free, and in whose ranks are to be found Tories, Liberals, Socialists, Anarchists and Communists. It would accordingly be quite improper to initiate here a political discussion of the merits or demerits of Communism. However, a thousand million people or so exist under this regime, and the current attitude taken by this powerful bloc towards religious theory and practice must necessarily be a matter of exceptional interest to all students of the contemporary religious problem. I was fortunate enough last year to visit East Germany under exceptionally favourable conditions for the study and discussion of this question, and more recently I made contact with a Canadian Socialist publication, *Religion and Atheism in the Soviet Union*, which gives a great deal of valuable, factual information on the current question of the mutual relations of Church and State, Socialism and Religion in the Soviet Union. I can supplement this as it affects the Peoples' Democracies of Eastern Europe from my own contacts with German and other East European Communists.

Church and State in the Soviet Union

Still the fundamental legal authority on this subject is what our authority describes as "the historic decree of 23rd January 1918" issued by Lenin soon after the Bolshevik Revolution had installed the new regime. The decisive clause in this document is the first, which our authority demonstrates to be the effective basis of the present Soviet legal code as it affects religion and the Churches. This states "The Church is separated from the State." Of almost equal importance is Clause 9 of the same historic document: "The school is separated from the Church." The effective separation of Church, State and school constitute the essential basis of the present Soviet Law on the subject.

As logical corollaries, the religious beliefs of Soviet citizens are not inscribed in Government registers, and religious oaths in State ceremonies or in the Law Courts are inadmissible. Church property, as distinct from that of individual Church officials, is not taxed and any twenty adults can apply for an appropriate building to be placed at their disposal for the purpose of religious worship. Another clause in the Soviet Constitution guarantees equal legality and facilities for both religious and anti-religious propaganda. When one reflects that Tsarist Russia was a theocracy in which the Tsar was simultaneously Emperor and Pope, and in which all religions other than the official Orthodox Church were subject to all

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

Communism and Religion

By F. A. RIDLEY

kinds of disabilities, it is obvious that the decrees issued by Lenin signified a cultural, equally with a political and economic, revolution. To cite our authority again: "In the Soviet Union, in conformity with Article 124 of the Constitution, the Church is separated from the State and the school from the Church. The Church has no right to interfere in the political activities of the State; neither does the State interfere in the internal affairs of the Church. No Church receives any money from the State. All Church organisations and the clergy are supported by voluntary contributions from members of the Church; all Churches and religions enjoy equal rights. There is no State religion in the U.S.S.R." In the German Democratic Republic and, I understand, in some other Peoples' Democracies in Eastern Europe, the current separation of Church and State is not carried so far. The East German Government pays subsidies to the various religious cults. Another clause in the Soviet Constitution prohibits clerics from indulging in breaches of the State Law on religious grounds. And the stories of religious persecution sedulously circulated by Catholic periodicals in America and Western Europe mostly refer to such prosecutions of anti-Socialist clergymen. When I was in East Germany last August I was informed that both anti-Semitism and Christian Science are illegal there, since both these cults offend against State legislation on social and medical practice. Though the Canadian periodical does not mention the fact, there has, I believe, been friction in the Soviet Republics of Central Asia, where Islam predominates, on the application of the Soviet Laws announcing complete sex equality. These are held by the Muslim clergy to contravene their religious legislation based on the Koran, which asserts the permanent inferiority of women as a *religious* duty and dogma. Next to the Russian Orthodox Church, Islam is the most widely-held religion in the U.S.S.R.

The Communist Party and Religion

One must clearly distinguish between the current attitude of the State and that of the Communist (Bolshevik) Party. This is frankly Marxist-Leninist and, as such, anti-religious. Karl Marx, as is well known, went on record with the historic affirmation that "Religion is the opium of the people"—a social drug to lull the misery of the dis-

inherited masses. Lenin, the actual founder of Russian Communism, is cited by our authority as writing: "We demand that religion should be held a private affair as far as the State is concerned. But by no means can we consider religion a private affair as far as our Party is concerned." In an interview recorded here, Lenin's successor, Khrushchev, underlines this point of view, adding, in a recent interview with the American journalist, W. R. Hearst—"But those who believe in God are becoming fewer and fewer; young people are growing up and they, in their overwhelming majority, do not believe in God. Public education, the dissemination of scientific knowledge, the study of the laws of Nature, leave no place for a belief in God." In consonance with the above attitude, the pre-war Communist Party actively supported the League of Militant Atheists, which was for a time affiliated to the World Union of Freethinkers, and whose representative, Mr.

Yaroslavsky, was present at our London Congress in 1938. Nowadays, the Communist attitude discourages open anti-religious propaganda, and appears to rely exclusively on the efficacy of public education conjoined with the progressive evolution of Socialism to undermine and finally to dissolve the pre-scientific outlook of religious dogma. So, at least, I was assured when I discussed these questions with professors in the Franz Mehring Institute in Dresden. No doubt their attitude would differ for countries like ours, where the same Socialist conditions do not apply and where the Established Church has been actually defined as "the Tory Party at prayer." Whatever political views one may hold, it appears that the above facts disclose a secularist conception far in advance of anything in countries such as ours, where even that elementary postulate of Democracy, the separation of Church and State, is ignored by our present medieval Constitution.

The Gravedigger Buries His Dog

By FIALHO DE ALMEIDA

THE OLD GRAVEDIGGER, nicknamed the Owl, had a great love for his little dog Scamp, which faithfully followed at his heels; at the burials the dog appeared serious with his head thoughtfully hanging. At meal times, Scamp licked the pots in the kitchens of the rich homes, where to his master were thrown, in a spirit of Holy Charity, the leftovers of the dinners. Thus lived the gravedigger and his dog in perfect harmony for many years, at night sharing the same pallet of straw. As the Owl was an inveterate drunkard, he felt he must also teach his dog to drink; at first the wine had to be forced down the little animal's throat, but in the end he got to like it and licked it up greedily. When it rained heavily, the Owl was confined to the house with rheumatism: so the dog went out on the prowl. Daringly entering a door which emitted an inviting smell, he made off with any food he could find, to lay it carefully at his master's feet. One night, Scamp failed to appear. The gravedigger spent the night looking for him, climbing walls and trees to call him. His search being fruitless, he went back home to fall weeping on his bed of straw. When day dawned he found the dog lying dead on the side of the road, his hairs bristling with the frost which had fallen the night before. As the old man leaned down to touch the little body, a shiver of horror went through him who had washed and dressed so many corpses for burial.

"It was the cold and hunger," he sobbed. "Yesterday we ate nothing. We men have clothes to keep us warm but the poor animals must go naked. You, my friend, are no less than others and so must be buried with full funeral rites."

When he crossed the sacristy with his shovel on his shoulder, the priest, tying up the ends of the amice, paused in the murmur of the ritual prayers to guffaw: "Where are you taking that shovel? Who the devil is dead?"

"My dog," replied the Owl sharply. "Not one of you deserves the respect due to him."

He reverently laid the body of the dog on a board, carefully composing the limbs; he then cut down some olive branches and as he placed them over the little corpse, murmured: "This is your shroud." In order to give the idea of a funeral procession, he bribed four boys gathering sticks to take hold of the bier. When all was in order, the Owl, his voice hoarse from grief, called out: "Start off, boys! We will now carry the body of this our brother to his grave." The children, with childish awe, set off along the narrow path for the top of a high hill where the Owl had decided

to open up the grave. He walked at the back bareheaded, carrying his shovel on his shoulder, chanting a nursery rhyme in a booming voice, in imitation of the priest officiating at a funeral:

"Little dog, little dog, go up to the skies!"

At which the boys responded:

"Fly away his soul, fly away his soul,
To join the angels in heaven."

On reaching the top of the hill, the Owl stopped and meditated. After a minute he said with his hat raised in the air: "Stop here, boys!"

They laid down the bier and he began to open up the grave, while the dull thud of his shovel as it beat rhythmically on the earth, echoed on the hill. With a face constricted with sorrow, he finished off the edges. When done he called to his companions: "Pass me down the coffin." He gently removed the olive branches from the body with the same care as if he was burying a beloved child. One of the servers said as he leaned over the grave: "He seems like a dear little angel!" "You are right," replied the Owl, affectionately stroking the face of the child. "Let us again chant the hymn to help the soul of this, our brother, to eternal bliss." The Owl led the procession round the grave, waving a branch of a tree while he sprinkled the body with imaginary holy water. In the end he filled in the grave and stuck the olive branch on top. The dog's funeral was over and they separated.

Later, the Owl could often be seen climbing the hill to the dog's grave, where he passed hours gazing across the sky, humming a tune, as was his habit in moments of sadness. One day, the village barber said to him with a cynical smile: "I hear you gave your dog a great funeral!"

"It's true, you mule," he answered. "He deserved it more than you ever will."

[Translated from the Portuguese by Nan Flanagan.]

Bless 'em All

Two hundred owners of motor scooters recently attended Mass at a Franciscan church in Dublin for the third annual blessing of their machines, an edifying ceremony which was performed by the Rev. Father David, O.F.M. In Malta, earlier this year, there was a special religious service to which children brought their pets. Cats, dogs, cage-birds—and even bowls of goldfish—were solemnly blessed during the service. "Bless 'em all!"—that's the motto.

Another Ex-Priest

By COLIN McCALL

IT IS APPROPRIATE, now that Mr. O. C. Drewitt's story of his years as a monk has been serialised in THE FREETHINKER, to draw the attention of readers to a book published in 1955 by another ex-Roman Catholic priest. *People's Padre* (Peter Davies, 15s.) is, I think, still available, though I was fortunate in obtaining a remaindered copy during the last National Book Sale.

Emmett McLoughlin was born in 1907 and, in September 1922, he entered St. Anthony's Seminary of the Franciscan Order in Santa Barbara, California. He remained a friar for 26 years, 12 of them in the seminary and the last 14 in a parish in Phoenix, Arizona, probably the worst slum area in America, where he founded the first U.S. hospital with a definite racial integration policy. His work there made him renowned and respected, but his hierarchy accused him of neglecting his priestly duties. Compelled to choose between the priesthood and his social work, he chose the latter and resigned from the Roman Church.

This autobiography is impressive because of its complete sincerity. Here was a boy who—like hundreds of others he has known—entered a Franciscan seminary without being fully aware of what he was doing. Once in, he was subjected to "twelve years of the most thorough and effective intellectual indoctrination the world has ever known." "It begins gently"—says Mr. McLoughlin—"with a blending of the legitimate pleasures of boyhood, the stimulus of competition in studies, and the pageantry of the forms of an ancient religion unseen in an ordinary parish church. It ends twelve years later, with a mental rigidity and acceptance of medieval superstitions and religious concepts as archaic as those of the Buddhist monks upon the isolated, frozen mountains of Tibet."

Perhaps the most valuable feature of *People's Padre* is its demonstration of this indoctrination process: a process as near perfect as clerical ingenuity can devise. The fact that the process failed in Mr. McLoughlin's case, as it does in many others (more than the Church will ever admit) is some encouragement for humanity. It indicates that an anti-life policy must ultimately fail; that secularism is, in fact, winning the battle with religion, albeit slowly. Mr. McLoughlin, it is true, remains a Christian, but his "approach to God" is "through man and not through rituals and sacraments." "To me," he says, "love of God could be expressed only through love of man, respect for man, help to man." He thus gives a religious motive for secular action.

The Roman hierarchy fully appreciates the basic conflict. A letter from the Rev. Brendan Mitchell written to Mr. McLoughlin (then Father McLoughlin) on June 10th, 1947, admits that the latter has done "a magnificent job . . . perhaps the most spectacular thing ever done by anybody in the Province ever (*sic*), or by any priest west of Omaha." But—it goes on—"There is an opinion current that your approach to the hospital work lacks priestliness and is too naturalistic. . . ." A week or two later, the full Council asserted that the Father's work as superintendent of St. Monica's hospital had "led to the spiritual neglect of your Negro parishioners and to laxities in your manner as a Franciscan and a priest." They were perfectly correct. It was people's *bodily* welfare, rather than their spiritual welfare, that Father McLoughlin was concerned about. The ultimatum came on September 18th, 1948. He was ordered to "sever all connexions" with the hospital by the 1st of January 1949. Instead, he left the Church: "I respectfully

submit to you my resignation from the Franciscan Order and from the active ministry in the priesthood of the Roman Catholic Church, as of December 1, 1948." Body had triumphed over spirit: this world had beaten the next.

But Bedlam broke loose. This sincere and courageous man was inundated with letters and telephone calls: congratulations, regrets, curses and denunciations. Friends of different faiths stood by him; the Church tried every tactic it knew. Bishop Gercke of Tucson expressed concern for his soul; intimated that the hospital venture would fail. From his "long experience," Bishop Noll of Indiana had "learned that ninety-five per cent." of renegade priests "have deeply regretted the action they took, and have heartily wished that they had patched it up earlier." "Dear Emmett"—wrote the abbot of the Trappist monks in Kentucky—"Jesus never turns a man down."

This was the theme of many letters. "There is still time"; "May you realise before it is too late"; and so on. Particularly worth noting is a letter from a girl of 13: ". . . why don't you go back to help God? Some day I hope I may give my life to God by becoming a nun, a Loretto nun, it is a great privilege to be able to help God. That Mr. instead of Father does not fit you. Father, you watch out because that devil is always around trying to tempt everybody. Please think it over. I will keep on praying.—Yours truly in Christ."

"Of the more than one hundred Roman Catholic priests whom I know to have made the break, only three have gone back," says Mr. McLoughlin. One of these three, Father Boyd Barrett, told him that "At the present moment ten thousand nuns are weeping, imploring, praying *for you* to the Sacred Heart and Our Lady."

Well, they wept, implored, and prayed in vain. Emmett McLoughlin has not gone back; it is inconceivable that he will unless his reason fails him. For he has seen *through* Catholicism. He has married and is leading a full life. "At the age of forty-two," he says, "I began to learn mentally and physically to live as a human being and a normal American citizen." For the first time he began to read Robert Ingersoll, Thomas Paine, Dostoevski, Thomas Wolfe, Omar Khayyám, and many others who had been "mere names" before. It was a new world. How new can be seen from *People's Padre*.

"AMSTERDAM has always been called the city of the Blessed Sacrament after the miracle that happened on March 15th in 1345. On that day the Blessed Sacrament was taken to a man lying ill in one of the houses of the Kalverstraat, now one of the big shopping streets of the city. When soon afterwards the man became sick, the woman who was nursing him threw the vomit into the fire for fear of desecration. Next morning she found the sacred host hovering above the flames. After first reverently putting the host in a white linen cloth the woman warned the priest from the St. Nicholas Church, who took the host privately back to the church. In a miraculous way, however, the host returned to the house. This event was taken by the authorities as a sign that Our Lord wanted this miracle to be publicly acknowledged, and in solemn procession the Blessed Sacrament was carried back to the church. This was the first of an annually recurring procession in commemoration of the miracle. Pilgrims came to Amsterdam from all over the world. The Coat of Arms of the city of Amsterdam proudly displays the crown of the Emperor Maximilian of Austria, a privilege granted to the city by the Emperor in gratitude to the Blessed Sacrament for his recovery from a serious illness. With the Reformation came the end of the colourful procession that used to wind its way through the narrow streets and along the canals of the medieval city.

—From *A Visit to Holland: What Catholics Should See*, by a correspondent, *The Tablet* (29/3/58).

This Believing World

No one need be surprised that the recent scathing exposure of that well-known Spiritualist, Mr. William Roy, by himself in the *Sunday Pictorial* is now called by his admirers, "defamation." Roy gave detailed descriptions of the way in which he fooled his guileless adorers and dupes—and now? He is back in business again exactly as the Fox Sisters were after they had confessed, in almost the same way, that they had bamboozled the American public for over 40 years. The "White Rose" Sanctuary in Battersea will, no doubt whatever, be crowded with worshippers at his shrine, all certain that they can easily get in touch with their dead relatives and friends. Whatever else may be said about them, Spiritualists have never been put off by fraud.

★

Roy's great champion is a Mr. Frank Turner, who has written *The Love Romance of Two Worlds*, which we thought may have had some connection with Mr. Barbanell's journal, *Two Worlds*—only Mr. Turner charges Mr. Barbanell with "wickedness" in attacking Roy, and there appears little love lost between the two gentlemen. In any case, Mr. Turner insists that "Persecutions of our physical mediums by self-regarded spiritualist 'experts' must cease, or else . . ." We tremble at the thought of what may happen to the "experts" in the face of such a terrible threat!

★

Angrily denouncing the Bishop of Bangor's refusal to let his churches be used for "spiritual" healing is a reverend gentleman—the Rev. Alex Holmes, of Canada, who points out in *Psychic News* that the Gospels give 26 instances of "Jesus healing individuals," and that "Archbishops, Bishops, clergy, ministers, or lay people" can never "add up to the kind of plus living that Jesus demands." To sort out this rigmarole is hardly worth it, but the fact remains that there is not a scrap of evidence that Jesus—or anybody else—ever healed anybody anywhere through "divine" healing. The Roman Emperor Vespasian is "recorded" to have performed "miracles" of healing—but does anybody outside a lunatic asylum believe he did?

★

The Chairman of the Congregational Union, the Rev. W. Griffith-Jones, recently sadly lamented the way in which the Christian Faith in this country is regarded "as one of a tolerated minority in a predominantly secularised society," and bitterly complained that "on television we often get blatant Atheism propagated; intemperance and prurience shamelessly advertised." The way our tender-hearted Christian parsons lump together "blatant Atheism, intemperance, and prurience" can always rouse the enthusiasm of all good Christians even if they know it to be a cowardly and impudent libel. But we cannot help wondering what the television propagandists themselves think of Mr. Griffith-Jones? Do they really like to be told about this "prurience" being shamelessly advertised? Is it true that "blatant Atheism" is so often "propagated"?

★

One of the greatest shocks Christians ever got was when the findings of the famous Bowman case, championed so stoutly by G. W. Foote, became law, and Freethinkers could leave legacies to an avowed Freethought Society. In the *Leicester Mercury* the other day were particulars of a legacy left to a convent only if a judge could hold in law that the convent "was a charity." In it were nuns "who devoted themselves to prayer and meditation"—the prayers interceding with God "for the general good of all mankind." Alas, the hard-headed judge, not particularly moved

by the spectacle of nuns spending all day praying and perhaps all night too, decided that this was a "mere belief" and not a charity—and so the good nuns did not get the legacy. "The law," he decided, "must have more constructive proof than mere belief." But is not "mere belief" the very backbone of true Christianity?

★

A reader of the "Methodist Recorder" lets that journal know that he is "appalled" at some of the evangelistic methods "employed in a recent mission held in his local chapel," and wants to know if they are essential, and the only way to God? The answer to both questions was "an emphatic no"! The reader was told that this was not the way of Jesus, who always "respected the personality of others." Is not this answer truly delightful? How Jesus respected the personality of others can be seen in the way he addressed the Pharisees—"Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" Lawyers, too, got it "in the neck"; in fact, even the Catholic Church never attacked heretics more violently than Jesus attacked those with whom he disagreed.

The Rising Generation

XXXI

ABOUT 1,400 YEARS AGO some parts of this country had been made Christian and some had not. Kent was one of the parts that had been "christianised," while in Northumbria the old Pagan gods were worshipped.

King Ethelbert of Kent had a daughter called Ethelburga and it was arranged that she should marry King Edwin of Northumbria if he promised to let her and her servants be Christians. He promised this, and kept his promise, so along with Ethelburga and her train of attendants went an old Christian priest, Paulinius, "a man beloved of God," to see that they followed Christian customs and attended his Christian services. Paulinius also told the King about Christ and tried to persuade him to turn Christian.

About that time two things happened to King Edwin that made him think some new power was looking after his interests. First, he became the father of a baby daughter and, next, he was saved from death by a faithful servant. An enemy of Edwin's tried to stab him with a dagger but this servant got in the way and received the blow himself.

Attributing this good fortune to the Christian God that Paulinius had told him about, Edwin said something like this: "If I beat my enemies I will serve Christ and his god instead of my old gods." And it happened that way, so Edwin became Christian and let Paulinius baptise the baby, as well as other children. (We hear, incidentally, that two of them "were snatched out of this life while still in their baptismal garments.")

Because King Edwin had turned Christian, all his warriors became Christians too. Then the people followed suit. They did not say, "We must look into this religion of Christianity and see if it is true." They merely said, "Our King has changed his religion, so that goes for us too."

Actually, when Edwin was killed in battle, the people of Northumbria went back to their old gods, but changed into Christians again when the wind was set in that direction, so to speak. And that is an essential way in which the religion of peoples has been decided for them. Those born in Britain will be recorded as being Christians, and the same with others born in Christian regions of the world. Those born in Ceylon would be mainly Buddhists, those in Egypt Moslems, and so on.

One of the first things to learn about religion is its geography.

G. H. TAYLOR.

THE FREETHINKER

41 GRAY'S INN ROAD, LONDON, W.C.1.
TELEPHONE: HOLBORN 2601.

Hon. Managing Editor: W. GRIFFITHS.

Hon. Editorial Committee:

F. A. HORNIBROOK, COLIN MCCALL and G. H. TAYLOR.

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.; half-year, 15s.; three months, 7s. 6d. (In U.S.A.: 13 weeks, \$1.15; 26 weeks, \$2.25; 52 weeks, \$4.50.)

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 welcome during normal office hours.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Room 4, 83 Suffolk Street).—Sunday, June 8th, 7 p.m.: Mrs. A. CLARKE, "People on the March for Peace."

Orpington Humanist Group (Sherry's Restaurant).—Sunday, June 8th, 7 p.m.: Dr. C. O. CARTER, "A.I.D."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, June 8th, 11 a.m.: M. BURTON, D.SC., "Fossils of Tomorrow."

OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (The Mound).—Every Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. CRONAN, MURRAY and SLEMEN.

Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Every Sunday, 8 p.m.: Messrs. F. HAMILTON, E. MILLS and J. W. BARKER.

London (Tower Hill).—Thursday, 12-2 p.m.: Messrs. J. W. BARKER and L. EBURY.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every weekday, 1 p.m.: G. WOODCOCK. Sunday, 8 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, MILLS and WOOD.

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Pierhead).—Every Wednesday, 1 p.m.; every Sunday, 7.30 p.m.: Various speakers.

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Every Sunday, noon: Messrs. L. EBURY and A. ARTHUR.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY. Sunday, 11.30 a.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

Wales and Western Branch N.S.S. (jointly with Cardiff Humanist Group).—Sunday, June 8th: Outing to Swansea and the Gower Coast. Meet at Central Bus Station, Wood Street, Cardiff (Astepy's Corner) at 10.45 for 11 a.m. Bus to Swansea.

West London Branch N.S.S.—Every Sunday at the Marble Arch from 5 p.m.: Messrs. L. EBURY, A. ARTHUR and J. W. BARKER.

The National Secular Society

ANNUAL CONFERENCE 1958

CO-OPERATIVE HALL, NOTTINGHAM—MAY 25th

IF THIS CONFERENCE proved nothing else, it did show that the members and delegates attending it were not mere "yes" men and women. They had come to elucidate things, to decide future action, and if this meant dissent on some items, dissent they did. But it was done without rancour. Secularists can differ on many things, but they are united in their Secularism and sense of common purpose.

The weekend began most pleasantly on the Saturday evening (May 24th), when we were heartily welcomed by the Nottingham Branch, headed by their young President, Mr. A. Johnson. Aided by generous allowances of refreshments, time only too quickly passed away, with members renewing old contacts and making new friends in the cordial atmosphere of good fellowship.

On Sunday morning the Conference itself began promptly at 10.30. As the President, Mr. F. A. Ridley, was unfortunately unable to be present owing to his wife's illness, it was necessary to elect a Chairman for the day, and Mr. A. R. Williams—so well known to FREETHINKER readers for his many charming and original contributions—was elected. He proved an excellent choice, performing his duties admirably.

After the good wishes sent by the American Rationalist Association had been read and the roll of delegates called, last year's Minutes (which had previously been circulated) were adopted.

The General Secretary, Mr. Colin McCall, then read the Executive Committee's Report, which was greatly appreciated, and which will reach all members later in pamphlet form. The Report emphasised the many-sided activity of the N.S.S., as well as the activities of the Freethought and Humanist Societies in different parts of the world. Mr. R. Johnson moved its adoption and was seconded by Mr. J. M. Alexander. In the discussion which followed, Mrs. Rogals, the energetic secretary of the Manchester Branch, asked for a ruling on her Branch membership. In accordance with Rule XV.6, the Chairman ruled it to be the number of members whose capitation fees for the current year had been paid and for whom cards had been issued. The Report was then adopted.

After Mr. W. Griffiths, the Honorary Treasurer, had explained some matters concerning the Financial Report, this also was adopted.

The big event next was the election of a President. Mr. F. A. Ridley had agreed to stand again, but some of the Branches thought that a change might be good for the Society, and Mr. F. J. Corina was put forward as a candidate by the Manchester Branch. The supporters of both Mr. Ridley and Mr. Corina made excellent speeches—Mr. Ebury, for example, pointing out the scholarship and encyclopaedic knowledge of Mr. Ridley which shone through his articles in THE FREETHINKER. In addition, Mr. Ridley had a considerable reputation on the continent. Mr. J. W. Barker warmly seconded, while Mr. Percy Turner again expressed his point of view that we could dispense not only with a President but with rules. Mrs. Rogals put in an eloquent plea for Mr. Corina, saying he had been working for the Cause with all his old enthusiasm—lecturing and debating whenever and wherever possible. She thought we wanted a new type of propaganda.

Mr. McCall, in supporting Mr. Ridley, spoke of the invaluable help he always received from him, and among those who took part in the discussion were Mr. Jones, Mrs. Venton and Mr. Shipper. A show of hands resulted in the election of Mr. Ridley.

The two Vice-Presidents, Mr. T. M. Mosley and Mr. L. Ebury, were re-elected, as were the Treasurer, Mr. W. Griffiths, and the Auditors. None of the members of the Executive Committee was opposed except Mr. J. W. Barker by Mr. D. Gagan, who had been nominated by the Dagenham Branch. On a show of hands, Mr. Barker was elected.

The Motion proposed by the Bradford Branch dealing with Rule VII.1, that a President should not hold office for more than three consecutive years, was outvoted. There were again some excellent speeches made against the idea that it was possible to bring in new blood by putting the old ones out. The problem was not quite as easy as that. During the discussion, Mr. F. A. Hornibrook made one of his energetic pleas for more constructive ideas and fewer destructive ones. The Motion was not accepted.

For the next item on the Agenda, proposed by the Manchester Branch, Mrs. Rogals put forward the plea that a

Conference should have the power to remove the General Secretary, and that the Executive Committee should have no power to re-appoint any person so removed. Messrs. Smith, Taylor, Challand and Kirk spoke on this issue; and Mr. Griffiths pointed out that it would be impossible to find anybody worth having if he was at the mercy of such terms for his employment. The motion was lost.

The next item was the important one of fixing the venue for the next Conference, members of the Executive Committee pointing out that it was often most difficult to find hotels for the members and delegates attending, as well as a suitable hall for the meeting. It would lessen the difficulties if previous Conference could settle the matter, thus giving a full year in which to make arrangements. Mr. Barker thereupon suggested London, but Mr. Shipper thought that Bristol next year would be a suitable spot and it would help local propaganda. Mr. Barker willingly withdrew his suggestion, and Bristol was unanimously chosen for next year's Conference.

On the question of Nuclear Disarmament—proposed by the Manchester and North London Branches—the Conference fully endorsed the Executive Committee's action in associating the N.S.S. with the campaign.

In the absence of Mr. P. F. Moore, Mr. G. H. Taylor read that member's proposals for the Executive Committee to consider "ways and means of co-ordinating and improving our propaganda by both the spoken and written word." Mr. J. M. Alexander supported the Motion, and other speakers joining in the discussion were Mr. Ebury and Mr. Smith, of Birmingham. We must give youth a chance in all our propaganda, it was urged, and train them in every possible way. The Motion was passed.

For the Central London Branch, Mr. Alexander proposed that the Executive Committee should "investigate thoroughly the whole question of Catholic Action in public bodies." As he pointed out, "the menace could not be too exaggerated," and the Motion was agreed to by the Conference. And for the Manchester Branch, Mrs. Rogals asked the Executive Committee "to obtain a report from

all Branches on the need for the appointment of a travelling propagandist in their areas." It was pointed out that such a scheme would cost at least £1,000 a year, but it was agreed that the reports should be obtained.

For the Manchester Branch again, Mr. Smith spoke strongly and carried a Motion deploring the question of the preferential treatment to religious bodies by the Rating and Valuation Authorities. Then finally the Conference deplored the racial policy of the South African Government and the Conference called upon Branches and individuals to do all in their power, in conjunction with like-minded organisations, to secure the earliest possible release of those now held on treason charges and the abandonment of mass trials by the South African Government.

So a very successful and worthwhile Conference ended with a unanimous vote of thanks to Mr. Williams for his Chairmanship. As the Outdoor Demonstration was due to begin at 6.15 p.m., there was just time for tea, after which, under the able command of Mr. J. W. Barker (Kingston-on-Thames), two extremely well-attended meetings took place simultaneously in the Old Market Square (surely one of the best open-air speaking sites in the country?). The speakers were Vice-Presidents L. Ebury (North London) and T. M. Mosley (Nottingham), J. M. Alexander, J. Brennan and G. Plume (Central London), J. Byrne (Dublin), J. W. Challand (Nottingham), F. J. Corina (Bradford), D. Shipper (Wales and Western), C. F. Smith (Manchester) and the General Secretary, C. McCall, all of whom also answered questions from the large crowds.

Fortunately the weather remained springlike, and on Whit Monday morning an outing to Nottingham Castle and its caves was most interesting.

Finally, a word must be said in praise of the way the Conference was organised. It is no easy job to ensure that everything goes smoothly, and the "behind the scenes" work of the General Secretary, helped by Mrs. R. E. Seibert, of the office staff, Mr. A. Johnson and his Nottingham colleagues and many others, all helped to make the weekend a success.

H.C.

The Great Way

By REV. JOHN L. BROOM, M.A.

(Concluded from page 172)

TAOISM regards man's original nature as essentially good, and is fond of comparing it with a piece of unhewn wood, unspoiled and fresh. Lao Tzu contends that it is loss of this original simplicity through the sophistication resulting from over-education which is primarily responsible for man's emotional maladjustments. One of the most startling chapters of the Tao-te-Ching begins, "On the decline of the great Tao, the doctrines of love and justice arose. When knowledge and cleverness appeared, great hypocrisy followed." And it goes on, "Banish wisdom, discard knowledge, and the people will profit an hundredfold; banish love, discard justice, and the people shall recover love of their kin." Clearly it is the Kantian type of morality which is here condemned—artificial codes of ethics which, like the Ten Commandments, are, as the philosopher W. T. Stace puts it, clamped on man like a straitjacket. The Confucians strongly stressed the necessity of correct, conventional behaviour, and Lao Tzu, the anarchist, rebelled against such solemn moralists, contending that their ordinances interfered with man's freedom of action. It is, of course, a platitude that countless abominations have been perpetrated in the names of righteousness, truth and justice from Old Testament times onwards. And it will generally

be found that the stern moralist brings more unhappiness in his wake than the easygoing libertine. Lao Tzu does not, of course, countenance "immorality," for the wicked man is as much at the mercy of moral codes as the saint—by rebelling against them he acknowledges their force. But the man whose mind is unsullied by considerations of right or wrong, good or evil, acts freely and spontaneously, doing right as it were instinctively, obeying the laws of his own nature. We must not behave righteously because the Ten Commandments or any book or our "conscience" (which is itself a product of social morality) tells us to—we must be good because such is of the essence of our humanity.

The accumulation of knowledge for its own sake also receives strong Taoist condemnation, because this practice too, overlays and obscures the original simplicity and goodness of human nature. The world is full of over-educated blockheads, men who know the binomial theorem backwards, who can recite the Kings of England from William the Conqueror without a slip, who are conversant with the latest findings in physics or chemistry, and yet who have not the slightest conception of how to achieve tranquillity of mind. There is a craze to be educated, to have letters

after one's name, to pass exams, but, says the Tao-te-Ching, "The greatest cleverness appears like stupidity, the greatest eloquence seems like stuttering." A man may not know how to read or write, and yet be supremely intelligent in the all-important business of living. The farther one pursues knowledge for the sake of being knowledgeable, the less one knows. Therefore, as Lao Tzu puts it, "The sage knows without running about, understands without seeing, accomplishes without doing."

Finally, Taoism counsels us to follow the great ancient Chinese practice of "wu wei." Literally, wu wei means inaction or doing nothing. It is, says Mr. Lin Yutang, perhaps the most brilliant modern interpreter of Taoism, the exact equivalent of "laissez faire." A high proportion of the world's misery is brought about by well-meaning but mistaken interference with the lives of their fellow-men by people who imagine they have a mission to convert those whom they regard as sinful. But this belief is often a product of egotism and self-righteousness, being based on the idea that one is morally superior to one's neighbours. Of course, if help is obviously required, we must give it without stint—to interpret Taoism with remorseless logic is itself to betray gross misunderstanding of basic Taoist principles. But as a general rule, we should let people live their own lives, working out our own salvation with diligence, by doing nothing. Problems have a curious way of solving themselves if ignored and let alone. Doing nothing, of course, is not the same as mere laziness—indeed, the passion to interfere and to fight against life's difficulties is so strong that to cultivate the art of not acting is often the hardest work in the world. But the drowning man who struggles usually sinks beneath the waves, while he who keeps calm until help arrives will often survive. "By doing nothing," writes Lao Tzu, "everything is done," and continues "I do nothing and the people are reformed of themselves." (That is, by the moral influence and example of the sage.) "I love quietude and the people are righteous of themselves."

As a working philosophy, Taoism is no longer practised in its pure form. Yet its principles as enshrined in the Tao-te-Ching will, I suggest, long remain as guiding lights to those in darkness or despair.

Who was Robin Hood?

By J. MARTIN ALEXANDER

NOTTINGHAM, the venue of this year's N.S.S. Conference, has other claims to fame. I was recently reminded of this, whilst discussing secular matters with a fellow member, in a certain low tavern, by catching, through the cancerous smoke haze, glimpses of a well-known TV character: Robin Hood.

The exploits of this legendary hero of the English people have delighted generations of schoolboys, and have been portrayed on cinema and TV screens by a succession of athletic actors from Douglas Fairbanks to Errol Flynn and Richard Greene. The commonly accepted accounts of the exploits of Robin and his merry lads and lasses are too well known for me to reiterate here, but *who was Robin Hood?*

He is traditionally identified with the Earl of Huntingdon, who, returning from the Crusades, and finding his rightful heritage stolen by the wicked Sheriff, assisted by the Bishop of Nottingham, is alleged to have retired to the glens of Sherwood. There he gathered a band of followers and carried on a guerilla war against the rich Norman barons. There is, of course, no historical evidence for this story, and at the risk of incurring the eternal enmity of millions of small boys (of all ages!) let me say, little

evidence that he ever existed as an historical figure.¹

When Christianity established itself, it still had to suppress the old fertility and nature religions. The common people were slow in completely abandoning their ancient beliefs. (In fact, in many country districts, particularly in the Midlands, they have never entirely done so.) Many of the old gods were transformed into saints and their shrines and temple sites Christianised. Other deities became evil spirits and devils and their devotees persecuted for practising witchcraft. Yet others, and the rituals connected with their worship, have come down as garbled folk memories of popular heroes and customs. Such a one is Robin Hood.² This is not to say that there never was a band of outlaws in Sherwood Forest who helped the poor and robbed the rich. Undoubtedly there was, but these have nothing in common with the folklore legends any more than a person named Jesus who may have lived, has with the Christ of the Bible. The whole story is fraught with suspicion when considered as historical reality.

Robin Hood is traditionally the leader of the oppressed Anglo-Saxon peasantry against the Norman landowners, yet the name Robin is pure Norman-French, certainly not Anglo-Saxon! This fact attains greater significance when we recall that Robin Goodfellow is a pseudonym of Puck,³ of the fairy folk of Britain; another of the half remembered deities along with Robin Hood, King Arthur, Lady Godiva, who was worshipped at Coventry and Banbury. (She can be identified with the Maid Marion of the May Day revels and the Sherwood stories, when considered as a form of the great Earth-mother or fertility goddess.)⁴

It is a strange coincidence, to say the least, that in the folklore of France there is a similar bandit hero, known as "Robin du Bois"—Robin of the Woods! This suggests a possible origin of the name. The fact that they both wore green garments is significant in considering this as a nature myth associated with the sacrificial character of the May fertility rites. One of the traditional May Day characters, "Jack in the Green," symbolising the dying and resurrecting vegetation gods, Osiris, Attis, Dionysus,⁵ etc., is the model on which the common inn sign "The Green Man" is based.

Now, the great fair at Nottingham at which Robin and his men are supposed to have appeared in disguise to take part in the revels and delight the common folk, was the great fertility festival of the first of May, with its ritual dancing around the Maypole (originally a giant phallus,⁶ the fertility symbol *par excellence*). At this feast took place the crowning of the ever virgin May Queen. It is not surprising that in many parts of the country Robin Hood is strangely associated with the May rituals.⁷ In one legend the scene of his activities is mysteriously transferred to Epping Forest, with which he is also associated! Maid Marion appears to be confused with the May Queen. She is, of course, one and the same person, the eternally virgin earth goddess.⁸ At Coventry and at Banbury the May procession was headed by a naked female on horseback. This made its way to the sacred tree, Maypole or phallus (later a "cross") erected in the market place and is remembered as the Lady Godiva who rides "a cock horse to Banbury Cross."

Let us now consider some of the other companions of Sherwood. There is Little John, the huge man, the giant with his stave, another phallic symbol. There is Will Scarlett, the very close friend of Robin, who in the earliest versions of the legend is killed, and according to some stories miraculously restored to life. This fact, together with his name, suggests the blood sacrifice of the ritual: the red king who must be slain and whose blood mingles with the seed to promote good harvests.⁹ The rotund priest

Friar Tuck is also an important character. Sometimes Maid Marion is more his companion than she is of Robin. This is quite understandable if we consider him as the high priest of the nature goddess.

According to local tradition, the outlaws hid in a huge oak in the centre of Sherwood. This is strongly reminiscent of the Osirian myth.¹⁰ The supposed oak tree still stands and its size and age suggests this was the focal point of pre-Christian worship. The oak was sacred to the Druids and by its alleged magical properties and association with mistletoe, was a well-known emblem of fertility and nature.¹¹

All in all, Robin Hood as an historical person is very suspect, but as a vaguely remembered and Christianised form of a pagan nature god, he survives as a people's hero. The peasantry, paying lip service to Christianity but harking back to ancient beliefs, would certainly take part in proscribed and therefore secret, rites at seed-time and at harvest. What more appropriate place than around the sacred oak? Here they would join in communion with nature deities; Marion, the earth mother and her green-clad consort, the corn god with his arrows of fertility—Robin of the Wood, sworn enemy of Sheriff and Bishop, of Church and State. The old religion versus the new.

¹*Encyclopædia Britannica*: article "Robin Hood."

²W. J. Thomas: *Early English Prose Romances*.

³Sir Sidney Lee: article "Robin Hood" in *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. XXVII (a most scholarly examination of the problem).

⁴Moncure D. Conway: article in *Harper's Magazine*, vol. XXXIII, 1866. Also see Rev. Alexander Gordon: article "Godiva" in *Dictionary of National Biography*.

⁵Sir J. G. Frazer: *The Golden Bough*, pages 129, 352 and 390.

⁶J. B. Hannay: *The Rise, Decline and Fall of the Roman Religion*, page 99. H. Cutner: *Short History of Sex Worship*, page 181. P. Stubbes: *Anatomie of Abuses*, 1583, fol. 94.

⁷*Encyclopædia Britannica*: article "Robin Hood." Also *Dictionary of National Biography*.

⁸*Encyclopædia Britannica*: articles "Maid Marion" and "May"; also *The Golden Bough*.

⁹*The Golden Bough*, page 296 *et seq.*; *ibid.* page 378.

¹⁰Prof. A. Erman: *Handbook of Egyptian Religion*.

¹¹*Golden Bough*, page 160.

NOTE

WILL READERS please note that the Northampton excursion announced for Saturday, June 21st, has regretfully had to be cancelled. An explanation will appear next week.

★

DR. EDWARD ROUX's article, *Science, Religion and Miracle*, advertised to appear in this issue, has had to be held over.

CORRESPONDENCE

PEOPLE IN GLASS HOUSES...

I was greatly entertained the other evening listening to the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Liverpool on ITV.

The crowning statement was that all insane persons were Atheists. May I suggest that his "Grace" (if he has not ample evidence in Liverpool) on his next visit to London spends his lunch hour at Tower Hill on Sunday morning or afternoon at Hyde Park?

At the latter he will find "sane" people grovelling on their knees in the dirt or mud (according to the weather) before a bearded gentleman with a Rosary and a picture of the Virgin!

C. STANLEY.

CHALLENGING INFIDEL GOLIATHS

Just for fun I have been perusing a "hot-gospel" pamphlet entitled *From Atheism to Christ*, and purporting to be the confessions of a one-time Secularist propagandist who has now "Seen the Light."

The first words of the Preface (by a Church of Scotland minister) speak of "the raging, tearing, ill-natured propaganda of Atheistic presumption" and describe the author as a convert "from the ranks of the red, bloody and dangerous movement

itself," who now, on the Lord's side, is challenging "the Goliaths of infidelity."

Par le parapluie de ma tante! I'm all agog to learn the sordid details of "the red, bloody and dangerous" activities directed from Gray's Inn Road. Mayhem at Marble Arch? Terrorism on Tower Hill? Horror over Hampstead? Little does the unsuspecting man in the street realise what nameless infamies are cloaked by the laconic and innocuous-seeming "Lecture Notices, etc." printed in THE FREETHINKER.

S.B.

DREAMS

Re Mr. Taylor's interesting article on "Dreams," I think it is only sighted people who have dreams. Many years ago, a man who had been born blind informed me that he never had dreams. Since then, I have learned of other such cases. It may be that the basis of dreams is sight. People who have become blind by accident, old age, or disease do dream, but I have never met a case where a person born blind ever dreams.

PAUL VARNEY.

WITHOUT COMMENT

ABOUT 6,000 people lined the pathways in Sandringham Park yesterday to see the Queen and Princess Anne walk back to the house after attending morning service at Sandringham Church. The Queen and Prince Philip earlier attended Communion before the Prince flew south to play polo.

—*The Daily Telegraph* (26/5/58).

SUPREMELY HELPFUL BOOKS

By DR. MARIE STOPES

MARRIED LOVE (28th Ed.)	...	...	7/6
CHANGE OF LIFE IN MEN AND WOMEN	...	...	7/6
CONTRACEPTION (Complete Medical text, illustrated), pp. 491	...	...	42/-
BIRTH CONTROL TODAY	...	...	7/6

FROM ALL BOOKSELLERS

If there is any difficulty or delay in obtaining any of these books, please write direct to the Author, Dr. Marie Stopes, at her FREE Clinic, 108 Whitfield Street, London, W.1

FOR NEWCOMERS

AS AN INTRODUCTION TO FREETHOUGHT

THE HISTORICAL JESUS AND THE MYTHICAL CHRIST by Gerald Massey.

ROME OR REASON? by R. G. Ingersoll.

THOMAS PAINE by Chapman Cohen.

MARRIAGE: SACERDOTAL OR SECULAR

by C. G. L. Du Cann.

ROBERT TAYLOR by H. Cutner.

WHAT IS THE SABBATH DAY? by H. Cutner.

Total value, including postage, 7/6,
for 5/- post free

PIONEER PRESS

41 GRAY'S INN ROAD . LONDON . W.C.1

AVRO MANHATTAN'S LATEST WORK

THE DOLLAR AND THE VATICAN

ITS CHARACTER, METHODS AND AIMS

312 pages packed with hitherto unknown facts

225 LAFAYETTE ST. 21/- PIONEER PRESS
NEW YORK 12, N.Y. 41 GRAY'S INN RD.
LYLE STUART Postage 1/3 LONDON, W.C.1

THE AMERICAN RATIONALIST

A new Illustrated — Militant — Informative Magazine
with the international outlook (a bi-monthly)

Published in St. Louis, Mo. (U.S.A.)

Subscribe through THE FREETHINKER, 41 Gray's Inn Road,
London, W.C.1, at 6/- a year; sample copies, 1/- each