

The Freethinker

Volume LXXVIII—No. 46

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Fivepence

ONE OR TWO PEOPLE have criticised us verbally for paying too much attention to Pope Pius XII. "He's dead," they say, "so let him be." We might well have done just that, had it not been for the panegyrics that poured forth in his name in this and other Protestant lands. These we cannot forget and we think it undesirable that others should forget either. In Roman Catholic countries they might have been feasible, but not here. We think, in fact, that the BBC and the Press suffered from temporary madness—or at least loss of memory.

The Queen presumably had to send a message of condolence, and it must be said that this was moderate in tone, referring only to her personal meeting with the Pontiff and his "unfailing kindness" to Commonwealth servicemen during the war years. No doubt the Prime Minister was under a similar obligation to express his sympathy, but he did not, alas, display the same moderation as his monarch. The world, he declared, "is poorer by the loss of a man who played so great a role in the defence of spiritual values and in the work of peace, and who earned the respect of all peoples, whether of his faith or not."

Never a Press Like This

The BBC, and the Press for the most part, were with the Prime Minister rather than the Queen. (*The Observer* and the *Manchester Guardian* being the honourable exceptions we noted). Labour's *Daily Herald* issued impressive posters of the Pope's portrait in mourning purple, with no caption. The Tory *Sunday Times* had two Papists and a Protestant testifying that "His love embraced every country, race and creed." "The Pope... of Peace" headlined the *Liberal Star* across two pages, and this became the key phrase. Never has there been such a deception. "No Church leader in history has ever had a Press like this," boasted the *Scottish Catholic Herald* (October 17th), and it was surely right. The Pope who—in the words of Professor H. R. Trevor-Roper, in a letter of support to the National Secular Society's protest meeting at the Caxton Hall—was largely responsible for "the moral surrender to Fascism in the 1930's (converted into a practical surrender by the condemnation of the Christian Democrats in Italy, and the solid vote of the Centre Party for Hitler's Enabling Act in Germany)"; this Pope became, by an amazing sleight of hand, a man of peace, the symbol of peace. The evils that he did were interred with his bones.

From Mr. John Foster Dulles—for whom peace is apparently bound up with "brinkmanship"—we might have expected to hear about "dedicated devotion to the cause of peace and justice" and "truly great inspiration." For President Eisenhower, too, the late Pope's violent opposition to Communism made him "an informed and articulate foe of tyranny," though "a sympathetic friend and benefactor to those who were oppressed," who "consistently championed the cause of a just peace among the nations of the earth." Not to be outdone, Vice-President Nixon announced that he had twice had "the great privilege" of meeting the

Pope; and he again saw him as "one of the foremost champions of human dignity, freedom and peace."

Kirk Shock

There was such a unanimity in these eulogies that the *Scottish Daily Mail* (October 16th) rightly announced the Synod of Clydesdale's dissension as a "Kirk Shock." The Rev. Alan G. Hasson, Minister at Bonhill South and Alexandria North Churches in Dumbartonshire, had moved a resolution at a meeting on October 14th, dissociating this Glasgow Synod (representing 700 ministers) from that part of the tribute to Pius XII by the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, which read, "He was... a constant influence for good,

especially in the cause of peace." These statements were not found to be correct "on investigation of the late Pope's relations with Fascism and Nazism, his failure as head of the Roman Church to end the continuing persecution of Protestants in Spain and Colombia, and the strenuous efforts made by the Roman Church to force the Western Democracies into an armed conflict with Soviet Russia."

The Roman Catholic Archbishop of St. Andrews and Edinburgh might well think it "very sad that when the whole world has been paying such wonderful tributes to the Holy Father this small group has taken it on themselves to contradict what has been said by one of their own Church," but in saying that the Synod's "assertions run counter... to the facts," the Archbishop clearly revealed his ignorance—or his bias.

He should look at the Rev. Hasson's argument submitted to the Synod in the form of a circular, of which we are fortunate to have a copy. The Pope, declares Mr. Hasson, actively supported the twin tyrannies of Nazism and Fascism, "whose principles coincided with those of the Church of Rome—hatred of democracy, repudiation of representative government, and the denial of the freedom of speech and the Press." Pius XII's message to Franco's armies is quoted, and will stand part repetition here: "With great joy we address you, dearest sons of Catholic Spain, to express our paternal congratulations for the gift of peace and victory with which God has chosen to crown the Christian heroism of your faith... We give you, our dear sons of Catholic Spain, our apostolic benediction." Then, during the last war, continues Mr. Hasson, President Roosevelt asked Pius XII to "pronounce the justice of the Western Allies' cause," but this he refused to do on the grounds that Russia did not allow complete religious freedom. Yet, "at this same time in Franco's Roman Catholic Spain, Protestant churches were being attacked, looted and burnt, while more than 100,000 copies of the Bible were burnt." These facts, says Mr. Hasson, are recorded in the *New York Times*, October 6th, 1940.

The Pope, Mr. Hasson rightly argues, could have stopped the persecution of Protestants in Spain and the worse persecution in Colombia. The 1956 General Assembly of the Church of Scotland had evidence that 75

VIEWS and OPINIONS

Pius:

Praises and Protests

By COLIN McCALL

Protestants had been murdered in Colombia, 46 of their churches destroyed, and more than 200 of their schools closed. Mr. Hasson claims that, since 1956, he has "amassed considerable evidence in addition to that already presented," and he submitted this evidence to the meeting.

Preventive War

He then turned to the Pope's efforts to force the United States into a "preventive atomic war" against Russia, and instanced the diabolical speech by Mr. F. Matthews, Secretary of the U.S. Navy, at Boston on August 25th, 1950. "To have peace," said Mr. Matthews, "we should be willing to pay any price—even the price of starting a war." And he called on the U.S.A. to launch an atomic attack on Soviet Russia. This speech, said Mr. Hasson, "created a world sensation, and immediately hostile reactions from all except Roman Catholic sources. American theologians agreed with Matthews, who incidentally, as well as being Secretary of the American Navy, also happened to be the Supreme Knight of the Knights of Columbus, and providentially, a Privy Chamberlain of Pope Pius XII." The circumstances suggest that the latter knew what Matthews was going to say, adds Mr. Hasson, and those who know

the Papist tactics of letting the laity speak the dangerous words—and take the repercussions—will agree. In this case, however, the Pope himself greeted Christmas 1956 with a good will message about a defensive war that *The Times* (24/12/56) described as "almost... a crusade for Christendom" and the *Manchester Guardian* (27/12/56) termed "The Pope's blessing for a preventive war." Anyone who reads the Roman Catholic newspapers will find continual references to this preventive war, leaving no doubt, as Mr. Hasson says, that it was "a consummation of papal hopes devoutly desired by the Vatican." Fortunately, though, it was "one diplomatic triumph which never crowned the practised cynicism of Pius XII."

It is encouraging to know that this argument, so closely paralleled by the speakers at the National Secular Society's meeting at the Caxton Hall on October 30th, was put before the Clydesdale Synod and led it to dissociate itself from the Moderator's reference to Pope Pius XII as "a constant influence for good, especially in the cause of peace." Let us hope that the Prime Minister, the BBC, and the British Press will take note. There are, after all, still some Protestants left in Britain.

The Pilgrim

By OSWELL BLAKESTON

MOIRA'S MOTHER asked if the girl could be given permission to come up to town for the week-end. She wanted to prepare the girl for the news that she was going to have a second father. It rocked the convent. Why couldn't Mrs. Ware come and fetch her daughter and guard her on the journey? But then Reverend Mother thought that a girl of Moira's age really ought to be able to manage short train journeys on her own, and it wouldn't do for the world to think the convent was turning out nincompoops.

The pin-head sister who taught history was sent to the station to give final instructions.

"You must think of this journey as a pilgrimage," she said, "and make frequent fruitful meditations on the martyrs."

Pin-head's troubles began at the booking office. She found she couldn't find the money Reverend Mother had given her to give the girl. Was it a sign that God didn't want Moira to travel alone?

"He knows best, doesn't He?" she demanded desperately of the clerk behind the grille.

Then she discovered the money in some obscure pocket.

She gave Moira the ticket and the change for the taxi at the other end, and started to explain which was the bit of the ticket for going up to London and which was the return half; but she couldn't make up her mind which piece was which. She said she'd ask someone on the platform, for she couldn't face the booking clerk again.

By the time they reached the platform, sister was panting as if she were about to face the final account of doomsday; but then she saw a porter, and she tore down the platform and grabbed his arm before he could vanish into an embarrassing place.

"This child doesn't know where she's going," she gasped. "I mean she doesn't know which way her ticket is going. Oh, please help us."

The man had a face with too much blood in it like a red cabbage, but he was kind in a bemused fashion. He explained the ticket, but mentioned that the ladies would really have to excuse him as he'd got to... disappear!

Sister furiously dragged Moira to the opposite end of the platform.

"There's something," she said, "which I must tell you.

It will make everything stop."

She put her hand above her head to show how to pull it.

"The communication cord," sister said.

Then she saw the distant train.

"No!" she cried as if she were repelling some satanic vision. "No, that can't be the train. Don't tell me that's the train."

It was the train.

"Holy Mary," the pin-head sister moaned, "how I wish I were coming with you to save you from losing your head."

Then sister saw the porter with blood in his face beckoning to them. The world was in command of the pilgrim, and sister obeyed.

The porter had opened the door of a "Ladies Only" compartment, and sister took a peep inside. There were two women facing each other in corner seats; and, the saints be praised, they were dowdy females smelling of dog. Sister looked at them with brimming eyes.

"Please take care of this little girl," she said, "she's going to London and—she's deaf and dumb."

Moira was horrified, and even pin-head sister, who so often muddled dates in the history class, realised that she'd cooked her goose with the pious fib intended to save the girl from contaminating contacts. Now sister couldn't give final hints about the communication cord. She began to cry, and wagged her fingers as if she were trying to improvise deaf-and-dumb language.

The guard blew his whistle. The porter slammed the door. The doggy ladies looked at the frightened girl with distaste rather than Christian charity. The train started to move. The pilgrimage had begun.

But long after the train was out of sight, sister was jumping up and down on the platform like a jack-in-the-box hopelessly reaching for something above.

—NEXT WEEK—

REFLECTIONS ON THE PAPAL
CORONATION

By F. A. RIDLEY

Prayer Enslaves

[The substance of a Paper delivered to the American Rationalists in Convention in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, August 23rd-24th, 1958.]

By ARTHUR G. CROMWELL

WHILE OUR POSTAGE is being disfigured by "Pray for Peace" cancellation stamps, our people are being taxed more and more to pay for ever greater military power. We are being urged to "Pray for Peace," the while preparing for war! How inconsistent can we get? As hate cannot beget love, neither can war and killings beget peace. Likewise, prayers in any and all forms will never be the proper substitute for common sense, honest work, and intelligent effort. The fate and destiny of man are entirely in the hands of man, and a natural universe that operates without mercy or malice. The more mankind come to understand this the less need for prayer.

Man is, by nature, a superstitious animal, and fear of the known and unknown tend to make him a moral and mental coward. He thus has been from time immemorial an easy prey of the soothsayer, the charlatan, the preacher, and the like, who would profit by these fears, ignorance and weaknesses. Prayer has been one of the most pernicious, injurious, mischievous frauds ever perpetrated upon one fellow being by another. It has been the method used to bring the weak of mind and the suffering to his knees in "humble submission" to the will and wish and profit of those who would gain much and give nothing. Prayer benumbs reason and thus destroys the native willpower so necessary for man's own wellbeing. Prayer promises much, but in truth gives nothing. It lures one to hope for immortality and suchlike unattainable things, and leaves but a path of frustrations that would destroy the mind and will. Prayer builds illusions and hopes that do nothing but leave a void and a dissipated dream-world at our feet. Prayer, like war, only destroys, leaving a broken hulk that was once a man. Prayer is a prime example of "man's inhumanity to man"! It is to be condemned by every honest thinking person.

We ask: "How does man become so easy a prey to this prayer idea?" His superstitious inclinations, plus physical and mental laziness, make of him "easy money" for those who "love God" more than they do their fellow man. These impostors take advantage of man's lack of understanding of the universe, his fear of the unknown and his desire for immortality, and so, armed with a lot of sanctimonious religious piousness, gaudy raiment and most elaborate rituals in gold-trimmed marble churches, they go to work to "soften up" the penitent, and the ever-present collection plate does the rest. These preachers and revivalists play on the emotional make-up of their victims to the point where what reason they might have had is abdicated in favour of emotional outbursts and abject surrender. Advantage is taken of the fears, the loves, the trials and tribulations of the penitents; the faults and failings they may have, and the confessions they may have made, as well as his mixed sense of values, and the old religious ballyhoo, with all its singing and prayers are applied to make the penitent more and more believe he is almost a hopeless sinner and his only salvation is in prayer and more prayer! And so the penitent finds himself relying more and more on the say-so of others and believing that they can cause a supposed "supernatural" to violate the natural in his favour. The penitent either does not know, or refuses to acknowledge, the fact that all existence is but natural—existing in a very natural fashion in a very natural universe, and that no man or anything can violate natural

law by either prayer or any other means. Nature moves on regardless of man's will, wish or even his existence. Man is only a bit of that great nature, and when anyone pretends to be able to operate this to personal advantage he knowingly commits a fraud.

There is a tendency on the part of mankind to believe that what is old in tradition is true in fact. Of course, nothing could be less true. Much of tradition was founded on folklore and fable, which in turn sprang from the roots of superstition and fears of the unknown. Age may improve the wine, but it can never make old falsehoods true. Facts in nature are entirely independent of time, place and the capricious whims and behaviour of man. The better the facts of nature are understood, the better advantage mankind may be able to make of them. Both the preacher and the Rationalist know this, but the difference lies in the fact that the Rationalist wants *all* his fellow men to know it also, while the preacher would hide the "facts of life" from his congregation and continue to prey on prayer.

A most interesting paradox appears here in the behaviour of the religious. In his all-too-short swirl in time and space he knows that death is the inevitable climax to his birth. He wants to live a long life, even never to die, yet at the same time believing in, and wanting, an immortality in some much believed in, but very unknown "hereafter." His faith in immortality gives way to his fear of death, so he goes to the doctor and the soothsayer in the vain hope that the inevitable may be avoided. And, the more religious one happens to be, the more he calls upon medical care and prayer to prevent his going to "Immortality Land." No other person on earth has more religious relations than the Pope in Rome. No other person calls for more medical care and prayers said on his behalf to prevent death than he; yet he is said to be "The Vicar of God"! What cowardice and fakery mankind practises in the name of fear, prayer and religion.

In spite of all the trials and tribulations of life here, man is so in love with living it *here and now* that even though he "Trusts God" and "Fears the Lord" and believes in "Immortality beyond the grave," he makes every effort to remain a *living mortal* and enjoy all the good things (as well as the bad) of this life. It is this will and wish to continue this life that makes for prayer. Just how does he attempt to get in personal contact with this supposed supernatural? He holds an audible or silent discourse with this imaginary supernatural, or almighty, in which said discourse is entirely, and actually but a monologue, man himself being the only participant. There is nothing more silent than the "voice from the grave" or "the voice from Heaven." The existence, the omnipresence, the omnipotence, and the omnisciences of any and all gods are but human beliefs not founded on facts or experiences; they are illusions, worthless and harmful.

The pathway of man's history through the ages has been beset with conflicting forces of ignorance, superstition and fear as against knowledge, understanding and intellectual freedom. The advance—if any—has been a slow and tortuous one; oftentimes he has been broken by frustrations, sorrow, fear and defeat, and a few surmounting the many obstacles to take advantage of the things and forces that would aid him to a full and more noble life.

(To be continued)

This Believing World

In electing a Pope 76 years of age, the Roman Church has once again shown its usual astuteness. The death of the late Pope brought it a wave of publicity unsurpassed in its long history, the newspapers of the world, as well as radio and TV all doing their best to give it the fullest advertising possible—for nothing. By electing an *old* Pope, the Church has made sure of a similar wave of world-publicity in a more or less short period. The Church might have had to wait thirty years or more if a Pope of fifty had been elected. When it comes to advertising itself—even in a Protestant country—the Church of Rome can beat the Church of England to a frazzle.

★

Mr. Gilbert Harding has already made a name for himself by his hard hitting against shams of all kinds, and it was good to see that he did not spare that relic of Sabbatarian intolerance, the Welsh National Council of the Lord's Day Observance Society—which is a rather grandiose title for a crowd of pious nobodies. He called these people "fanatical Sabbatarians"—but he might have pointed out that, though the epithet fitted, they were not really entitled to it. They do not believe in the *Biblical* Sabbath Day at all but in the Pagan day of rest for Sun worshippers—Sunday. It is both ignorant and impudent to transfer the Jewish Sabbath to another day and call that day a Sabbath.

★

Of course, his Welsh hearers did not like his plain speaking, and tried to rub in his conversion to Rome, and his membership of the Sunday Freedom Association. This had very little effect at the meeting, but in actual fact Mr. Harding believes in the Lord's Day exactly as the most fanatical member of the L.D.O.S. He believes that his Church was divinely inspired to change the Jewish Sabbath Day from the seventh to the first day and transfer its Jewish "holiness" at the same time. In the ultimate, there is precious little difference between any of these Christians. They all believe in the Bible as God's Word, and both sects are ready to throw over the Word when it suits them.

★

No doubt, ever since writing was developed there have been people who recorded their previous lives in proof of "reincarnation," but the number is now increasing and becoming "news" for diligent editors. An art school mistress, a Miss Ockendon, is quite certain that in her previous existences she lived in a cave, that she took part in the Crusades, and that during the Civil War, she was a man. We believe that Mrs. Annie Besant was just as sure that she was Jesus Christ himself in a previous incarnation.

★

But the reincarnationists are multiplying. A gentleman, Mr. W. Dawson, has supplied *Psychic News* with details which, "though unsubstantiated by supporting evidence" (we are told) "still makes interesting reading." It is typical moonshine. Mr. Dawson's last incarnation occurred 2,000 years ago, and, of course, he was "the son of a king." Somehow or other, we rarely get these people admitting that they were dish washers or ignorant slave labourers. Nearly always they were high priests, kings or princesses.

★

We note that some people are objecting to that growing sect, Jehovah's Witnesses, obtaining halls at reduced terms. What exactly is wrong with that? If the N.S.S. could get a hall at reduced terms, would it sturdily refuse? Why? The Witnesses are as sincere as the Salvation Army or Roman Catholics or even the Flat-Earthers, and have as much right to sell their goods in the cheapest markets as anybody else. The really astonishing thing is that there are people

who actually believe in their teachings...! Ordinary pulpit Christianity, or the BBC version, is silly enough in all conscience, but can intelligent people listen to the balderdash of a Jehovah's Witness with a straight face.

Leicester Log

As indicated in our recent issues, the Secular Youth Fellowship is proceeding most satisfactorily and has now a periodical newsletter, giving news about the various activities (campings, films, talks, games and outings).

★

Ashby-de-la-Zouche Rural Council has decided by a large majority to allow the opening of cinemas on Sundays. Religious elements are already preparing to fight the issue.

★

A Leicester member who sells Christmas seals for the National Spastics Society had an experience worth recording. He found he was expected to dispose of stamps which contained religious propaganda in the form of angels, Holy Families and suchlike. He wrote protesting to the Secretary and pointed out that such Christian symbols would be offensive also to people of other religions. He received a sympathetic reply and a supply of non-religious stamps as a replacement.

★

A Saturday course on Robert Owen will be held at the University of Leicester (Department of Adult Education) on November 15th in Vaughan College. The fee is 4s., inclusive of tea.

★

Under the title "No Public Money for Religion," Mr. Hammersley's latest letter in this controversy is prominently framed in the *Leicester Evening Mail* of October 24th. He makes the point that religion, being a matter for private opinion, should not be supported by public money. "We have carried Christianity on our backs for nearly 2,000 years. It is time it stood on its own feet."

★

In its feature, "Down Your Street," the *Evening Mail* reporter is to visit Humberstone Gate, and naturally such a feature would not be complete without reference to the Secular Hall; he has therefore arranged an interview with the Secretary and some good publicity should result.

FOSSE.

Please Give Thanks

THEN RELAX AND ENJOY YOUR FOOD

CATHOLIC.—Bless us, O Lord, and these Thy gifts which we are about to receive from Thy bounty. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

JEWISH.—Lift up your hands towards the sanctuary and bless the Lord. Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who bringest forth bread from the earth. Amen.

PROTESTANT.—Bless, O Lord, this food to our use, and us to Thy service, and make us ever mindful of the needs of others, in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHILDREN.—God is great, God is good, and we thank Him for our food. Amen.

The above is copied from the menu of the Houghton House Restaurant, Fayetteville, N.C., U.S.A. It is no isolated case, our correspondent tells us; many restaurants print prayers on their menus.

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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

RUBY TA'BOIS.—Christian Churches, it should be remembered, mostly condemn suicide.

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.

INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics Institute).—Sunday, November 16th, 7 p.m.: J. M. THORNTON (Roman Catholic), A Lecture.

Central London Branch N.S.S. (The Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, November 16th, 7.15 p.m.: H. J. BLACKHAM, "Prospects for Progress."

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, November 18th, 7.15 p.m.: R. AICKMAN, "British Inland Waterways—Their Value to the People" (illustrated).

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, November 16th, 6.30 p.m. A Public Scance, conducted by C. T. Powell.

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Hall, Upper Parliament Street).—Sunday, November 16th, 2.30 p.m.: P. ADELMAN, "Marxism and History."

Oxford Humanist Group (Taylor Institute).—Wednesday, November 19th, 8.15 p.m.: Dr. W. E. SWINTON, "Man and Evolution."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, November 16th, 11 a.m.: J. LEWIS, PH.D., "The Modern Threat to the Individual."

Notes and News

"THE sad fact is that the proportion of Catholics in prisons and Borstals is greater than the proportion of Catholics in the population." Had this been said by a Freethought speaker it would have been strongly disputed (to say the least) by the faithful. But the words were spoken by Father Alan Keenan, O.F.M., preaching at the Red Mass in St. Mary's (R.C.) Cathedral in Edinburgh on Sunday, Octo-

ber 12th, at the opening of the new legal year, and were reported in the *Glasgow Observer-Scottish Catholic Herald* (17/10/58). Fr. Keenan hastened to say that it would be wrong to think that the proportion "indicates a weakness in the Catholic conception of the family or in the efficiency of Catholic education"; on the contrary, it "has a higher standard of morality than any other denomination we know." It is because the high Catholic standards are assailed by the world outside that the poor Papist falls from "the cloud-capped towers of the New Jerusalem . . . and all the potential energy for goodness is released in the kinetic energy of crime." "The higher he was"—said Fr. Keenan—"the harder he falls." We hope the congregation of Roman Catholic lawyers was convinced. We aren't.

★

THE *Church of England Newspaper* aptly termed the recent Papal election "play acting." "With cloak and dagger romanticism"—it said—"the ancients of the Roman Catholic Church secreted themselves for their task," and the public is "left to imagine the intrigue and wire-pulling that proceed behind their closed doors." It is the "comedy" that fascinates the public, it added, "not the faith." But the Papists do not lack defenders even among the Bishporic of the Church of England, and on this occasion it was the Bishop of Rochester who rushed to their support. "This is quite a worthless opinion," commented the Bishop, Dr. Christopher Chavasse, "written by an anonymous leader-writer. The paper has a poor circulation and very few people, fortunately, will take any notice of it." When the National Secular Society was arranging its meeting on Pius XII, many Protestants expressed alarm at the spread of "popery" inside the Church of England. And their alarm seems justified.

★

FURTHER evidence of Roman tendencies in the Church of England may be found in the 1958/59 Year Book of the Parish of Tor, Mother Parish of Torquay. It included an article on—of all people—St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus. "The soul of this young man was touched by the glory of men and women who found no glory in the conquest of others"—it reads—"but only in mastering themselves. . . . He began to see that the glory of God was what he preferred to fame . . . [and] yielded to the grace of God." The article might well have been taken from a Roman Catholic publication (not a word about that awful "Reformation"!) and was appropriately illustrated with "Christ bearing His Cross"—"The vision of St. Ignatius Loyola."

★

BORIS PASTERNAK is, we understand, a follower of the Greek Orthodox Church. In view of the publicity concerning *Doctor Zhivago*, we thought readers might like to see an example of his poetry.

A Poem by Boris Pasternak

(Translated by Bayard Simmons)

Not as the people, not once in every week,
Not forever, but twice in five-score year,
I have implored Thee that Thou shouldst repeat,
Thy *Fiat Lux*, creative words, calming fears.

Thou hast found intolerable too, I say,
The medley vile, the folk of little worth.
How canst Thou wish that here I should be gay,
With what Thou eat the Salt of all the Earth?

The Life and Times of King Arthur

By F. A. RIDLEY

SEVERAL FIGURES situated so to speak on the margin of history have managed to achieve a celebrity equal to that of the most authenticated "heroes." The presence of legends and even apochryphal works does not necessarily prove their hero or author to be *merely* the creation of man's myth-making faculty, but, when we reach the verge of the "margin" we encounter figures of whom it is difficult to assert that they ever dwelt on this terrestrial globe of ours. Was Pythagoras an historical character? Or Romulus, the foster-child of the she-wolf? Or, to come nearer home, did Robin Hood ever really sport with his merry men in Sherwood Forest and "rob the rich to help the poor"? Or, to take an even more famous character, did King Arthur ever actually preside over the Knightly revel of the good company of the Round Table, or set out with his magic sword, Excalibur, on the quest for the Holy Grail? Did he finally depart on his mystic barge across the Western Ocean to Avalon, the Isle of the Blest?

This last problem is fully, indeed exhaustively, considered in a new and encyclopedic study by Mr. Jack Lindsay—a former contributor to the *THE FREETHINKER*, and himself a prolific author of historical novels, besides several previous incursions into the domain of historical research. In his latest book, *Arthur and his Times*, Mr. Lindsay both investigates a problem and, by way of solution, argues a thesis. The prospective reader should perhaps be warned that there is actually much more about the "Times" of King Arthur than about his identity. To this crucial question—man or myth?—Mr. Lindsay devotes only a single chapter. However, his conclusion is far from negative. Arthur, he opines, was no myth, no being compounded *purely* of legend, but a man—an actual historical figure whose date, environment and concrete achievements can be given "a local habitation and a name." The later, luxuriant crop of legends, both Celtic and medieval, which gathered round the name and fame of Arthur can be traced back to a Roman-Celtic warlord whose career and exploits can be dated approximately at the turn of the fifth-sixth centuries A.D. This period, it may be noted, ranks as the darkest part of the Dark Ages; particularly in our island, which was then in the middle of that momentous, if little known period during which Roman and Christian "Britain" was being transformed by overseas conquest into Anglo-Saxon and Pagan "England" after the withdrawal of the Roman legions early in the fifth century.

Historians of the British Dark Ages who have mastered—as Mr. Lindsay most certainly has—the scanty historical sources (the legendary ones, contrarily, are abundant, even embarrassingly so) have the same sort of advantage over the amateur critic that, say, a traveller from Tibet would have, since it is virtually impossible to check their evidence or even to diminish the stature of their "tall" stories. After a survey of local scenes in the previous (fifth) century, Lindsay asserts these definite conclusions. There was an Arthur, even though we do not know much about him. He was probably a Celtic war-chief (the name "Arthur" means "Bear" in ancient Welsh), who defeated the invading German marauders, the Angles, Saxons and Jutes, who had been harrying the eastern shores of Britain already in Roman times, and who began to invade the island seriously about the middle of the fifth century. Arthur's victories—Mr. Lindsay asserts—were won by means of his intelligent use of heavy cavalry corps (the prototype of his medieval Knights), a tactical arm just then coming into

prominence on the continent, and against which the invaders, who fought on foot, could make no headway.

Our author presents an Arthur who had a kind of roving commission to move around Britain, fighting impartially against invading Germans, Irish pirates and recalcitrant chiefs. All available accounts describe him as having finally perished in a fight with Britons, not Saxons. The monk, Nennius, who first describes Arthur's heroic deeds—at Mount Badon he slew 960 Saxons all on his own!—dates Arthur's death in 537.

What, if any, truth is there in this reconstruction? As a scientific historian, Lindsay naturally does not waste his or our time in citing the "monstrous regiment" of romances, from Sir Thomas Malory to Lord Tennyson, who have adorned the tale of Arthur with so many lavish embroideries. The Arthur he presents for our acceptance is an historical character: the historic (?) acorn, not the luxuriant oak which a millenium of Celtic nostalgia and medieval romance has bequeathed to us. There does not appear to be anything impossible in the portrait. Similar war-chiefs and similar legends appeared on the continent—Attila, for example (cf. *The Niebelunglied*). And in medieval Spain, the Cid, now a national hero, was very similar to Lindsay's Arthur. The chief difficulty in accepting such a story is that the near contemporary Celtic chronicler, Gildas, never mentions Arthur. The first to do so was Nennius, who wrote about 300 years later, which is a long time, particularly in the Dark Ages. One possible explanation may be tentatively suggested. In the still half-Roman, half-Celtic Britain, people may have had two names, a Roman and a Celtic one. Now Gildas, who describes the battles later attributed to Arthur, actually ascribes them to Aurelius Ambrosius, whom he terms "the last of the Romans." Gildas, who tells us that he himself was born on the actual day of Mount Badon (probably near Bath) must surely have known. But might not some Roman general, perhaps Ambrose himself, have also had the Celtic name of Arthur, the Bear? It is possible, and if so, might solve the problem of Arthur's historicity.

In any case, whether Jack Lindsay has proved his case or not, he has certainly managed, *en route*, to shed a flood of light on the least-known period of our national history. And everyone who is interested, not only in the problem of Arthur, but in the history of this island, should make a point of reading this massively learned volume.

[*Arthur and his Times*, by Jack Lindsay; Frederick Muller and Co., 1958; 25s.]

More News from Little Rock

BUT it was Little Rock's white Protestant churches that first stepped into the educational gap, and without them the city's segregationists could make only a poor pretence of offering education to the schoolchildren. Trinity Cathedral (Episcopal) began holding a small class—white only—in early September, now has 28 students in its Interim Academy. . . . At the Westover Hills Presbyterian Church, 35 white students are studying University of Arkansas correspondence courses under supervision; a similar programme is on at Pulaski Heights Presbyterian Church, and one is planned for Asbury Methodist Church. A bigger church project is planned by nearby Ouachita Baptist College: a 500-student high school with classes in the educational buildings of three large Little Rock Baptist churches. Tuition will be \$20 a month, and Baptists will get preference, but other "innocent victims of a political struggle"—so long as they are white—will be admitted, said Ouachita President Ralph A. Phelps Jr.

—Time (November 3rd, 1958)

The Bolton Press Controversy

By G. H. TAYLOR

THERE HAS JUST CONCLUDED an excellent and lengthy controversy in the Bolton *Evening News* which stemmed from an article in that paper by the Archbishop of Liverpool (R.C.), in which he said:

Most people do not know how close Pope Pius XII came to averting the Second World War. Bolton freethinkers immediately joined issue and, as is usual with this admirable provincial newspaper, most of their letters were printed. The issue became, once again, that of "Morals without Religion," a title which has "caught on" since Margaret Knight used it in 1955. Since that time there has been a steadily growing number of provincial editors who have lost their fear of offending religious people—and correspondingly this very fact would seem to indicate that there is a *decreasing number* of religious people who have to be placated.

Archbishop Keenan was reminded of the conduct of the late Pope before and during the war. Here is an extract from one reply:

In June 1939 three thousand of Franco's Fascist soldiers went to Rome to celebrate the victory of Franco in the Spanish Civil War, and were received in audience by Pope Pius XII. After telling them how they had "fought for the triumph of Christian ideals" and that they had "brought immense consolation as defenders of the faith," he imparted to them his paternal blessing.

Archbishop Keenan had also made the following arrogant claim for Pius:

One of the great achievements of the late Pope was to make it clear to the whole world that he regarded himself not only as the head of the Catholic Church and the Father of Christendom but as the father of all men of good will.

The dictatorial ambition of this impudence was duly taken up in the correspondence column.

Canon Chronnell of Bolton entered the controversy and attributed the rise in juvenile crime to the fact that children today did not know the Ten Commandments. He was asked:

Can he give us a single scrap of evidence to show that the children brought up in church schools turn out any better than the next?

Canon Chronnell also bewailed that

the Education Act of 1944 made it harder than ever for religious denominations to find the money necessary to build schools where religious instruction is carefully given.

Nevertheless, money *is* found. But here I must interpose the opinion that the evils of the Agreed Syllabus are vastly overrated by freethinkers. The Act makes it "compulsory"

to include religion on the school timetable. But when wasn't it—in effect? There may be a few schools which

now have religion which previously didn't, but 99.9 per cent. already had it. And the word "compulsory" is no

stronger than it was pre-1944, when the Conscience Clause operated. Religion may be compulsory on the timetable

but not to any individual child whose parents withdraw him.

The only major change has been the Agreed Syllabus, and it has been too readily assumed that this works in

favour of religion. Assuming the syllabus to be strictly adhered to, it could have the effect of clipping the wings of the Fundamentalist type of schoolma'am by compelling

her to conform to the agreed norm. Altogether, I even doubt whether the developments in religious instruction could be termed reactionary.

One of the freethought letters that followed Canon Chronnell's I quote in full:

As Canon Chronnell says, our prisons and Borstals are overflowing. But his fellow Roman Catholics form a far larger percentage of prisoners than the small percentage of Roman Catholics of the population of the country. His religious educa-

tion therefore does not remedy matters. On the other hand, it makes things worse.

The Canon's suggestion of uniting under One Fold and One Shepherd makes one laugh. The Fold, of course, would be the Roman Catholic Church, and the Shepherd the Pope. In other words, spiritual Fascism.

Another good letter included the following:

Religion is a matter of belief and not of fact, and people should have to pay themselves for the teaching of their beliefs. To argue that the Mosaic Law is the only moral code is ridiculous.

"Unbeliever," a keen N.S.S. supporter, contributed a most telling letter calculated to make the young inquiring minds of Bolton sit up and take notice. The substance of it appears in our item, "For Newcomers," which is printed at the foot of this page.

Another correspondent quoted Mrs. Knight's statistics from the Scottish Home Department and Report of Scottish Prisons (given in THE FREETHINKER article, "Mrs. Knight's Recent Activities," April 11th, 1958).

It was objected that "prisons are mainly occupied by people in the lower income groups, of which the ratio of R.C.s is very high"; and this drew the reply:

The R.C. population is about one sixteenth of the country's, so they have a good handicap in the crime stakes. And if R.C. education is so good why are so many Roman Catholics in the lower income groups? And why, after ten years of Catholic education, do so many of them become criminals?

Of fourteen letters published, freethought or near-freethought had seven. Of the others, five were pro-Christian, of which the gem came right at the end:

Jesus Christ is history, otherwise the letters B.C. and A.D. would never have been affixed to the date of the year.

To this the editor made an apt comment: "This correspondence is closed."

FOR NEWCOMERS

Ethics and the Churches

ATTEMPTS ARE OFTEN MADE to misguide the public into believing that Christianity equals morality. Nothing is further from the truth. One simply has to look at history and principally at the history of the Roman Catholic Church, or to read statistics on the inmates of prisons and Borstal Schools to realise that it is not so.

Do our Christian friends think that all people who reject or have never heard of Christianity are immoral? Are not some of the most sublime moral principles to be found in the writings of people of pre-Christian times or non-Christian countries? Ethics are not the monopoly of the Christian Churches. There are certain general principles which are accepted by all civilised countries and which we accept without question. The Ten Commandments are far from sufficient to cover the whole of the moral field in our modern world; for example, there is not a word about tolerance, which is one of the main virtues in a civilised society, or our duty to animals.

It would be more profitable for everyone concerned if religious instruction and worship were to be replaced in all Council schools by moral and civic lessons, with help of examples from everyday life or the writings of ancient and modern writers of all horizons. It would have a far more lasting effect on the children and would at least save many parents and teachers from hypocrisy.

CORRESPONDENCE

FREEMASONRY

I am a Grand Rank Freemason. On being interviewed, prior to initiation some 30 odd years ago, I was asked "Do you believe in the Great Architect of the Universe?" Taken aback and quickly thinking, I answered quite truthfully, "I was baptised and confirmed in the Church of England." For the benefit of your readers I would say that Freemasonry is not so much a secret society but rather a society with secrets. However, books on Freemasonry and its alleged secrets are easily purchasable in the Charing Cross Road or obtained on loan from most public libraries—see *Darkness Visible* by the Rev. Walton Hannah.

Actually Masonic ritual is in parts just mumbo-jumbo, but so is the Antedeluvian Order of Buffaloes, the Rosicrucians, the Order of the Moose and Knights Templar, etc., etc. The difference between the Freemasons and the Buffaloes is the former drink wine and the latter beer.

Politics are taboo in Freemasons' Lodges; it is assumed that everyone is a Tory. Religion is never discussed, whilst Christ and the Holy Ghost are ignored, but probe a Freemason and you will find his knowledge of the order abysmal. A few wearers of the converse collar have infiltrated into our ranks but they are not popular as they preclude the telling of lewd stories at the banqueting table.

Naturally masons help one another, but this is no different from what happens everywhere in other forms of organisations.

I have read Mr. Cutner's article (26.9.58) and consider it fair comment, in keeping with the general high standard of THE FREETHINKER.

TORQUAY.

AQUINATE PHILOSOPHY

Although it is generally accepted that the official philosophy of the Roman Church is that of Thomas Aquinas, I note an exception which is given in Mr. Bernard Wall's book, *Report on the Vatican*. He says (page 223), "The Franciscans have an international academy of higher studies for Theology, Canon Law and Philosophy in Via Merulana (Rome). Only Franciscans are allowed to frequent it. Just as the Jesuits at their institutes teach Scholastic Theology and Philosophy... so the Franciscans adhere to their greatest philosopher, Duns Scotus, the Englishman. The Franciscans had as much of a stronghold in medieval Oxford as the Dominicans in Paris... and they ran strong with Englishmen, with Bacon and Ockham following on Scotus.

"These Friars, Franciscans and Dominicans waged the subtlest, lengthiest battle of words ever known in history... Franciscan scepticism ate at the foundations of the great Thomist structure. The debate ended in the sand, however—the Black Death and the Renaissance turned interest elsewhere."

Incidentally, followers of Duns Scotus were known as the Dunces or Dunses, who were a predominating sect until the 16th century, when their system was discredited by the humanists and reformers; however, the Dunces still survive on the Via Merulana.

C. H. HAMMERSLEY.

LEICESTER AND NORTHAMPTON

The announcement in a recent issue that Leicester secularists are sponsoring a youth club is glorious news—a solid nail in the coffin of the Churches. If similar action were taken in every town in the kingdom, church bells would soon be silenced and the parasitic clergy put to useful work.

Why stands Northampton idle? Have its citizens forgotten the valiant deeds of their grandfathers? Does Bradlaugh's statue not kindle their just pride, and urge them, too, to be up and doing?

Wake up, Northampton!

W. E. HUXLEY.

LIFE WITHOUT PURPOSE

I was interested in your paragraph under "Notes and News" in the October 17th issue about the gentleman who wrote in the *Sunday Pictorial* that he holds the view that man and the earth he inhabits are "pure accidents," and that life is without purpose. You ask whether he has ever thought about investing his life with a purpose—which is sound enough as advice but not always easy to act upon.

By "purpose" we usually mean progress towards a clearly perceived end. To a large extent, a man's thinking is governed by his circumstances and his past experiences. One who has suffered much misfortune may well wonder whether life is more than "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." It is significant that those engaged in special work whose relationship to human weal and welfare they are fully conscious of—and those also who, following in the steps of St. Francis, labour on behalf of animals—rarely, if ever, stop to question whether life has a purpose. But it is difficult for many in soulless jobs in a soulless milieu to find any really satisfying meaning in life, and

perhaps only a religious faith may save some people so circumstanced from believing that existence is, on the whole, drab and rather pointless. Although from my teens onwards I have never felt that there lies anything for us as human beings beyond the bourne of this temporal world, some are powerfully persuaded otherwise, and I think that they may bear adversity and unpropitious daily living more gladly and less stoically than the rest.

Of course, beliefs that generate hope do not necessarily have validity. Hope may be illusory, as in respect of the so-called consolations of religion I think it is. We must make our own purpose in life, if we can. There is none afforded by a general biological view, as far as I can see. Man has thought to control his destiny, which in a marked degree he could do, had he sufficient rational intelligence and a collective will to exercise rationality in his affairs. But basically life exists merely to perpetuate itself. It has no other purpose. In the course of geological ages it has evolved in organic complexity and intelligence; but will that forward evolution continue? That is no certainty. In any case, the blind cosmic processes that brought life into initially tentative being on this earth are those that will one day expunge it from our planet as cleanly as though it had never been.

G. I. BENNETT.

ISLAMIC HOMOSEXUALITY

W. E. Huxley (26/9/58) asked what made me think that Islam imposed very severe penalties on homosexuals. Certainly not my own experience, but I was indebted to Rom Landau's *Moroccan Journal* for a good deal of information on the sex life of Muslims in North Africa. He informs us that sexual intercourse between males is proscribed by the Koran, and that Mohammed made it punishable by death. But that penalty can be pronounced only if four reliable witnesses can swear that they had been present at the crime. So, as I dryly concluded in my previous contribution, that is tantamount to no restriction at all in practice. And that is what Landau himself bears out. In countries where Islam is only another religion, and does not possess autocratic powers, Muslims are, of course, subject only to the ordinary common law, like the rest of us. And, I daresay, they behave in sex matters like the rest of us as well. Religion, it strikes me, is often in these matters like a jacket you put on or take off as the occasion demands, making no difference to the real you.

LEONARD MARTIN.

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