

The Freethinker

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WRITING in what is now the first century of the Christian era, the Roman satiric poet, Juvenal, remarked upon the contemporary flood of Oriental superstitions which were just then invading Rome, the Imperial capital of a cosmopolitan empire. In his day, the East, and Egypt and Syria in particular (both then provinces of the Roman Empire) represented the classical counterpart of such modern areas as Tibet, or Hollywood which export "Mahatmas" two-a-

penny! Juvenal writing in a dismal Grub Street tenement of the Oriental-infested metropolis, acidly said that the luscious streams of the East seemed to have mingled with the traditionally sober waters of the Tiber. "The Orontes," he wrote, "has flowed into the Tiber" (Antioch, the luxurious and superstitious capital of Syria, was situated on the banks of the River Orontes). About the same time, the Roman historian Tacitus, then a high official in the Roman administration, scornfully commented that every "execrable superstition" from the East seemed to gravitate irresistibly towards Rome, corrupting the sober morals and ancestral virtues of the rulers of the world.

The Successors of the Caesars

The French Freethinker, Ernest Renan, has remarked very aptly that the Roman Caesars would undoubtedly have been very astonished had anyone told them that, in the course of time, they would be succeeded as masters of Rome and rulers of the Western world by the spiritual successors of a group of obscure propagandists who arrived in Rome about the same period that Juvenal and Tacitus were directing their satire against the current crop of invading Oriental superstitions. But so it was to be. Nineteen hundred years after the obscure Christian sect first arrived in the metropolis of its contemporary world, the successor of these early Christian propagandists has just been ceremonially crowned as Pope-King—as a kind of spiritual Caesar—on a world-wide scale unknown to any ancient Caesar. And through the all-pervasive medium of a modern technique which the early Christians would almost certainly have regarded, could they have foreseen it, as damnable witchcraft inspired by the Devil in person! Evidently, to judge from the carefully organised world-wide publicity engineered by the Vatican even the most conservative of the Christian Churches has moved with the times.

Pope Peter?

Among these early Oriental invaders for whom history had actually reserved such a brilliant future, tradition has preserved the names of two in particular, Peter and Paul. The canonical New Testament has preserved writings—real or alleged—of both. Assuming their historical existence on the dubious testimony of an undoubtedly ancient ecclesiastical tradition which dates back with certainty to the early second century, no corroborating information has, so far, been found in secular history, but this is perhaps comprehensible in view of the obscurity of these early

protagonists of Christianity, it would appear that Paul was a very much more considerable figure than Peter; also assuming the still more doubtful assumption that the Epistles ascribed to them are indeed genuine. Paul's Epistle to the Romans—that basic thesis of dawning Christian theology—is also a much more substantial and original work than are the two rather nebulous Epistles General ascribed to his Galilean colleague. However, in sublime

disregard of these apparently obvious facts, the Church of Rome has stubbornly persisted in regarding Peter rather than Paul as the inspired founder of the Roman Catholic and Apostolic Church. The present Pope claims to be the 262nd in unbroken succes-

sion since Peter, whilst his Infallibility and unchallenged supremacy over the *whole* Church are ascribed again solely to Peter as Christ's designated successor. If, as we were once informed by a Catholic theological student, St. Peter did not either go to Rome or become its first Bishop, then the world-wide Roman Catholic Church would willy nilly have to close its doors. The Vatican stands or falls on the tradition that Peter was the first Pope, from whom all the others derive. Naturally, the key text in the whole New Testament is Matthew's "Thou art Peter," etc. It is with these words that every Pope is greeted when he enters St. Peter's Basilica for his coronation. From the standpoint of secular, historical research pure and simple, it must be conceded that it would be difficult to find anyone anywhere in history who has undergone such an astonishing transition as did the shadowy, legendary fisherman of Galilee into the first Pope and founder of the oldest and most powerful dynasty in European, if not in world, history.

The Vatican on TV

The worldwide publicity given by TV, radio and Press to the recent coronation in Rome has, so to speak, put the Vatican on the map. It is an impressive warning against too glib assumptions that the progress of science is under all circumstances inimical to religion. No doubt the *spirit* of science is so. But, as we have just seen, its technical evolution may be invaluable—we almost wrote a God-send!—to the Churches. Rome, with its vast experience of propaganda—the name itself derives from the Vatican!—may be expected to take full advantage of the fantastic publicity that the passing of the late and the coronation of the present Pope have just received. Time was when Father Agnellus Andrew and Co., the BBC reporters of the coronation on radio and TV, would have been burned alive as purveyors of potent Black Magic!

The Decline of the West

Thanks to television, the pastoral terms "shepherd" and "sheep," and their mutual relationship are now known to hundreds of millions of viewers, listeners and readers. We recall the famous observation of Renan that "before the Ancient Greeks there were no citizens and no nations, only flocks of sheep browsing under the pastoral care of Divine

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

Reflections on the Papal Coronation

By F. A. RIDLEY

Shepherds." This is the precise view of human society broadcast at Pope John's coronation. When the latest Divine Shepherd had solemnly blessed his world-wide flock of sheep, surrounded by attendant priestly shepherds clad in the flowing robes and lofty mitres of the long-vanished pastoral age, not only the Orontes, but the Euphrates, the

Ganges and the Nile have again flowed into the Tiber. In modern, as formerly in ancient, Rome, does this melancholy spectacle announce the proximate Decline of the West and the eventual coming of the Ages of Faith? At the Vatican, where they take long views, they no doubt hope so.

Edgar Saltus

By MIMNERMUS SECUNDUS

Religion is but a monument of ancient fear.—EDGAR SALTUS.

The things we boast of will one day be quoted to prove our ignorance.—EMERSON.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO was born Edgar Saltus (1858-1921), an author with a reputation on both sides of the Atlantic ocean. He was an American only in the sense that Edgar Allan Poe was one. There was nothing provincial about Saltus, and in thousands of readable pages he revealed his cosmopolitan culture and sympathies. With Thomas Paine he could have said, proudly, "The world is my country."

Characteristically, Edgar Saltus began his literary career with a book on Balzac. It was brief, bright, and imbued with the spirit of the matter. A year later he showed another facet of his bright genius by writing *The Philosophy of Disenchantment*, a remarkable exposition of the teaching of Schopenhauer, Hartmann, Leopardi, and other thinkers. This work was followed by the brilliant and illuminating *Anatomy of Negation*, a book which alone would have made the reputation of a lesser man.

The book was a tableau of Atheism from Kapila to Leconte de Lisle, and helped to fill a much-needed gap. As an essayist he stood in the very front rank, his *Pomps of Satan* being a work of absorbing and unflagging interest. Instead of fantasy and the world of dreams, the author gave us society and the world of reality. Instead of pathos and bathos, we had cynical, cultured criticism, and the style was the veriest glory of epigram. The subjects were curious and varied, and described the fashions, foibles, and failings of American society. There was acid, too, in the criticism. His sarcastic description, "The Benighted States," as he called the Great Republic of the West, was not a compliment, but the jest went round the world. New York he drenched in vitriol:

Never, perhaps, except in the Rome of the Caesars, has there been gathered together in one city a set so rich, so idle, so profoundly uninterested in anything save themselves.

This was the manner in which Edgar Saltus hurled out his jibes and his epigrams. All that easy zest, that curling of his tongue round the subject, that freedom from enthusiasm, were possible only to a man who simplified his life by dividing it well, and not by cultivating one side at the expense of another.

As a novelist Saltus justified his great reputation. His stories form a collection which earned him the title of the American Balzac. In his work, *Mary Magdalene*, he produced a most daring and successful reconquest of antiquity.

A poet at heart, Saltus proved his claim in many a passage of really beautiful prose. Here he is worthy of De Quincey at his best:

The Orient is asleep in the ashes of her gods. The star of Ormuzd has burned out in the skies. On the banks of her sacred seas, Greece, hushed for evermore, rests on the divine limbs of her white immortals. In the sepulchre of the pale Nazarene, humanity guards its last divinity. Every promise is unfulfilled. There is no light save, perchance, in death. One torture more, one more throb of the heart, and after it, nothing. The grave opens, a little flash falls in, and the weeds of forgetfulness, which soon hide the tomb, grow eternally above its vanities. And still the voice of the living, of the just and the unjust, of Kings, of felons, and of beasts, will be raised

unsilenced, until humanity unsatisfied as before, and yet impatient, for the peace which life has disturbed, is tossed at last, with its shattered globe and forgotten gods, to fertilise the furrows of space where worlds ferment.

In *The Lords of the Ghostland*, Saltus deals with Brahma, Ormuzd, Amon Ra, Jehovah, Zeus and Jupiter. It is on such vignettes that we see Saltus's art at its best. Death, for example, has been a subject that has attracted thousands of writers, yet he can invest such a threadbare subject with freshness:

There are topics about which words hover like enchanted bees. Death is one of them. Medievally it was represented by a skeleton to which prose had given a rictus, poetry a scythe, and philosophy wings. From its cyries it swooped spectral and sinister. Previously it was more gracious. In Greece it resembled Eros. Among its attributes was beauty. It did not alarm. It beckoned and consoled. The child of Night, the brother of Sleep, it was less funereal than narcotic. In the change of things, death lost its charm. It became a sexless nightmare frame of bones topped by a grinning skull. In epicurean Rome it was a marionette that invited you to wreathe yourself with roses before they could fade. In the Muslim East it was an angel, in Vedic India it was a god. Changing again, it has now acquired the serenity of a natural law.

Saltus carried a weight of scholarship gracefully. His criticism of the older deities show his wide range of knowledge when irony and humanity, tempering one another, lend to his works an inimitable charm. He loved the old-world garden where Horace smiled at Rome; the supper-table where smiling Voltaire challenged the best wits of Europe; the chateau of brave, old Montaigne, and the beautiful river-haunts of Whitman. Saltus showed us, if, indeed, it were needed, that the American can compete successfully with the culture of the admired European writers. He was a philosopher, a poet, a critic, a novelist, and that rare thing in our popular world of laborious penmen, a really fine writer of English, the finest and most-widespread language in the world.

A Worthy Opponent?

WHEN we read in the *Catholic Herald* (10/10/58) of the "moral harm done by clever personages on the 'Brains Trust' and other programmes, who repeatedly deny the existence of God," it helps us to understand why so few opponents of Christianity are allowed on the BBC. The relatively few who do appear are causing too much damage as it is. Bertrand Russell is named by the *Herald* as the leader of these dangerous "personages," but Mrs. Margaret Knight is referred to as "a great follower" of Lord Russell. Indeed, Mrs. Knight's treatment of the Rev. Leslie Weatherhead is likened to a steam roller going over a blancmange! The choice bit is still to come, however. "Never has this implacable and formidable anti-Christian been given adversaries worthy of her mettle," complains the *Herald*. "She should be given a nice long session in which to fight it out with Fr. Martin D'Arcy, S.J., for example," it adds. Well, we are sure that Mrs. Knight would jump at the opportunity; we should relish it; so it's up to the BBC and Father D'Arcy. No doubt both will pay attention to a suggestion from the *Catholic Herald*.

On Christian Relics—2

By H. CUTNER

(Concluded from page 359)

RIGHT THROUGHOUT THE AGES, Christians have venerated "holy" relics merely on the strength of priests—or pious charlatans, for that matter—telling them that the relics were Christian. Even a Pagan unbeliever like Lucian (120-90 A.D.) tells us in his *Peregrinus*, "that whenever any crafty juggler, expert in his trade, and who knew how to make a right use of things, went over to the Christians, he was sure to grow rich immediately, by making a prey of their simplicity." And Celsus, as Conyers Middleton (1683-1750) noted in his *Free Inquiry*, represented "Christian wonderworkers as mere vagabonds and cheats who rambled about to play their tricks at fairs and markets." It was the easiest thing in the world to foist the most extravagant rubbish as "holy" relics on to Christians then, as indeed it is now. Witness the way Group Captain Cheshire, V.C., is doing his utmost now to persuade his fellow Christians that the "Holy Shroud of Turin" is genuine, and, of course, convincing most of them. It is as big a fraud as all Christian relics are dealing with Jesus and Mary.

No more ridiculous story—taken literally—has ever been written than that of Jesus turning water into wine; yet we have shown at Orleans some of the "liquor" which made the guests at the marriage feast of Cana so drunk. This edifying story is never, or very rarely, referred to by Christian temperance orators.

Naturally, if the milk of Mary has been preserved, we must expect the blood of Jesus also to be preserved. It is exhibited at more than one hundred places. And at Rome you could see the cedar table on which Jesus took the famous Last Supper—though another equally genuine table can be seen in Galilee. It should not surprise us that even the towel Jesus used to wipe the feet of the Apostles can be seen in Rome, though the more genuine towel—genuine because it contains an imprint of Judas's foot—is at Aix. And to prove how great he was as a Man of Sorrows, his tears can be found exhibited in many churches all over Europe.

Helena, the mother of Constantine, always ready to preserve all the relics she could, managed to obtain the two pillars of Pilate's house, and even the twenty-eight marble steps that led up to it. She is also responsible for transporting the Shrine at Loretto from Dalmatia, which has a reputation for curing incurable diseases almost equal to Lourdes. This shrine is actually the house where lived Mary at Nazareth!

Naturally, the head of St. John the Baptist can be found in many places—at Amiens, Lyons, Rome, as well as in Spain and Germany. If you dared to question the one at Amiens, you would be shown the veritable hole over the right eye made by Herodias with a knife when the head was first brought to her on a charger. You can even see the finger with which John pointed to Jesus as his successor at Toulouse, Lyons, and, of course, at other places.

Gibbon, who could hardly refer to Christianity without a sneer, was even more so when he dealt with relics. The bones of Peter and Paul were, he says, "deposited under the altars of Christ," and devoutly visited by emperors, consuls, and generals of armies. "Their genuine or fictitious remains," he adds, "were adored as the Palladium of Christian Rome. . . ."

"The pilgrims of East and West resorted to the holy threshold; but the shrines of the apostles were guarded by miracles and invisible terrors, and it was not without fear that

the pious Catholic approached the object of his worship. It was fatal to touch, it was dangerous to behold, the bodies of the saints; and those who, from the purest motives, presumed to disturb the repose of the sanctuary, were affrighted by visions or punished with sudden death."

Even the broiled fish which Peter gave to Jesus was to be seen in Calvin's time, as well as Paul's chain, particles of which (Gibbon tells us) were inserted "in keys or crosses of gold, and distributed in Britain, Gaul, Spain, Africa, Constantinople, and Egypt."

Relics of all the Apostles were similarly preserved, including those of St. Stephen. The discovery of his remains in the fifth century is characterised by Archdeacon Jortin (1698-1770) "as perhaps one of the most barefaced and impudent impostures that ever were obtruded upon the Christian world." Of course, Jortin really believed the story of Stephen in Acts—but it may as well be pointed out here that there is not a scrap of evidence that his "stoning" to death ever took place. All the same, the stones which killed him can be seen, as Calvin notes, in a dozen churches. As for the blood of Stephen, it was contained in a phial, and used to liquefy at Naples on the third of August. But when Gregory XIII corrected the calendar, it obligingly changed its date, and liquefied on the thirteenth of August, on which date was held thenceforth his festival.

But it is a mistake to imagine that only the heroes of the New Testament left their relics to posterity. The astute Church of Rome found that relics of many of the Old Testament characters were just as necessary to perpetuate its glory, and so after 1,200 years, the grave of Zechariah was re-discovered with the prophet wearing a golden crown, golden shoes, and a beautiful robe. Samuel's remains came to light in 406 A.D., much to the delight of Jerome, and were removed to Constantinople. Adam's skull was discovered in Golgotha and, naturally, the tombs also of Eve, Seth, and Noah. Aaron's rod can be seen in Paris, Rome, and Bordeaux. The bones of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob rest in Rome. And no doubt plenty more of Old Testament relics are still to be seen. In fact, the table on which Abraham was ready to sacrifice Isaac is at the Church of St. James-Scossa-Gavalli, at Rome.

Most of us have always thought that Jesus Christ died, as he lived, a bachelor, but Archdeacon Jortin gives us in his *Ecclesiastical History* the full particulars of his marriage. It took place on the day of the Carnival, 1364 A.D., and the convent of Sienna holds the marriage certificate. His bride was St. Catherine, who so adored her Master that he came to her cell one day and put a marriage ring on her finger. There can be no doubt about this historic occasion, for several famous Italian painters have painted it. Blatant infidels like myself are forced to think of similar marriages in Pagan mythology, like the one between Ariadne and Bacchus, but what can one expect from infidels?

It may well be true that relics are not quite as convincing these days as they once were, due to that secular education once so feared and hated by the Roman Church—and other Churches, of course. But time and common sense and science march on. Nowadays, no one takes Pagan mythology seriously, and that that will one day be the fate of our Christian mythology is as certain as that the sun will arise tomorrow morning.

This Believing World

Although the Church has always tried to take a major part in "Remembrance Sunday," it has signally failed. The TV presentation on November 9th last of the Cenotaph service proves that its prime importance is purely *secular*—even the music played by the military bands before the Cenotaph in general are such favourites as "Rule, Britannia," "Hearts of Oak," "The Minstrel Boy," and so on. The Cenotaph itself is entirely devoid of Christian symbolism, its designer wisely refusing to put the inevitable cross upon it. In fact, the ceremony could have completely dispensed with the Church—and gained by it.

In the "Bolton Evening News" recently a "Protestant" tries his utmost to show that the high proportion of Roman Catholics in prison is not due to their religion so much as to the fact that the "offenders" are descendants of "immigrants from Western Ireland" who were "illiterate and almost uncivilised." But surely this argument cuts both ways? Why, if they were such all-believing Catholics, were they "illiterate and uncivilised"? And is it not a fact that the delinquents had the same education in most cases as non-Catholic children? The argument from Christians has always been that Christian teaching is the great antidote to crime—but, according to prison statistics, this is simply not true. Most criminals have had a very religious education, and this is true for criminals all over the religious world.

The Roman Church, in settling "for ever," that there had to be only four Gospels because there are four corners to the earth, perhaps never expected that other Gospels would be found which some Christians find at least equally "authentic." For example, here we have Prof. W. Till, lecturer in Coptic in Manchester University, discussing "a fifth Gospel," which is described as "according to St. Thomas," and which contains "secret words" by Jesus not found in the canonical Gospels. Thomas is called "Didymus" (a twin) and one of the traditions frowned on by all the Churches is that the other twin was Jesus himself!

In any case all the Apostles have written Gospels—or Gospels are attributed to them—but the Gospel of Thomas (or one of them) describes how he saved Jesus from the Cross, and how they both journeyed with Mary to India, where eventually Jesus died. We can even see his tomb there at Srinigar, and that of Mary at Muree. There is no end to religious credulity.

Strenuous efforts are always being made to save the Bible by putting it in a more modern idiom, and its utter failure in this is shown by the way the Churches refuse to have anything to do with these new-fangled translations. In pious scorn, one lady in a newspaper cutting which has reached us asks how would we like Chaucer, Shakespeare, Gibbon, Byron, and many other writers re-written? We wouldn't—but they never professed to be writing the word of God. Moreover, they were *original* authors; our Bible is a translation from Hebrew and Greek, and no one knows what was *originally* written, for we have only copies packed with all sorts of errors, inaccurate readings, and so on. No wonder scholars are disturbed at the way the Lord is blamed for so much nonsense!

Viewers will be delighted to learn that, according to *News Chronicle*, "clergymen are to be taught to become TV personalities." Whether this will end the reign of Lady Barnet, Miss Diana Dors, or Sabrina, remains to be seen, but we cannot help wondering whether, if a clergyman

does rise to the heights of our glamorous ladies, this would mean that they could thus better prove the truth of Christianity. Would a more attractive clergyman overthrow the arguments from history, science, and philosophy, which have succeeded in proving that all the claims of Christianity to be a Divine Religion are egregiously false?

South African News

Prime Minister Hendrik Frensch Verwoerd broadcast to the nation asserting that as "believing rulers of a religious country," the Government would seek their strength and guidance in the future, as in the past, "from Him who controls the destinies of nations. Only when upheld by the blessing of the Almighty and the confidence of his people can a leader give of his best, physically and spiritually. In this spirit I dedicate myself to my country."

Following his denunciation of the Lourdes "miracles," Johannesburg Rationalist Association chairman Dr. Edward Roux received a report in the *Jo'burg Star* which was enough to bring several protesting letters from outraged R.C.s—all good publicity for Freethought.

When the Afrikaans tabloid weekly *Die Brandwag* discovered the existence of the Rationalist group—people who actually disbelieved biblical "truth"—they immediately published an article under the large headlines, "Here is an Exposure which Ought to Shock Every Reader of *Die Brandwag*," and explained to their horrified readers: "In Johannesburg there exists an organisation some of whose members deliberately set out to question the Word of God and even the existence of God. The young woman we mention in this article is the secretary of this movement. Without shame this woman says on public platforms that she refuses to bring up her children in the ways of God and His commandments."

The rest of the article gave excerpts from the Johannesburg Rationalist secretary, Mrs. Betty Lurie's lecture, "An Atheist Mother," given to the group during May.

The following week *Die Brandwag* gave extracts from the *South African Rationalist*, including one from Ingersoll's "Advice to Parents." Ingersoll was described as "one of the members"! The *Rationalist* good-humouredly points out that *Die Brandwag* has made history by being the first journals to publish Ingersoll in Afrikaans.

CONWAY DISCUSSIONS

Mrs. Kathleen Tacchi-Morris's lecture on Armistice Day last at Conway Hall attracted a large audience and a vigorous discussion. Her plea that women all over the world should promote peace and abolish war for ever was listened to with the closest attention—no doubt helped by the lecturer's splendid elocution holding her audience completely. The discussion brought out many varieties of belief and ideologies—but all agreed that war must be abolished. The chair was ably taken by Mr. J. Hutton Hynd, who also contributed an interesting foreword.

—NEXT WEEK—

CATHOLIC ACTION

By COLIN McCALL

THE FREETHINKER

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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

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Midland Institute, Paradise Street).—Sunday, November 23rd: LEN EBURY, "My 30 Years of Militant Freethought."

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics Institute).—Sunday, November 23rd, 7 p.m.: A Lecture

Central London Branch N.S.S. (The Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, November 23rd, 7.15 p.m.: J. M. ALEXANDER, "Evolution and the Last 100 Years."

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, November 25th, 7.15 p.m.: The "Dialectical Materialism" of Karl Marx. For: JOHN LEWIS, PH.D. Against: W. H. CARLTON.

Glasgow Secular Society (Central Halls, Bath Street).—Sunday, November 23rd, 3 p.m.: F. J. CORINA, "Darwin and Damnation."

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, November 23rd, 6.30 p.m.: Prof. P. H. NOWELL-SMITH, M.A., "Modern Philosophy."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Hall, Upper Parliament Street).—Sunday, November 23rd, 2.30 p.m.: K. HUMPHREYS, "A Citizen Growing Up."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, November 23rd, 11 a.m.: F. H. A. MICKLEWRIGHT, M.A., "What the Bishops said at Lambeth."

Notes and News

In a *Manchester Guardian* review (7/11/58) of *Bigger than Little Rock*, the Rev. Roger Lloyd praises the Bishop of Arkansas, who wrote the book, as a "great Christian leader." It is undoubtedly true that life in Little Rock was disrupted by the crisis, that even friends became suspicious of one another and "carefully avoided talking about the Central High School." And Bishop Brown apparently admits the Churches' "past failures, prejudices and blindnesses." But now—writes Mr. Lloyd—they had "to speak and declare themselves, and so they did, bravely and candidly, only to find that hardly anyone understood the language they were using, and still less the motives that inspired them." Can it be that they didn't speak clearly, that they were equivocal? We don't know about Bishop Brown himself—he may have been an exception—but we have produced evidence in plenty in THE FREETHINKER that

the Churches have failed lamentably in Little Rock. We cannot see how straightforward statements that all are equal in the sight of God, that segregation is contrary to the teaching of Christ, can fail to be understood. Such statements, however, were rare, extremely rare, and we consequently have Mr. Lloyd acknowledging a debt to Bishop Brown because "redemptive reconciliation has at least got a start, even if it has terribly far to go." To add—as Mr. Lloyd does—"we should be proud indeed" if "any English diocese in the same circumstances did half so well" is assuredly damning with faint praise.

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LATELY—said *Look* magazine (September 30th, 1958)—Roman Catholics have been showing concern over secularism in United States schools. As Father Thurston N. Davis (editor of the patriotically named Jesuit paper, *America*) put it: "We don't feel tense about other religious groups. What tension there is among Catholics is directed at the secularists. We're worried about those who are losing their faith in God. We're worried about the secularists who deny God His rights in the realm of Caesar. On this, we look for allies among other religious groups." A fortnight before, however, *Time* magazine (September 15th) had given Pope Pius XII's view that the "four mortal perils" threatening the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America were: Communism, Secularism, "Protestant invasion" and "a disquieting spiritism." Catholics, then, seek the Protestant's support against the Secularist in North America, but fight both in South America.

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ONE of our oldest and staunchest readers lives in Southern Ireland and is, not surprisingly, an ex-Roman Catholic. He sends us a couple of letters from his sister and his friend, urging him—in the words of the latter—to give up his "false philosophy and pray and *think*" (our italics). The friend—who is "appalled"—misquotes Horatius's "more things in Heaven and earth" speech and maintains that the "universe itself should convince any reasonable person of the existence of a supreme being." The sister realises what our reader's "friend Darwin" has done to him. "The idea of believing in that ignoramus [yes, she means Darwin] when there are millions of intellectual men" who acknowledge God as creator is, understandably, beyond her. She remembers the time when her errant brother had the *Imitation of Christ* at his bedside and read a chapter each night. "Would that you had continued the practice!" she exclaims in her sincere, bewildered way.

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WHETHER a London report by "Ronny Howard" in the *Trinidad Evening News* (6/10/58) aimed to demonstrate primitive survivals in modern thought, we don't know. But that must surely have been its effect. "Was one of your great-grandmother's grandmothers a witch?" it asked. If so, "a group of psychic research scientists would like to hear from you" because they are trying to discover if descendants of witches "have inherited their peculiar powers." Two boy cousins—it continued—"descended from a woman who had been whipped as a witch seven generations earlier... were discovered to have exceptional powers of thought transference." "A farmer with traditions of witchcraft in his family was found to have a useful gift of hypnotising pigs," some water-diviners and faith healers were also found to have "old-time blood links with alleged witches in some cases." "One of the Queen Mother's remote ancestresses"—it added—was burned for witchcraft and "to this day the Queen Mother's brother, Hon. David Bowes-Lyon, is credited with the gift of second sight." We may have to put up with this sort of thing at home; as an export commodity it is appalling.

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

(Concluded from page 363)

IT SEEMS to those who submit readily to their superstitious instincts that there must be a planned scheme by some capricious "almighty" to work hardship, sickness and death upon them to cause them to "love Him more," and to deny to them the things they want most in order to "Fear Him more." This supposed "almighty" will change his schemes to favour the penitent by prayer, supplication—and financial support of the "Church"; he is told by his priest, preacher or rabbi, or suchlike parasite. Thus he seeks escape by turning to these men with feet of clay, in the hope that they can and will help him "in the eyes of the Lord." They are led to believe that these fakes have a "private line" to the "almighty," and that they have the one and only pass key to the "pearly gates," and that the sole prerogative of "forgiving sin" and eternal pardon lies only in their power.

And so the penitent thinks he can escape the realities of this life by flight to the gods via church, preacher and prayer. Thus this whole vicious scheme becomes nothing less than an insidious form of blackmail, with the culprits never being forced to show their credentials. What crimes in the name of "Salvation" have been perpetrated upon mankind! The prayer business has been the most profitable racket ever known to man. It outranks any and all the gambling casinos; it is free from all taxation and governmental supervision or regulation. It leads in all the flim-flam rackets of all time, and there seems to be no way to convict the ones who gain in this advantage of the gullible. These charlatans pretend to tell of God, and of their personal experiences with him, and of the many conversations with him "through prayer." They promise an immortality in Heaven, yet do not have to produce it, or even prove that there actually is any such thing. Only the dead can prove their fakery, but the dead can't talk, and so in "the silence of the grave," these racketeers are safe from prosecution for fraud.

This prayer business has become so profitable that every conceivable way has been concocted to fleece the ignorant and gullible, such as "Faith healing," revival meetings, prayer meetings, prayer weeks, public praying, and "union services." All forms of dress, ceremonies, rituals, singing and praying are extravagantly put on to whip up great and unbalanced emotional and heartrending money-gathering sessions. The illusion of a "purgatory" (defined by the Roman Catholic Church to be "an intermediate state after death for expiatory purification, especially from venial sin") was concocted in the Dark Ages as an especially lucrative means of garnering in every last penny the poor deluded penitent might have to give. There was, there is no avenue of profit-taking that religion, Church and priest have not explored to the limit. There are no human sorrows that have been too sacred for these conjurers. When questioned, they have tried to excuse their dishonest practices by saying "Prayer satisfies the yearnings of the soul." When asked further what the "soul" was, only an answer barren of any truth, logic or scientific fact was the net result.

Aside from using prayer for profit and as a means of restricting human thinking and behaviour, there is also the underlying danger of demoralising the penitent when he finds his faith in prayer has been betrayed. History tells of many peoples who destroyed their gods when they lost

faith in the efficacy of their earthly agents. Also, the belief in prayer tends to cause one to shirk his responsibilities and tease the deity to do that which he himself cannot or is not willing to do for himself. To hope that prayer will prevent a natural circumstance, such as sickness, death, or a flood, or a draught, famine or the winning of a war is but to destroy what natural character and reasoning ability one might otherwise have. Prayer has the same evil influences upon the practitioner as does any bad and useless habit when once acquired. It is next to impossible to divorce it even when common knowledge causes one to know the futility of it all. Like an opiate, the more it is used, the more it endangers one's wellbeing, with the demands for it becoming ever greater, and the net results ever worse. It creates a dream-world filled with nightmares, and only when the trap is sprung by the kind hands of death is the penitent free!

During World War Two I had a debate with a clergyman and was asked if I believed that chaplains were useful in the military services. I replied that I did not believe that they were of any use anywhere at any time. I directly asked the clergyman if he believed in prayer, and, if so, if he believed God hears and answers all prayers? He replied that he so believed. I then asked him, "If this is so, then let us establish several hypothetical propositions and see how the answers come out. First, there are two very devout Catholic boys facing each other across No-man's Land. Each has a loaded rifle pointed directly at the heart of the other. Each said his morning Mass with his Catholic chaplain before going into the front lines. Each chaplain and each soldier had prayed to his one and same god to preserve his life and limb, and bring victory to his side. All concerned firmly believed that their prayers were heard and would be answered in their favour. Each believed that God was on his side. One life, at least, must here be ended. Will the chaplain and the family of the dead soldier be as "thankful" to this god as the chaplain and family of the soldier who pulled the trigger first or had the most accurate aim? Would this indicate that God took sides or showed partiality and, if so, why? It will not do to say that 'it was God's will' or that 'God moves in mysterious ways' and 'We cannot know God's will.'" And, to carry this to the second proposition: "Let us suppose that each soldier simultaneously pulled the trigger of his gun and both soldiers died as a consequence? Did God not hear either prayer, or did he choose to ignore both, or was there no God either to hear or answer?" Thirdly: "Suppose both soldiers misfired and neither was killed, the question now is, which side, if any, was God on? Or did he answer both prayers in this particular case, while he permitted thousands of others who had prayed just as fervently, to die a sudden and violent death? What kind of a god do you believe in that seems to play favourites, or behave indifferently towards his own created children?"

The person that prays assumes quite a responsibility upon himself when he "goes to the Lord in prayer" and attempts to tell him just how to manage this unlimited universe. Prayers would imply that the Lord does not know his own mind and must listen to and accept the pleadings, teasings, demands, advice and endless prayers from us mortals to tell him how, when and what to do.

To be sincere is one thing; to be mistaken is another; to

"believe" that one's prayers are heard and answered is one thing; to actually have a response from a non-responsive illusion (deity) is an impossibility, and anyone claiming such is a fraud and knowingly preying upon the credulity of those who may put their trust in him.

This is not a "negative" position I take. No, not at all. I know of no god or gods, or any form of supernatural things or beings. Those who say they know that there are such things are taking an affirmative position and the burden of proof is upon them. Yet to date, since the first man said there was a god and that prayer was heard and answered by him, not one shred of accredited evidence or proof has been offered up by them to substantiate them.

Man in his mad desires has fashioned his gods in his own image and weaknesses, and in his fear and longings he prays to his own created phantoms! For man to advance intellectually he must leave all the gods and their supposed agents, churches and trappings. He must forget the myth, magic and miracles that have befogged his life and mental processes, and get closer to reality and to his own fellow man. Together, and free of the superstitions of the past, we may come to know the laws and forces and substance of this natural universe. He must forsake the gods in favour of man. He must surrender all the beliefs in vicarious atonements, apparitions, heavenly discourses, church attendance and god worship and turn to science and history. He must cast aside his fears for intellectual courage, that will enable him to awaken each morning refreshed and buoyant and eager for the day's adventures; fearless of the known and unknown; fearless of darkness or storm; of gods and devils, and with the knowledge and courage to face up and conquer the trials that may beset the day. Let him glory in the sunshine of day and knowledge, that gives life and meaning, and make himself a vital living being, a man free in both mind and body, eager to soar out into the great dome of human knowledge and experience. Open hands to help will do far more to help his fellows than folded hands in useless prayer.

Church and State in Italy

By J. GRANCHAROFF

THE FASCISM OF THE CHURCH, which tries to dominate the life of the Italian people and subjugate them to the "divine" law of the Vatican, is finding bitter resistance among liberal-minded people and publications. The quotations I shall give are from *La Previsione*, an international polemical review with a social, humanist and generally cultural outlook. Its address is Via Dafnica 121, Aci Reale, Catania.

"The Catholic Theocracy boasts divine rights over the whole people and individuals; for that reason we have to fight it on its own ground. We affirm that the authority of the Catholic Church has not any historical, logical, or scientific ground."

If the authority of the Church were accepted only by believers the matter would be much more simple. What is true for an individual cannot be true for the State, because the State cannot see the Church with the eyes of a believer. What the Italian State sees in the Vatican is the political force which it needs in order to strengthen its own power.

The story is not new—"with the Treaty of Laterano, the Italian State became tied to another State, but not to a religion, which does not need a political treaty because it is a question of individual conscience."

Contrary to the historical fact that a small State is usually absorbed by a bigger one, the Vatican today is the

real boss in Italy. Its claim to dominate and direct the affairs of the Italian State can only be made on the assumption of the so-called majority being Catholics. But it is based on the parochial registers, on the number baptised, not on the effective and actual spiritual condition of Italians, which would be the proper basis. "Even so, a majority is not the criterion of truth. How can the Italian Government guarantee the authenticity of the authority of the Catholic Church, if it cannot exhibit any proof to the world of culture and science outside?"

"And secondly, how can the magistracy of the Italian Republic take action and condemn people for so-called blasphemy of the religion of the State, if the latter cannot guarantee the former and if the magistracy itself lacks competence in theological matters.

"In spite of this, clericalism continues its advance and penetrates every sector of civil and individual life. Action is taken against the people, and they are condemned in the name of the people for expressing views which offend the prestige of the Vatican Theocracy."

The function of the Italian Government is to carry out the will of the "Sacred Mother Church," that is, to suppress any freedom of expression, to kill human dignity, and to stop any cultural advancement.

In the comments of the Italian Episcopal Conference, which dealt with secular problems, and gave instructions to believers on how to vote for the Church's principles, they mention "Quarta Cura," encyclical of Pius IX: "The Roman pontificate cannot and need not come into a pact or conciliation with progress, liberalism, and modern civilisation."

It is clear enough that the Church "did not lose, and does not wish to lose its secular prerogative of a reactionary and anti-humanistic force."

Vae victis! And it cannot be otherwise if the Church is the victor. It makes man a miserable being, robs him of his life and pleasure, and on the suffering of others it builds its own prosperity. It needs the valley of tears and unhappiness to populate heaven with souls.

And here it is quite natural to ask our left wing politicians, and Comrade Togliati in particular—and his party—what they have to say about Article 7 of the Italian Constitution, which they supported and voted for. In fact, it does not cause him any anxiety. He declares that "the insertion of Article 7 was an act of secular coherence and political wisdom."

It must be clear to us then that this political party with atheistic colour and a materialistic conception of history is not interested in solving the social problem and in defending free thought, but in gaining political power. To achieve it, it accepts the Jesuit maxim, "The end justifies the means."

The battle of the Italian free-thinker is very hard. He has to fight against the century's menace, the twin State-Church.

Less Blood by Request

"SOUNDS horrible, a pretty lurid cry for vengeance," comments Canon Frank Bishop, Vicar of St. Giles's Church, Camberwell, London. (*The Star*, 11/11/58.) And we agree. He is referring to a verse from Psalm 68: "That thy foot may be dipped in the blood of thine enemies, and that the tongue of thy dogs may be red through the same." Canon Bishop believes there is "a widespread demand" to get the Psalms altered because some of them are too blood-thirsty. Here we beg leave to differ. Our opinion is that very few people care either way.

CORRESPONDENCE

THE PROGRESS OF PRIVILEGE

May I point out to Mr. Corrick (October 4th) that the upper chamber today is vastly different from that of Cromwell's time, both as regards composition and function, also that the British monarch now reigns by the will of the people, not divine right. Secularists would be unwise to champion every unpopular cause. They should reserve their powder for their mortal enemies, the Churches. For tactical reasons, republicans should bide their time. No bishop, no king.

W. E. HUXLEY.

"HIS HOLINESS THE POPE"

THE FREETHINKER points out that the prayers of the faithful proved ineffective in saving the Pope's life, and suggests that if God had decided to call his Holiness to eternal bliss, what possible difference could prayers make? I would like personally to remark that all the repeated grovelling and exhibitionism that has been going on recently is a disgrace to human beings, and if this sort of thing comes natural to people what hope is there for common sense? If the Pope was such a marvellous chap, what a fine opportunity the appropriate deity missed in failing to lengthen the life of the head of a considerable section of the human race!

At the present time the Roman Catholic Church is actively engaged by means of expensive and large-scale advertising, in trying to increase its membership. It is also trying to persuade the country to pay for the R.C. education of children, and the content of that education reeks with gross superstitions and untruths, which ought to be kept away from children. How can we further the establishment and teaching of only secular subjects in our schools? Only by vigilance on the part of those who care for the protection of the minds of children from pernicious religious doctrines. We must closely examine these and the practices of the Church and publish the details in the interests of truth.

A. D. CORRICK.

A BISHOP AND DIVORCE

I think my latest discovery of freethought in unexpected places is worth a few notes. It occurs in *Reserved Judgment* by Judge Tudor Rees (Frederick Muller Ltd., 1956). When engaged in divorce proceedings, the author had lunch at times with the President of the Probate, Divorce and Admiralty Division, who was Welsh, and who, on the occasion in question, had also asked a Welsh bishop to share his table. For some reason, the President started to keel-haul the bishop about divorce—and my, he did! These legal "big shots" are past masters at cross-examination, and the bishop, wriggle as he pleased, was completely flattened. The author (Judge Rees) was so struck by the discussion that he went home and wrote it out; and it is reproduced in this book, pages 205-209. I will quote the beginning of it.

President: "And so you are opposed to divorce?"

Bishop: "Utterly."

"On what grounds?"

"Many grounds. But I need only mention one. I stand upon Christ's commandment, 'Those whom God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.'"

"I see." A long pause, and then: "Bishop, does God ever make a mistake?"

"Of course not. He is perfect."

"Therefore everything he does is perfect."

"Absolutely."

"So if he joins together two people in marriage, it must be a perfect marriage?"

"Oh, no."

"Well, what is wrong?"

"Human sin."

"But an omniscient God, working a perfect work, would have seen the intervention of that sin to break up the marriage, and would not have jointed the two together?"

Etc., etc., to the hopeless defeat of the bishop. It might have been a reprint from THE FREETHINKER. Of course (as with all such things) it has implications much wider than divorce.

Apart from the above, the entire book is excellent reading for anyone interested in sociology. Nothing morbid, but all sound sense by a very humane and understanding Judge. G. S. BROWN.

N.S.S. EXECUTIVE MEETING

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 12TH.—Present: Messrs. F. A. Ridley (Chair), Alexander, Arthur, Barker, Corstorphine, Ebury, Hornbrook, Johnson, Moore, Taylor, Mrs. Trask, the Treasurer (Mr. Griffiths) and the Secretary. Apologies from Mr. Gordon and Mrs. Venton. The resignation of Mr. Shepherd (due to pressure of work) was received with regret. New members were admitted to the Bradford, Central London, Merseyside, North London, Wales and Western and West Ham and District Branches, which with Individual members, totalled 15. It was agreed that the President should speak to University of North Staffs Heretics Society. Report of possible Singapore Branch was received with satisfaction. Donation of £5 and literature to Ghana Rationalist

Group and expenses for two speakers to Wales and Western Branch were authorised. Further information on Dagenham "Chanticleer" paper would be sought. Pius XII meeting at Caxton Hall had shown a small profit and been very successful. Questionnaire to M.P.s had been sent out but few replies received. The Annual Dinner was fixed for Saturday, March 28th, at Paviour's Arms, Westminster. A discussion on London propaganda followed; Mr. Taylor reported on his discussion at Guy's Hospital and Mr. Ridley on his lecture at Oxford University—the latter resulting in 20 new members for the Humanist Group. Mr. Ebury mentioned invitation from All-African Congress to Mr. Ridley, which the latter had reluctantly had to decline. The next meeting was fixed for Wednesday, December 17th, 1958.

OBITUARY

WE are sorry to hear of the death of Mr. M. Feldman, of Leeds, one of THE FREETHINKER'S and National Secular Society's best friends in Yorkshire. Mr. Feldman was a fearless and outspoken Freethinker, a man of firm opinions who never hesitated to express them strongly, and who was respected for it. He died on October 25th after undergoing a serious operation. It is good to know that Mr. Feldman's son shares his father's views and will continue to subscribe to this paper.

It is with sincere regret that we announce the decease of our member Mr. George Alfred Hassell, who passed away peacefully in hospital after a long series of illnesses, at the age of 72 years.

George Hassell had been an active and lifelong member of the Leicester Secular Society, being for many years in charge of the bookstall, a regular attender of lectures and discussions. We shall miss him for his kindly nature, his unswerving loyalty and his forthright opinions. C.H.H.

WITH the death of John West on November 3rd, a month short of his 89th birthday, a staunch Freethinker and a sterling character leaves the London scene. A member of Central London Branch of the National Secular Society, Mr. West had been associated with progressive movements all his adult life and often recalled his memories of great figures of the past. He himself continued to attend N.S.S. meetings until increasing age compelled him to retire to Ladywell Institute, London. There members of the Society called on him and found him cheerful, happy and mentally alert. Unfortunately, his relatives had no trace of the Society's address and his funeral on November 5th took place at Hither Green Cemetery with no member present. But many of them will miss him.

CAN MATERIALISM EXPLAIN MIND? By G. H. Taylor. Price 3/6; postage 6d.

THE PAPACY IN POLITICS TODAY. By Joseph McCabe. Price 2/6; postage 5d.

A SHORT HISTORY OF SEX WORSHIP. By H. Cutner. Price 2/6; postage 6d.

FREEDOM'S FOE—THE VATICAN. By Adrian Pigott. A collection of Danger Signals for those who value liberty. 128 pages. Price 2/6; postage 6d.

THE DOLLAR AND THE VATICAN: Its Character, Methods and Aims. By Avro Manhattan. 2nd Edition—Revised and Enlarged. Price 21/-; postage 1/3.

ESSAYS IN FREETHINKING. By Chapman Cohen. Series 1, 2, 3, 4. Cloth bound. Price 7/6 each series; postage 7d. each.

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THE BIBLE HANDBOOK (10th Edition). By G. W. Foote and W. P. Ball. Price 4/6; postage 6d.

A CHRONOLOGY OF BRITISH SECULARISM. By G. H. Taylor. Price 1/-; post 2d.