

The Freethinker

Volume LXXVIII—No. 40

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Fivepence

SOME TIME AGO a Czech film was shown in London which depicted the dramatic and tragic historic episode of John Huss and the beginnings of the Hussite movement in the first half of the 15th century. It was a formidable heretical and subversive movement which, while starting as a religious heresy, ended by provoking an armed rising against the whole established Catholic feudal order in Church and State, then far more closely allied than they are nowadays.

In the history of the Czech nation the Hussite drama represents, perhaps, the most tragic and momentous highlight. Whatever Marxist-Leninist views the present Communist rulers of the Czech Republic may entertain privately about religion as such, they are

careful to preserve and to glorify the heroic figures and episodes in their national history. The film represented a case in point. I did not myself see it, nor have I ever visited Czechoslovakia, but I have seen in the (also Communist-controlled) German Democratic Republic, just over the Czech border, how this policy works in practice. The famous door upon which Luther nailed his historic theses at Wittenberg, which are usually regarded—not perhaps altogether accurately—as the actual starting-point of the Protestant Reformation—is still “religiously” preserved as a national memorial, where I actually beheld a company of Communist policemen gazing upon it with rapt interest—and why not? After all, while no Communist, Luther was nearly as obnoxious to the Conservatives of his day as are the present day Communists.

The Morning Star of the Reformation

It is always rather difficult to date precisely a complex international movement like the Reformation. A century and a half before Luther nailed his historic defiance of the Pope on the door of Wittenberg University, the English heretic, John Wycliffe, may be said to have launched the Reformation in the second half of the 14th century. Wycliffe, the “morning star” of the Reformation, had both a national and international influence. In England, his Lollard disciples appear to have organised the Peasants’ Rising of 1381, which led to their subsequent ruthless extermination by the combined forces of Church and State through the terrible Act of Parliament, *De Heretico Comburendo* (1401). (“For the collective burning of heretics” would perhaps accurately convey its sense.) But Wycliffe also made disciples on the Continent, conspicuous amongst whom was the Czech preacher Jan Hus (John Huss), Rector of the important University of Prague. The career and influence of Huss were eventually destined to surpass even those of his English mentor, Wycliffe. Huss may best be regarded as the link between Wycliffe and Luther.

The Life and Death of Huss

John Huss was born in Bohemia about 1370, and after holding several academic posts, became Rector of the Czech University of Prague in 1402. Here he came into contact with the ideas of the English reformers and soon, under his influence, Prague University became a centre of

Wycliffe ideas. As in England, contemporary political and social factors soon coloured this originally ecclesiastical movement for reform; as a Czech writer informs us, the theological revolt of Huss against the cosmopolitan Church of Rome soon coincided with the current revolt of Czech nationalism against its then German rulers, and eventually, with one of those agrarian peasant risings against the feudal order in Church and State. Huss himself

appears to have been a Czech nationalist and, both on that account as well as on account of his reforming activities, soon became a national hero in Bohemia. But, like Wycliffe before him and Luther after, he does not appear to have fully endorsed the political

and economic programme of his more radical followers, who, after his martyrdom, became the militant backbone of the Hussite movement. However, he went quite far enough to arouse the apprehensions of the Church and Court of Rome and in 1414, he was summoned before the General Council then sitting at Constance. This Council had been summoned for the express purpose of restoring the unity of the Church and was presided over by Pope John XXIII in person. Huss, very rashly, went, and was duly arrested, condemned to death as a heretic and, after his stubborn refusal to recant, was eventually burned alive on July 6th, 1415. The story that he was guaranteed a safe-conduct by the then King of Bohemia, does not appear to be authentic. No Catholic ruler in the Middle Ages would have dared to guarantee in advance, the safety of a heretic to be condemned by the Church; to do so would itself have been obvious heresy. The next year—1416—Huss’s chief lieutenant, Jerome of Prague, was also burned alive. (Wycliffe had been lucky enough to die in his bed, but his remains were burned. Heresy was emphatically not a safe occupation throughout the Ages of Faith.)

The Hussite Revolution

The martyrdom of Huss and Jerome was soon followed by a formidable armed revolt by their Hussite followers, who from 1419 onwards, under the leadership of a Czech knight, a military genius named Jan Ziska, not only overthrew the Catholic regime in Bohemia, but successfully maintained themselves against a whole sequence of Crusades, “holy wars” preached by the Catholic Church against the Hussite heretics. Ziska, who has been recognised as one of the great captains of all military history, appears to have first noted the value of mobile artillery—then in its early stage of development, and like Cromwell two centuries later, understood the military value not only of “trusting in God” but equally of “keeping his powder dry.” Like Cromwell, he never lost a battle; and the Hussite movement was eventually destroyed, not by the combined forces of Catholic Europe, but by its own internal divisions. After Ziska’s death, the Hussite movement split into two “wings,” which waged fratricidal war against each other. But the Hussite stronghold of Mount Tabor remained independent throughout most of the 15th cen-

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

John Huss and the Hussite Heresy

By F. A. RIDLEY

tury, and the more radical German reformers of the next century, such as Thomas Muenzer and the Anabaptists explicitly recognised the Hussites as their predecessors in the Reformation. The great Belgian historian, Henri Pirenne, has even compared the Hussites with the Bolsheviks since, like so many medieval revolts against the totalitarian Catholic society of the Middle Ages, the Hussites were political and economic radicals no less than religious heretics.

Dead Man's Drum

The Hussite revolution made a tremendous stir in Europe. Henry V of England, the victor of Agincourt, was about to march against them when he died; while Joan of Arc announced her intention of dealing with them when she had finished with the English. (Unfortunately, the English

finished with her first!) But the stark terror which the blind Hussite General Jan Ziska excited is best indicated in the famous story first related by Pope Pius II that, after Ziska's death, the Hussites made a drum of his skin, at the first sound of which the Catholic Crusaders used to turn tail!—not perhaps historical but certainly no mean military tribute. John Huss certainly started something and the Hussite movement represented a major incident in both Czech and European history. It is most fortunate that the present-day Czech regime is so able and apt to celebrate not only one of the most stirring episodes in its national history, but also some of the greatest heretics of the past. The notable film, *Jan Hus*, is to be shown at Leicester Secular Hall on Sunday. We hope it will draw the appreciative audience that it so richly deserves.

Why be Agnostic?

By ADRIAN TA'BOIS

"WHY BE AGNOSTIC?" asks the Atheist. "You see no evidence of any God and neither do I. Neither you nor I believe in a God, so what is there to be Agnostic about?"

Now let me tell you a true story. I used to be an Agnostic and (before I became an Atheist) considered the above argument to be a very poor piece of reasoning on the part of the Atheist. What a damned cheek it was (I used to think) to ask what there was "to be Agnostic about." In other words, having decided that there isn't a God, the Atheist asks *you* what *you* want to be Agnostic about. I couldn't help feeling that the argument would carry equal force the other way round. After all, a Christian, having decided that there is a God, could also ask what there was to be Agnostic about. If these lines of thought were considered they would run thus:

- (1) How can you be Agnostic about something which doesn't exist?
- (2) How can you be Agnostic about something which does exist?

The Atheist would simply point out that implication (2) was incorrect, while the Christian would simply point out that implication (1) was incorrect. All that these types of remarks ever did was to strengthen my Agnostic approach. Don't believe—there isn't a God; do believe—there is a God.

Of course, I could see that the Christian arguments put forward to justify God were not convincing once they were examined in detail, so I was naturally doubtful about the existence of a God. But Atheists who firmly told me—with an air of absolute authority—that there wasn't, isn't, and never can be any God whatsoever, never succeeded in *proving* that there isn't a God. "Perhaps" (I mused) "there is a God but the evidence for one just hasn't come my way." Later on, however, I realised it was as hard to prove God didn't exist as to prove that fairies and witches don't. And this made me think again even more furiously than before! I read heaps of Atheistic and Christian literature. I read Thomas Paine and the Bible. I went to Atheistic meetings and had a series of friendly arguments with a clergyman. I couldn't be certain if books on Atheism were necessarily more reliable than those written about Christianity. But the turning point came when I found that the facts in some Atheistic writings about early man, how he lived and ate, *why* he thought the way he did, *why* he was very superstitious, etc., could be verified by books on ancient history, which usually had no religious axe to grind.

Then I pictured the modern countries with their engi-

neers, doctors, astronomers, powerhouses, hospitals, laboratories, etc., with all the *accurate* information and technical data that have carefully been built up. Now at last I was thinking to some purpose. For the opposite picture was appalling. In a sparsely inhabited land I pictured desolation among sandstorms and hard rock, with queer human beings in "nightgowns," walking about in their bare feet. It was known that few could read or write. They thought only dimly, had little knowledge to go upon, and where knowledge is little rumour is great. All types of supernatural stories were whispered from mouth to mouth. For these credulous people had little else to talk or think about. Fear was great, for there was little logic to temper or tone down the wild rumours and hearsay that were passed down through the ages from generation to generation. No wonder there were many miracle men, people with demons in them, virgins who produced offspring, men who were perfect, serpents who spoke.

I realised that people such as these were responsible for passing down the "religious truths" of Christianity; people such as these were responsible for the "authenticity" of Christ, God, the Holy Spirit, and all the rest. *No wonder* the stories were fantastic; *no wonder* they differed from what we see today in modern England. And *no wonder* that from now on I *know* there isn't a God.

Youth Fellowship

Leicester Secular Youth Fellowship seems to be going now in full swing. The following analysis will be of interest to secularists everywhere. We have about twenty members and numerous friends who ride with us on our camping youth hostelling activities. I asked each one individually at different times, on different days the following questions. *And please note:* There has been no inculcating of ideas into these boys.

1. Do you believe in God? 2. Do you believe in an after life?
 3. Are you interested in religion? 4. Why did you join this club?
- Answers: (1) Out of twenty: 11 said "No"; 5, "Don't know; don't think so"; 3 of these, "Couldn't care less"; 4 did believe; none attends a Sunday school; none agreed with religious instruction in school. (2) 16, "No"; 2 did; 2 were not sure. (3) All answered "No." (4) "Because there are no prayers." "Because you don't tell us all the time to be good and you seem to expect it of us." "Because you don't lecture us on some of the things that seem silly and impossible." *i.e.*, Bible.

I may add they like the camp because they are not embarrassed by having prayers, and there are no irksome restrictions. Everyone is expected to behave well and keep up the good name of the Leicester Secular Society. This works very well indeed.

C. T. POWELL

Blasphemy Threat at Tower Hill

By COLIN McCALL

READERS WILL HAVE NOTED the short news item (THE FREETHINKER, August 29th) about National Secular Society meetings at Tower Hill, London. It may now be useful to explain what has been happening in some detail.

At a meeting at Tower Hill at lunchtime on Thursday, August 7th, Mr. J. W. Barker, following Mr. L. Ebury on the platform, made a light-hearted reference to Roman Catholic relics. A Catholic in the audience promptly called him a "bloody liar." Mr. Barker gave authority for his remarks and elaborated them; the Catholic repeated the sanguinary epithet on two further occasions and then accused Mr. Barker of blasphemy. That same afternoon, while still unaware of what happened, I, as N.S.S. Secretary, received a phone call purporting to come from Scotland Yard. As far as I can recall, it began something like this: "This is Scotland Yard; Inspector Roberts, Extension 26. We are checking up on a complaint. Could you tell me the name of your speaker at Tower Hill today?" I asked for further details: why he wanted to know; but he said he was sorry he couldn't tell me, though they would be writing to me later. I then said I couldn't tell him who had spoken because I hadn't been there and, after a short conversation, we agreed that he would get in touch with me in writing and I should get to know who had been speaking. Immediately after replacing the receiver, I phoned Mr. Barker and learnt what had happened. As there were plenty of witnesses to testify to the abusive language of the Roman Catholic, we were content to await developments.

The following Thursday, August 14th, at Tower Hill, Mr. Ebury, knowing what had happened, said: "It's a pity some people cannot defend their religion without going to Scotland Yard," whereupon the same Roman Catholic retorted "I never went to Scotland Yard," suspiciously like an admission of guilt. Mr. Ebury then proceeded to talk about the blasphemy laws in this country, citing Mr. R. S. W. Pollard's pamphlet, *Abolish the Blasphemy Laws*: "Only certain religions are protected; in practice, these are the doctrines of the Church of England those of other Christian Churches so far as they correspond with the established Church. It is not blasphemy to ridicule the Catholic doctrine of Mass, or the doctrines peculiar to the Buddhist, Jewish or Moslem religions." Mr. Barker also spoke.

A week later, August 21st, a police inspector in uniform attended at Tower Hill with, it is believed, some plain clothes men. Mr. Ebury and Mr. Barker were again the speakers, and after his talk, Mr. Ebury was approached by the inspector for his name and address, which he gave. The inspector said he was following up a complaint by six people (names; no addresses) and he had taken down one phrase that he thought might be blasphemous. Here is Mr. Ebury's own account of what happened:

"During the course of an hour's address, I alluded to the subject of pious relics and frauds, and showed the audience a bottle containing water from the Holy Well in the House of the Annunciation at Walsingham, which I had purchased on a visit there. I then told them the story of the famous House of the Annunciation at Loretto, still claimed as genuine by the Roman Catholic Church, together with the surrounding legend. It was supposedly transported by angels from the Holy Land in the 13th century, because of the Virgin's grief at seeing her house in the hands of the hated infidel. I drew a word picture of

the sorrowful Virgin pleading with 'God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Bogey, and members of the Old Firm,' to provide a gang of angels for the moving job. It was these words in quotation marks that the inspector considered might be indictable for blasphemy and was intending to report to Scotland Yard."

On Saturday, August 23rd, a carbon copy of a badly-typed note was sent to the Secretary, the Secular Society. Dated August 22nd, it was marked "To be published in *Daily Mail*" and was unsigned. It read:

"Mr. Ebori [sic], regular speaker on behalf of the Secular Society at Hyde Park and Tower Hill, will be charged with blasphemy by a group of members of the Church of England, who contend that he has contravened the Articles of the Church of England, established by law, by publicly blaspheming and ridiculing the Christian religion.

"Evidence for legal action is now being prepared by lawyers and as part of their evidence is a copy of his speech delivered on the 21st of August on Tower Hill taken down by Scotland Yard's Police Officers.

"No doubt the outcome of this case will be of very great interest."

There is little doubt, of course, that this anonymous note was phoney, and a phone call to Scotland Yard virtually confirmed this. It also enabled me to check on "Inspector Roberts." He, too, it seems, is phoney, and certainly unknown at Extension 26. And, since nothing else unusual has happened since receipt of the note—which, as far as I am aware, has not appeared in the *Daily Mail*—it is perhaps appropriate to draw a few conclusions.

It is my belief that this was a deliberate, though perhaps clumsy, attempt to intimidate the National Secular Society. I believe furthermore that it was the work of Roman Catholics. The first reference to the Church of England was in the anonymous note and this was after Mr. Ebury had explained that the blasphemy laws principally apply to the Church of England. It is undoubtedly true that a police inspector attended the August 21st meeting, but that a blasphemy prosecution would be instituted on the strength of those fifteen words of Mr. Ebury's is barely credible: it would show the absurdity of the law and provide the N.S.S. with free publicity. No, having done its duty in response to a complaint, Scotland Yard seems, sensibly, to have forgotten the matter. This may not apply to the Catholics whom I believe to be at the back of the affair, but they must have realised by now that National Secular Society speakers are not easily intimidated. For us, the affair may serve as a reminder that the blasphemy laws still exist as a source of possible trouble and (hardly necessary this!) of the intolerance of the Church of Rome. Finally, it shows that present National Secular Society speakers are worthy of their predecessors. Len Ebury and Jimmy Barker have ignored all threats and continued their splendid work at Tower Hill. It is some measure of their success that a few intolerant people should want to silence them but that the bulk of the crowd is sympathetic.

NEXT WEEK
THE SUPERSTITION OF ASTROLOGY
By RUBY TA'BOIS

This Believing World

Hearty congratulations to the members and supporters of the Devon and Somerset Staghounds which, in the name of Sport (with a capital S), butchered a stag they hunted after chasing it twice into the sea. Their hearts bled for the poor stag which, had it not been butchered, as Col. Murphy gallantly pointed out, "would have been battered to death against the cliffs at high tide." After all, what was a stag "created" for except to be chased by a Stag Hunt? And is there any greater sport than to see a stag racing away from death, its heart pounding, its eyes exposing its terror and horror...? Besides, are not the gallant sportsmen and sportswomen true Christians?

★

Religious statistics in the U.S.A. given by *The Observer* show that there are 9,500,000 Methodists there, thus topping the Protestant sects, who altogether number 60 millions, 38 millions of Catholics, and five millions of Jews. But are all these actually church or synagogue goers? The answer is definitely no. The *American Churches Year Book* shows—for the first time—a downward trend in relation to the increase of population. Roughly, 61 per cent. of the people affiliated to the Churches (it is claimed) go to church. It used to be 62 per cent. But we cannot help wondering how many even of the churchgoers really believe? We never hear these days anywhere quite as much about miracles or devils or Hell as our fathers did.

★

In a discussion at the recent Church Missionary Society's Annual Conference at Cheltenham (as reported in the *Gloucester Echo*) about the last thing discussed was Christianity. We were given heartbreaking details of the way the "natives" suffered from illness and poverty, how men and women doctors were coping with all this misery, and how 100,000 needy people at Hong Kong were sleeping on the housetops—but where was Jesus? Where was God Almighty? How could "Christian instruction"—one of the things advised—help "natives" who were adding to the population at a terrific rate and who were suffering from lack of food and dying in thousands from illnesses they could not cope with?

★

Fancy reading passages from the Bible to people suffering from, say, leprosy, or other terrible tropical diseases, haunted also by extreme poverty and hunger! Let us give credit to those devoted people who try and in some way alleviate the sufferings of unfortunate peoples all over the world—but telling them about David or Noah or Jesus has about as much effect as telling them about Little Red Riding Hood. The day of Church Missionaries is over; what is now needed is Science—doctors and nurses and teachers who, if they still believe in God, rather teach "God helps those who help themselves."

★

It is not only "The Freethinker" which has commented on the extraordinarily poor quality of modern sermons and of the work of the average parson generally. Here we have the Rev. Brian Hession—who wrote a book describing his cure from cancer—writing in another book, *The Gentle Step*, "It is a pity that the standard of performance of the present day clergyman is so poor, almost pathetic." He quotes an American parson who said: "The clergy produce sermons fit for a theological seminary and deliver them in a parson's voice with plums in their mouths." Poor parsons! Once they were the elite of the land—and now? How very few of them are prepared to defend their beliefs in open encounter with a Freethinker!

With a volubility probably unequalled anywhere else in the country, Prof. J. Foster, of Glasgow University, provided ITV's "About Religion" with a discourse on the Bible as the world's greatest book beloved not only by millions in Europe and America but also by millions in Africa and Asia. Translated into over 1,100 languages, almost everybody in the world can now share his own adoration of God's Precious Word—every word of which, of course, is Divine. Prof. Foster appeared to know nothing of Biblical criticism and seemed to adore even the commas which decorated the text. It was a heartening sight to see and hear his enthusiasm for all who put myth and miracle, credulity and superstition, above *reason*.

Review

Heavenly Humor. 152 pages. \$1.25. *American Rationalist*, 2218 St. Louis Avenue, St. Louis 6, Mo., U.S.A.

THIS BOOK is described by the publishers as "an incense-laden garland of irreverent revelry" of solely anti-clerical humour. Jokes, limericks, epigrams, anecdotes, poems and definitions are all featured, and the striking cover and illustrations are by the cartoonist Otto Soukup.

One man's humour is another man's poison, but there is certainly something for everyone here. A few samples follow:

An old man was knocked down and taken to an R.C. hospital. The Mother Superior, taking details, warned him that his hospital bill would be heavy. He explained that he was a pensioner and couldn't afford to pay, whereupon she asked if he had any relations who would foot the bill. "No," he said, "I only have two old-maid sisters who are nuns." Shocked at this irreverence, the Mother Superior corrected him sternly: "Your sisters are the brides of Christ." "In that case," replied the old man, "send the bill to my brother-in-law!"

Widow (in Spiritualist séance): "Is that you, 'Arry?" Spirit: "Yes." "Are you 'appy?" "Very 'appy." "'Appier than you was with me?" "Much 'appier." "'Eaven must be a beautiful place, 'Arry?" "I ain't in 'eaven!"

A faith-healer met his old friend Max and enquired after the health of the family. "My brother is very sick," Max said. "Your brother isn't sick," said the faith-healer, "he only thinks he is." Two months later they met again and the faith-healer enquired, "How is your brother now?" "Worse," groaned Max, "he thinks he's dead now."

For ten years a man was employed at a lumber mill. Every night he made it a practice to carry something home—a board, a handful of shingles, or a bundle of laths—until he had a cellar full of filched materials. Finally a priest prevailed upon him to attend a religious service. He became ashamed of his long series of petty thefts. So he asked the priest what he should do to make amends. "Could you make a novena?" asked the priest. "Just give me a blueprint," said the contrite sinner, "God knows I've got lumber enough."

Minister: "What does your mother do for you when you've been a good girl?" Little Girl: "She lets me stay home from church."

A little Protestant boy came home with a black eye and his horrified mother asked, "Where did you get that shiner?" "The O'Reilly kids gave it me," he answered. "I was making jokes about the Pope." "Didn't you know the O'Reillys were R.C.s?" said his mother. "Yes," he said, "but I didn't know the Pope was."

Uncle (to child after church service): "Did you like it?" Child: "I liked the music, but the commercial was too long."

THE FREETHINKER

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

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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.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

E. I. DELAY.—Many thanks for offer of translation but we are afraid we have no space for it.

W. M. MCALPIN.—You will find excellent articles on the various Ice Ages in many encyclopedias, and the book by Sir Robert Ball, *The Cause of the Ice Ages*, will give you more specific information. Your Free Library no doubt has many later works also.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

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

London (Marble Arch).—Meetings every Sunday from 5 p.m.:

Messrs. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER and C. E. WOOD.

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, 6.30 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

Orpington Humanist Group.—Sunday, October 5th: Pilgrims' Way and Wealden Ramble. Assemble Kensing Station, 11 a.m. Bring packed lunch. Set tea at Wrotham, 3 p.m.

INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics Institute).—Sunday, October 5th, 6.45 p.m.: COLIN MCCALL, "The Humbug of Telepathy."

Central London Branch N.S.S. (The Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, October 5th, 7.15 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, "Problems of World Freethought."

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, October 7th: J. H. LLOYD, "Humanism and the BBC."

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate).—Tea, followed by the film "Jan Hus" (John Huss). (See Views and Opinions.)

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Hall, Upper Parliament Street).—Sunday, October 5th, 2.30 p.m.: E. WILMOT, "Socialism, One World, One People."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, October 5th, 11 a.m.: Prof. H. LEVY, "Atomic Lunacy."

Notes and News

Mr. MARTIN LECHNER of St. Louis, Missouri, left his native Amsterdam for the United States 45 years ago. While on a return visit to his relatives in Holland, he managed to attend the World Union of Freethinkers reunion in Brussels at the end of August, as a representative of the American Rationalist Federation. His friendly nature endeared him to all. More recently (September 8th-12th) he was in London, where he met other Freethinkers, and on September 11th he was a very welcome addition to our speakers at Tower Hill. Mr. Lechner took fraternal

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £358 5s.; J. Wilson, £2; H. G. Blewett, 4s.; Mrs. A. Calderwood, £1; F. B. Bolton, £3 15s.; R. Reader, 2s. 6d.—Total to date, September 26th, 1958, £365 16s. 6d.

greetings from the National Secular Society and THE FREETHINKER to the American Rationalist Federation when he returned to the U.S.A. For us his stay was all too short.

★

TORONTO magistrate Donald Graham was "taken aback," according to an undated newspaper cutting recently received from Canada. And no wonder! A 12-year-old girl who accused an 18-year-old youth of assaulting her in his home on July 24th, said when about to take the oath, "I'm an atheist?" "What do mean by an atheist?" asked the magistrate. "Don't you believe in heaven or hell?" "No," replied the girl with a shake of her head. However, the girl was sworn and eventually the youth was committed for trial. As far as we know, the magistrate recovered from his shock.

★

LORD BOYD ORR is a man for whom we have a great deal of respect. But we admit that this was severely shaken when we saw the item in the *Glasgow Herald* of September 1st under the heading "British Association Members at Worship." At a service in Glasgow Cathedral to mark the annual meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, "Sir Alexander Fleck, president of the association, and Lord Boyd Orr, Chancellor of the University, read the lessons." Lord Boyd Orr is an Honorary Associate of the Rationalist Press Association, for whom he chaired a meeting later the same day. It was at this meeting that another Honorary Associate of the R.P.A., Professor Hyman Levy, made the admirable suggestion of a Hippocratic Oath for scientists that they would not knowingly contribute towards human destruction or degradation.

★

THE *Chicago Sun-Times* (1/9/58) carried a report which it rightly described as "astounding." Members of the Parapsychological Association in the U.S. have proposed a large-scale research programme "looking toward the use for defence purposes of extrasensory perception." How seriously this proposal will be treated in military circles we don't know, but even the parapsychological card and dice man himself, Dr. J. B. Rhine, stated that "a considerably greater degree of control than is now obtainable would be required to apply the capacity reliably to practical problems." As for an "effective instrument" for "abolishing surprise attacks," give us radar every time.

★

BISHOP JOHN J. WRIGHT, of Worcester, Mass., U.S.A., recently spoke strongly on the radio about plastic crucifixes and statues that are being "mailed unsolicited to Catholics by a Miami dealer." These objects are "sheer junk," he said, and he advised recipients to give them back to the postman or throw them "in the nearest ash can." We find ourselves, for once, wholeheartedly in agreement with a Roman Catholic bishop, and we are pleased to say so publicly. But where does Bishop Wright draw the line? Does a dab of holy water and a mumbled blessing turn junk into excellence?

★

WANTED—*Orpheus* by Salomon Reinach, English edition. Write office.

Christians v. Pater

By OSWELL BLAKESTON

WALTER PATER'S background was "small drab suburban villas"; and his life, apart from his books, is no joy to the biographer, for it is a progress from cramming jobs to a Fellowship, and term time peacefully alternating with vacations on the Continent. There is the business of an unfortunate kick from a comrade when Pater was a school-boy, which may have left many psychic traumas; but then there is really very little to be said until one stumbles on an undergraduate's caricature of Pater as a tutor at Oxford, a picture which suggests "a debilitated cavalry officer in mufti" rather than the man who was a red rag to the Christians. Pater, in fact, made only one attempt, after the publication of *Marius the Epicurean* (1885), to escape from the Oxford womb. Then he took a house in London to meet a wider life; but, as Wilde joked, the very idea of Pater as a social celebrity was grotesque. After eight years of visiting what George Moore condemned as "the fullest houses in London," Pater returned quietly to Oxford, where, with a new sense of failure, he lay in bed till noon reading a dictionary.

Yet Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873) so infuriated the muscular Christians that it looked as if the author would be utterly crushed by such giants as Jowett. Pater himself was so alarmed that, as a sop to the Jowetts, he allowed the hero of his two-volume novel to die with the last rites of the Church. This, however, was an uneasy victory for the Christians; and *Marius the Epicurean* is uphill work and not all the readers get to the end of it, and in fact it is a survey of philosophies and religions up to the time of Christian Rome rather than a story. Then *Imaginary Portraits* (1887) finally established that religion for Pater was really an æsthetic pageant. Here the author borrowed from Heine the idea of the decayed god who takes employment in the new religion; but Pater's mingling of gods was possible because they were all bloodless, merely decorative themes.

The question remains—why were the Christians so horrified by *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*? What was all the philosophical to-do about? When all the fancy words have been detached, was Pater saying much more than that we should take an interest in what is going on around us? Pater did not, perhaps, practise what he preached, but did he preach more than a sensible rule for life?

Pater wrote: "How can we pass most swiftly from point to point, and be present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy? To burn always with this hard gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life." Today, we can recognise the voice of the masters of ethical teaching in such statements as "failure is to form habits" and in the admonition to live in the "now" and "apprehend without judgement." But the Jowetts pronounced anathema when Pater offered such advice in highly embroidered prose; for them the purpose of every moment was to overcome some un-Christian weakness.

And how they loathed Pater's "art for art's sake," and how many Christians still flame against it. But Pater saw that art is of the greatest possible use to the community not because it provides great hollow moral utterances, but because it helps man to increase the richness of his responses to stimuli ("... as many pulsations as possible in the given time") and so improve the whole human strain. The aim of art, as distinct from propaganda, must always be art, the enrichment of neural and psychological

reactions.

The trouble for the contemporary reader of Pater is that the author's own art was not really art but an artificial craftsmanship with prospects seen by caged birds, refined anecdotes told by dispassionate observers, balanced cadences of reference. Re-opening Pater's *Imaginary Portraits*, one finds oneself back in enchanted gardens with ghosts of nosegays left by visitors of long ago. One may easily recoil from such prose idylls, with each word painfully hammered out by "the seeker after something in the world that is there in no satisfying measure." It is sad to think that all this patient polishing was so poorly rewarded—for Pater, during his life, never made more than a hundred pounds a year from his writings, but it is sadder if we do not take the trouble today to separate the philosophy from the "precious writing" and grant the truth of one and falseness of the other.

The dislike and suspicion and misrepresentation of Pater was focussed in W. H. Mallock's parody, *New Republic* (1877), in which Pater was satirised as a man who, when he visited an ugly house, took "a scrap of artistic cretonne" in his pocket as a kind of "æsthetic smelling salts." This was part of the Christian campaign to confuse the issue, and it is astonishing how effectively the work was done. But today rationalists should realise that Pater was the forerunner of Music While You Work, of Creative Therapy, of all the ambitions of the Leisure State. The Christians must be denied their denigration of the unfortunate tutor.

A Damnable Doctrine

By G. H. TAYLOR

WRITING on "The Darwin Conversion Myth" some months ago, I said "It would be unduly optimistic to say the lies about Darwin have been finally nailed. We know our Christians."

In the current issue of *The National Message* there is an article by Lady Hope on "Charles Darwin and Christianity," the import of which is that she was instrumental in converting Darwin to Christianity shortly before he died. Now this account of Lady Hope's is over forty years old and it has been told over and over again in spite of having been exposed as sheer fabrication. It had its origin at Boston, U.S.A., and was subsequently re-told by credulous Christians for credulous Christians in one religious journal after another. In next to no time the story had reached India, where it was reproduced in the *Bombay Guardian* of March 25th, 1916, which amply proves Foote's charge that a Christian lie will get half way round the world while truth is getting ready for the formidable task of catching up with it.

The story has all the appurtenances of a well polished falsehood, right down to the correct shade of Darwin's dressing gown and the chapter of the Holy Book he studied as he sat in bed. At Lady Hope's mention of the wonders of the Creation as described in Genesis, Darwin "seemed greatly distressed, his fingers twitched nervously and a look of agony came over his face" as he bemoaned the fact that people had made a religion out of his ideas. He beseeched Lady Hope to come and speak to a gathering of about thirty of his friends. In Lady Hope's narrative:

"What shall I speak about?" I asked.
"Christ Jesus," he replied in a clear emphatic voice, adding in a lower tone, "and His salvation. Is not that the best theme? And then I want you to sing some hymns with them."

The wonderful look of brightness and animation on his face as he said this I shall never forget, for he added: . . . "This window will be open and you will know that I am joining in with the singing."

And so it goes on, pathetic in the extreme. The idea that friends of Charles Darwin could undergo such an intellectual indignity as being preached at and sung to by Lady Hope is too puerile for serious consideration.

When the story appeared in *The Scotsman* last April its retailer, a minister of the Free Church, was challenged by the Rev. J. L. Broom. The minister quoted Lady Hope and this coincided with an authoritative letter from Darwin's granddaughter and biographer, Lady Nora Barlow, whom Mr. Broom had informed. Lady Barlow wrote:

The correspondence that has arisen in *The Scotsman* over Charles Darwin's alleged visit from Lady Hope is perpetuating a myth that was authoritatively denied in 1922 by those in the best position to judge of its truth or falsity.

Charles Darwin's daughter, Mrs. Latchfield, wrote to *The Christian* (February 23rd, 1922): "I was present at his deathbed. Lady Hope was not present during his last illness or any illness. I believe he never even saw her, but in any case she had no influence over him in any department of thought or belief. He never recanted any of his scientific views either then or earlier. We think the story of his conversion was fabricated in U.S.A. In most of the versions hymn-singing comes in, and a summer house where the servants or villagers sang hymns to him. The whole story has no foundation whatever."

Mrs. Latchfield also wrote in a letter to a correspondent on the same subject (March 23rd, 1922) that she believed that Lady Hope never had any interview with her father. She says that her brother, Sir Francis Darwin, who was living in Down House at that time, was certain that Lady Hope never came to the house.

In Lady Barlow's edition of the unexpurgated *Autobiography of Charles Darwin* (Collins, 1958, 16s.) she has reinserted some passages which had been suppressed at the wish of Darwin's wife. One of them is:

I can indeed hardly see how anyone ought to wish Christianity to be true, for if so, the plain language of the text seems to show that those men who do not believe—and this would include my father, brother and almost all my best friends—will be everlastingly punished. And this is a damnable doctrine.

A damnable doctrine. That is what Darwin thought of Christianity. And how much more damnable would he have deemed it had he known it bred the worst form of liars, those who defile the memory of the dead by inventing, or repeating without verifying, the holy Christian lies about the way he died.

The Friar of Orders Grey

I am a friar of orders grey:
As down the valley I take my way,
I pull not blackberry, haw nor hip,
Good store of venison doth fill my scrip;
My long bead-roll I merrily chaunt,
Where'er I walk, no money I want;
And why I'm so plump the reason I'll tell—
Who leads a good life is sure to live well.
What baron or squire
Or knight of the shire
Lives half so well as a holy friar!

After supper, of heaven I dream,
But that is fat pullet and clouted cream.
Myself by denial I mortify
With a dainty bit of a warden pie:
I'm clothed in sackcloth for my sin:
With old sack wine I'm lined within:
A chirping cup is my matin song,
And the vesper's bell is my bowl's ding-dong.
What baron or squire or knight of the shire
Lives half so well as a holy friar!

JOHN O'KEEFFE (1747-1833).

How to Save His Bacon

I WENT to a little village called Moradia. My first visit was to the priest, who bemoaned his fate at having to live in that dull hole where nothing ever happened. Little did the poor man think of the pain and tribulations awaiting him. That same night an American Adventist missionary and his wife moved in and put up a great tent for meetings. Next day the two missionaries went abroad in search of souls to fill the tent. They were sadly unsuccessful till the lady missionary hit on the happy idea of offering a piglet to each woman who was head of the house. There was a great rush of women to the tent. After a two-hours service the piglets were distributed and led squealing to their sties. Next night the faithful at the tent service were few, but the lady missionary was ready with another idea, which was to offer the women food for their piglets. They delightedly sat through the dreary two-hours service and heard for the first time of this new God, all love and kindness, so different from the wrathful one who punished all transgressions so severely. Their buckets were filled up and they went off contented. Many new converts were added by this device. Soon news of the treachery reached the ears of the priest. He rushed to the guilty women and ordered them to desert the Adventists and return again to the true fold. But now their piglets were thriving and they had no notion of recanting. They just laughed in the priest's face. He rushed to the local Countess, a great pillar of the Church, and begged her help in the matter. She went and pleaded with the women, pointing out that they were drawing down the wrath of God on their heads. They were obdurate. "Is there nothing which will bring you back to the Church?" she asked desperately. The women had a whispered conference. Then their leader spoke out: "Yes, Countess, we agree to return if you will give us two piglets."

[Translated by Nan Flanagan from the Portuguese of Virginia de Castro.]

CORRESPONDENCE

EXTRA SENSORY PERCEPTION

Very few people would be so artless as to guess that a chance sequence of twenty-five "Zena Cards" would repeat a first sequence of the five different cards four times. This is an extreme example of the type of possibility that is automatically excluded by people used for testing "prevision." The sensitive in this respect is merely a person with a detectably abnormal extent of the capacity for improbability exclusion.

There is a probability that a series of tests will not commence with improbabilities approaching the pattern content of the example above, but this probability will eventually decline, and in such a manner as the E.S.P. tests have shown

Dice tests or "psycho-kinesis" confirm the nature of this ability, increasing numbers of dice thrown together producing progressively better results since this correspondingly increases the field of the exclusions—the field of intuitively detectable improbabilities within the field of obvious improbabilities. This sense of the automatic exclusion of the improbable is the same as that inaccurately and vaguely conceived as probability anticipation by a minute minority of the few consistently successful gamblers, most of whose good fortune is merely due to chance.

Essentially it is a field sense, so the "Zena Cards"—presumably devised differently from ordinary playing cards in order to exclude the significance of such exclusion of the improbable—do so only incompletely. In this improbability field is the key to the apparent statistical manifestation of paranormal sensitivity.

I attempted to put the "Zena Card" aspect of this proposition to Dr. Soal and Dr. West at the offices of the Society for Psychical Research some fifteen years ago. The former thought he saw my point but the latter did not consider that I had established it. Elsewhere, years before confirming from *The Reach of Mind* that sensitives had a marked tendency towards artistic ability, I suggested an outline and promised if required to supply the details of a method of analysis of drawings involving random distributions for assessing the average quantitative extent of sensitives'

intuitive improbability exclusions.

The ill-founded statistical evidence of prevision should be clearly distinguished from such cases as those involving correct anticipation of the sequence of the twenty-five cards, which cannot be dismissed as chance. There is plenty of material for the construction of plausible possibilities immune from such fantastic extravagancies of conclusion as suggested by Dr. Rhine; but without the necessary factual foundations even the cautious speculative builder of theories is only likely to drop intellectual bricks.

R. O. STURGESS.

THE IRISH QUESTION

As an Ulsterman now resident in London, I was interested to read in *THE FREETHINKER* of 29/8/58 reference to the "vexed Irish question."

I am, myself, a humanist and I am of the opinion that secular movements should be non-political. Nevertheless, I recognise that the Irish problem is at least as much one of religion as it is of politics and therefore comes within the proper purview of secularism.

Vexed as the question is, it is not, as many English people seem to imagine, replete with nationalistic and religious subtleties as to be incomprehensible to anyone but an Irishman.

Indeed, as I see it, it is basically quite simple and can be stated in two short phrases: Not nearly enough work. Far too much religion. This applies to both North and South and from these parent causes, I believe, virtually all the unrest in Ireland derives.

The unemployment problem is at last being vigorously tackled in the North, however, and in recent years I have been surprised at the number of Protestant clergy, even of such traditionally Fundamentalist sects as the Presbyterians, who would privately (though not from the pulpit, of course) admit agnostic views. There is hope for Ulster.

Eire, with only 6% or thereabouts of a Protestant population and a mere handful of secularists, presents a different picture—one which I can only view with dismay. Much as an Ulster humanist may regret the partition of Ireland and artificial divisions in human society generally, he must nevertheless, after the most careful consideration, decide to support his Protestant neighbour in stubbornly resisting union with the South and domination by a government whose policy is influenced at every turn by that greatest enslaver of human minds of all time—the R.C. Church.

E. S. IRWIN.

MATERIALISM

Mr. Cutner's chirp in your issue for August 22nd calls for a few words in reply. At no time in my correspondence to *THE FREETHINKER* have I mentioned spooks, spirit photography or apports. Like Mr. Cutner, I do not believe in such nonsense.

More than twenty years ago, while searching for a reason for living, for if death is the end of all things the sooner it comes the better, I had occasion to spend several nights in a so-called haunted house and once among the tombstones in a country churchyard. I need hardly say that I saw nothing and experienced nothing except a heavy cold the next day.

I have already mentioned in a previous letter that my belief in the survival of consciousness is based on the mind-brain relationship, embryonic growth and psychical research, particularly the Cross Correspondence experiments commenced by the S.P.R. in 1906. I cannot refer to Mr. Cutner's articles during the past four years, as after reading carefully each copy of *THE FREETHINKER* I leave it in a hotel, train or bus, with the hope, usually realised, that it will be read by someone else. However, I feel sure he never quoted from the S.P.R. *Proceedings* owing to the fact that they are copyright.

I willingly leave Mr. Cutner to his Materialism, for I am content to know that some of the finest intellects of this century and the previous one have rejected it. Einstein, Jeans, Whitehead and Lodge in physics, and Bergson, Driesch, McDougall and Smuts—to mention only a few—in biology, philosophy and psychology. Even Einstein, probably the greatest Jew of all time, admitted "The presence of a superior Reasoning Power which is revealed in the incomprehensible universe." I prefer their conclusions, based on facts, to Mr. Cutner's wishful thinking.

J. W. T. ANDERSON.

[Mr. Cutner writes: I haven't the ghost of an idea what is meant by "the survival of consciousness," nor am I impressed by an array of big names against Materialism. They mean no more than the names of Calvin, Luther, Wesley, "General" Booth, and Billy Graham mean in support of Christianity.]

SEX AND CHRISTIANITY

Mr. Drewitt states that I am unconsciously "terrified" to come to his argument re sex. But should I? Man is free to make use of his sexual instincts. Sex reasonably practised is worthy of praise,

and may be meritorious before God. One of the functions of the Church is to sanctify marriage. What we condemn is abuse; and nothing is more disgraceful than to become a slave of these passions of sex, as Aristotle says. Passions are good servants but bad masters.

We believers in Jesus Christ fear only Him who after killing the body has the power to send the soul to Hell. Faith makes all the difference between us and the unbelievers. From the Christian point of view, when the ex-Friar Preacher had the gift of Faith and the Love of God, he was "a little less than the Angels" (Ps. 8); now that he has lost them both, and Faith and God's love, and has become a champion of "Sexual Love," he is a little bit higher (?) than the brutes (Ps. 48). Of course, I am not saying this to offend him, but this is the logical consequence from the Catholic point of view, and there are materialists who say they are proud of it!

On the contrary, highly offensive are these ex-Priest's words: "Deep in the unconscious, Catholics (more than 400,000,000!) are like wriggling worms clamped by the back-end—through the blocking of all natural sex feeling from babyhood. When 'love' is mentioned they can only wriggle in impotence." Words in brackets mine. And that is enough proof of Mr. Drewitt's "impotence" to be a Catholic. He must have wriggled enough when he was a monk!

FR. G. M. PARIS, O.P., Editor, *The Faith* (Malta).

[Abridged.—Ed.]

I'LL BE BLESSED

Two men allowed Mrs. Joyce Williams, a 33-year-old gipsy, to "bless their money." Afterwards one was £24 short, the other £21

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