

# The Freethinker

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SINCE THE ALGERIAN RISING of May 13th, 1958, radicals everywhere have felt the impact of a wave of deep disgust.

Caesarism, Militarism, Fascism . . . such words recall so many bloody conflicts, so many noble but vain efforts, so much odious brutality and shocking tortures!

The events of May 13th evoked gloomy memories and deep disquiet.\*

All progressive people, irrespective of their individual views or political allegiances, feel convinced that severe combats lie before them, and that the current reaction will seek to gain ground by every possible means. Hence the deep apprehension which we cannot analyse further here.

The Freethinker has not escaped. All our friends and adherents have been deeply grieved by the results of the Referendum and of the recent elections. The bulk of them spurn fear. They know that the profession of Freethought has entailed a continuous struggle throughout the centuries against corruption, obscurantism and tyranny. *They are ready to take appropriate action in order to defend their ideals.*

But they are perplexed by the collapse of the traditional political conceptions. The composition of the new National Assembly has disconcerted many people who did not believe such a swindle was possible nowadays. For it contains dangerous possibilities. Will not the reactionaries, encouraged by their so-called "victory," try to secure maximum results? Or will this hideous victory (swindle is a more accurate word) recoil upon the heads of its instigators?

We shall soon see. Meanwhile, one fact emerges clearly: democrats must not allow themselves to be lulled to sleep. The energy and the character of popular reactions are bound to produce an effect on the more or less settled intentions of our opponents. They will be compelled to restrict the limits of their actions.

As far as Freethought is concerned, we think that it, too, has its contribution to make, as have the political parties—perhaps even more so, for it is threatened more directly. The Church will certainly be the chief beneficiary (perhaps the sole one—who knows?) of this wave of reaction which has submerged our unhappy country. While Capitalism and Colonialism may probably have to make some concessions, the Roman Catholic Church will benefit. She has many friends—and in so many camps! She is so adroit in persuading people of her good will and excellent intentions! Bestowing smiles to Left and Right alike, and upon all sides, she hopes to light beacons everywhere, lit and kept alight by political incompetents or by criminals!

*The decisive hour in the struggle for the Secular State is about to strike!*

We are no longer in the presence of merely vague threats. The secular educational system is about to suffer the most furious attack that has ever been made on it. The Church is on the eve of attaining its aims: Church schools are about to be given equal treatment with State schools, and their obscurantist teachers will be paid the same as the qualified secular teachers. Tomorrow *the Concordat will be re-established*. From then, the French State will prostrate itself before the Deity and grovel in supplication before the self-styled successor of Saint Peter.

What are your reactions, disciples of Gambetta and of Combes, of Jules Ferry and of Jaurès, of Pelletan, of Waldeck Rousseau, of Ferdinand Buisson and of so many more? What stirs in your veins,

your brains—and your hearts?

*Freethinkers! Your action has slowed down in recent months.* That was normal, and we do not blame you. But now we think the time has come to recall you to work in that atmosphere of fraternal unity which we have developed over the years, and that no sectarianism or petty disputes should mar.

Resume your propaganda—strictly secularist, rationalist, anticlerical. Avoid controversies of a partisan nature. We must concentrate on defending the secular schools and the separation of Church and State. It is freedom of thought that is in danger, and the neutrality of the State in religious questions. To protect this precious legacy of our militant predecessors, we must rise to the formidable task that confronts us.

On the eve of the New Year this is my resolve as a militant veteran in our movement. Whilst giving you my greetings and most ardent good wishes, I summon all who hear my appeal to close the ranks more firmly around our beloved National Federation of Freethinkers, and to organise public educational conferences, to circulate our papers, our pamphlets and our books, to spread our propaganda and to demonstrate irrefutably that there still are, in France, friends of reason and irreconcilable foes of fanaticism and tyranny.

\*That is, even if May 13th had not been any more than a mere swindle, as one may now imagine, an audacious comedy, executed with skill. We hear now that the plotters of the *coup d'état* were less dangerous than was believed at the time; many of them even showed signs of panic and wondered how their adventure would have turned out had the Government not aided their swindle (they derived encouragement, one may add, from previous capitulations of the republican regime). Personally I have always thought, and I still think today, that the Government could have remained master of the situation had it really wished to do so. But did Pflimlin and the others really wish to do so? One may well doubt it when one sees how they got on under the succeeding regime! It is very doubtful, in any case, whether a few hundred or even thousand parachutists could successfully occupy the capital in face of the opposition of millions of industrial workers residing in the Paris area.

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

## The Fruits of May 13th

By ANDRÉ LORULOT

(Vice-President of the World Union of Freethinkers,  
President of the French National Federation of Freethinkers, Editor of LA RAISON, etc.)

# Personal Story

By ROBERT HUDON (CANADA)

PEOPLE sometimes ask me how I became a Freethinker. I believe it is more appropriate for me to explain how I became aware that I was not the only one of my kind in the world. For a long time I really thought I was.

I was born into a large family of French ancestry, in the Eastern part of Quebec Province, Canada, and I lost my father when I was only two. I was adopted by a Roman Catholic family, to be brought up in that faith. But, as soon as I began to think, I began to ask questions, and this regardless of embarrassment to myself and others. Young though I was, I seemed to be just craving for knowledge and was loath to accept the unknown. Many things puzzled me, and I seemed naturally sceptical. I was certainly outspoken among the other children on what was hard to fit in with our schooling. The concept of a God particularly puzzled me, as it must many others, and I wondered why an Infinite God could not overcome the Devil. In my view, God and Satan were a mischievous set of twin brothers, for ever holding the greased end of a stick at each other. Often I was happy, seeing many classmates approving my childish unorthodoxy. French, by the way, was the sole language at the school. It was the age of little red schoolhouses, in which could be found an agglomerate of up to 50 pupils of all grades, ranging in age between 6 and 15, all under the same modest teacher who, as a general rule—as in our case—was a mistress.

To come to the point. The teacher soon enough learned there was a little heretic among her charges, and promptly found the opportunity for a lecture. She chose as subject, "The Infinity and Goodness of God, for sending down to earth His sole and only Son, to suffer and to die on the cross—for us." I was very well aware of her sharp eyes often staring at me, and, pointing to a large crucifix on the wall, she said: "God in His Infinite Power, and Jesus the Son, did not need to go through this suffering. But it was to prove His love and goodness, saving us from an eternal hell-fire."

At this point, the feeling of being incriminated was just too strong for me and, before I was aware of it, I was standing up and saying, "Maybe Jesus didn't suffer on the cross." With a quick, scornful yell, the teacher asked me what I meant. In one breath, right there and then, I exclaimed, "Well, God is good; with His power He could see that Jesus didn't suffer, but he might have him make grimaces—sort of make-believe." I was honest and serious. But my words were like a flash of lightning, and the whole school exploded into a thunder of laughter.

It was some time before the teacher restored order. And she needed that time for reflection. Then she turned on me. "Robert," she said, "go home; come back tomorrow," adding ominously, "I'll see you change that pattern of ideas!" For a moment I was dumbstruck; there was only half an hour to the end of the school day. But after leaving I was in fear, thinking she would be at home in the evening, facing me in front of my foster-parents. But that didn't happen, and I was feeling much better next morning. I thought I had got off with a caution.

School, however, lacked the usual friendliness. I was met with cold-faced looks from all; teacher had done some brain-scrubbing. I became aware that I had been declared a freak. And the idea was not confined to school; it had spread through the neighbourhood like a grass fire. I was 10 years old then, and was regarded by many as worse than a first-degree criminal. It was an awful feeling. I was

completely alone. I had moral support from no one, and it broke my spirit to find so many against me.

My schooldays came to an abrupt end. Though in this I didn't lose much more than the gloomy souvenirs of a cruel, medieval indoctrination, I could write no more than my own name. My time had been wasted on catechism and prayers. I had been fitted to do no man-sized work, and my foster-parents, who previously had been severe, were now tyrannical and abusive, as well as critical of everything I did. I reached a stage of inferiority complex so that I could not look people straight in the face; they in turn became more and more convinced of my madness. After two long years of this—religiously—living hell, longing always to be alone and far away from it all, I finally did leave.

Many more details I should have liked to add, but I will conclude with a reference to my most important discovery. It came around the age of 20, when I was now able to read a little English. I experienced my first eye-opener in Freethought literature: a little blue book entitled *My Twelve Years in a Monastery*, by Joseph McCabe. It was the spark of life, and since then I have accumulated much of that master's work—some 40 volumes. I cannot say that my troubles ended there. They did not; but at least I am more happy from having learned and gained in confidence. I am now able to say: "I recognise the fool: he acts and looks as though I were the fool!"

## Outlook

Though near ninety, I'm contented,  
Optimistic: still I find  
Many blessings, all around me;  
Best of all, my *Peace of Mind*.

Now, when shades of night are falling;  
Drowsy feelings gently creep:  
When on "Fading out," I ponder,  
Thoughts are pleasant, as of sleep.

As I view my course, soon ending.  
No repinings mar the scene.  
Though oft failing, fortune favoured,  
In the main, Life good has been.

Good I've found, in worthy purpose;  
For true fellowship, to strive;  
So "achieving and pursuing"  
Good, it was to be alive.

As a candle, oft will flicker,  
Ere burnt out, a flare bestow,  
So may I, with naught regretting,  
When, like it, I "out" must go.

As I gaze into the future,  
Nothing to depress, I see;  
No recanting, hopeful, cheery,  
So I greet my destiny.

C. E. RATCLIFFE.

—NEXT WEEK—

REVERENT RATIONALISM

By DR. J. V. DUHIG

# Cardinal Newman and the Development of Doctrine

By F. A. RIDLEY

THE INTENTION of ultimately elevating John Henry Newman to the rank of a saint recalls what is, perhaps, the most important development in modern Christian theology. It represents a development inseparably associated with Cardinal Newman, in particular in connection with his greatest (though not best-known) book, *The Development of Christian Doctrine*, probably the ablest, as also the most important book connected with religious philosophy to appear in recent times. Freethinkers appreciate a worthy foe with whom to measure their controversial skill; we do not wish always to be flogging dead horses. It constitutes in fact not the least insignificant proof of the intellectual decay of Christianity that it no longer appears to be capable of producing apologists of the calibre of Newman himself or that *enfant terrible* of modern Romanism, Fr. Herbert Thurston.

Ancient Christianity, as soon as it had abandoned its initial obsession with the proximate end of the world, based itself on a blind belief in the doctrines believed to have been formally set down by its founders and recorded for all subsequent generations in the canonical New Testament, supplemented by the tradition of the Church. This mental attitude is definitely laid down in one of the latest writings to be declared a canonical book of the New Testament, as "the Faith once for all delivered to the Saints." According to this definition, what theologians came to term "The Deposit of Faith" had been laid down once for all by the founders and no subsequent addition or modification could be made by man in any future age. We know, for example, from contemporary evidence that one of the most popular books in the original New Testament, *The Shepherd* of Hermas, was eventually ejected altogether from the inspired canon of Scripture because its author was known as "a man of our time" and neither an apostle nor a prophet. Hence, he could not by definition have been the inspired source of an authentic revelation. In the fifth century, when the pseudo-science of theology had been given definite shape as an amalgam of legend, cemented by logic, a Gallic monk, one Vincent, of the famous monastery of Lérins, summarised the orthodox tradition in a phrase, which for the next fourteen centuries represented the last word of Catholic orthodoxy. Only those beliefs, he declared, can be regarded as dogmas and Articles of Faith, binding on all Christian believers who do not wish to be cast out as heretics, which have been accepted "everywhere, always and by all." This assertion remained unchallenged by all orthodox theologians whether Catholic or, later, Protestant. In fact, the Reformers in the 16th century originally based themselves on the canon, and accused the Church of Rome—quite accurately—of having departed from it by introducing doctrines unknown to the early Church, e.g., purgatory, relic worship, the cult of Mary, transubstantiation. Down to the middle of the 19th century this was the orthodox view.

The canon of St. Vincent worked out in the Middle Ages when little was known of human or even Church history. When an age of critical scholarship arose at the Renaissance, all sorts of difficulties began to appear. A closer study of the New Testament and of early Church texts soon disclosed that many modern doctrines were quite unknown there. The Trinity, for example. (One of the first scholars to make this dangerous discovery was Servetus, who escaped burning by the Catholic Inquisition, only to be burned by Calvin's Protestant one!) But the Church of Rome obviously ignored the formula of St.

Vincent, since no one could possibly affirm that, say, Papal Infallibility or the Immaculate Conception had been known to the New Testament writers. These beliefs were allegedly deduced by often very dubious logic from certain N.T. texts. Protestant controversialists like the Frenchman, Jurieu (from whom Newman is supposed to have derived his basic idea of Development) eloquently pointed all this out. In the field of logic, Rome continued to be hard pressed until, in 1845, its famous Anglican convert, John Henry Newman, put the centuries-old controversy on a new level by effecting an intellectual revolution in Christian theology. For in that year he published *The Development of Christian Doctrine*, which he had actually written while still a member of the Church of England.

The essence of his massive volume can be stated quite briefly. It was perfectly true that, as St. Vincent had taught, every dogma of the Church can be found in the original "deposit of Faith." But many of these dogmas were only—so to speak—sketched or suggested, rather than explicitly taught. Later on the Church "developed" and elaborated them, as and when it became necessary. Thus, the Catholic Church only found it necessary to insist on the Trinity in the fourth century, on Transubstantiation in the 12th, and on Papal Infallibility in the 19th. But all these dogmas can be found in outline—at least, if one looks hard enough!—in the deposit of Faith. All that the Church has done is to develop the original acorn into the later elaborated oak. Newman, be it noted, agreed with St. Vincent that the Church had no power to invent a new dogma; to do so would be heresy of the worst type. Despite many assertions to the contrary by Catholic "evolutionists," Newman did not anticipate Darwin by 14 years (1845-59), nor was the Cardinal an evolutionist of any kind. His theory actually *excludes* evolution. His dogmas "develop" (to repeat our analogy) from acorns to oaks, but they do not—and by definition, cannot—change into something different, as, for example, in Darwinian theory, "ape men" evolve into (real) men. Newman was the most subtle and eloquent of Christian apologists, but he was in no sense a scientific, nor even a theological, evolutionist.

In his own sphere of apologetics, Newman's influence has proved immense. He has given Rome's older Protestant critics their definitive answer. He has given what is a plausible and logically consistent explanation why, for instance, Christ conferred Infallibility on Peter, the "first Pope," in the first century, but why Papal Infallibility was not proclaimed *De Fide* until 1870, or why the Assumption of the Virgin was only so proclaimed in 1950. Thanks to Newman, Rome can now proclaim many more such dogmas, which were not by any means accepted "always, everywhere, and by all." Writing at the time of publication of Newman's *magnum opus*, the Protestant publicist, Isaac Taylor, pointed out in a masterly passage how far-reaching could be the effect of Development as a principle for the successive adaptation of the Church of Rome to the needs of ages characterised either by science or superstition. Newman's theory has given Rome a new lease of life and has opened up all sorts of possibilities. We trust that elementary gratitude will induce the Church, which has in recent years "translated" so many nonentities into saints, to bestow its highest posthumous honour on the most eloquent and subtle of modern Christian thinkers. Surely the possession of high intelligence has not now become an *absolute* bar to sanctity?

## This Believing World

It should not come as a great surprise to readers of this journal that our Queen has been elected by a new religious sect—according to the *Sunday Express*—as the “Empress-saint of the Universe.” Its members are sure that Queen Elizabeth “will inaugurate 1,000 years of peace,” just as recorded in Revelation. The sect’s headquarters are in Lausanne and its followers call themselves “the Arc-en-ciel” (the Rainbow). The Queen was elected because she is descended from Princess Tephî, who was the daughter of the last King of Judah. She made a beeline for Ireland when her country was invaded, and some of the rubies she took with her now form part of King Edward’s crown. Which all proves—dear, dear, now what does all this unsupported religious drivel really prove? We give it up.

★

According to the “Edmonton Journal” (of Canada), the works of Lenin “surpass the Bible in world reading.” This statement is based on some Unesco statistics. But surely it is nothing extraordinary? It is true that the Bible is perhaps the most widely distributed book in the world—but who, outside a few fanatical and mostly ignorant pious sects, and students who want to make the Church their profession, ever reads it? This is a pertinent question, for if only people would read the Precious Word for themselves, the task of Freethought would be infinitely easier. Bible absurdities, as Foote used to call them, are the most laughable in literature, and religion is the one thing that cannot face any laughter.

★

So to say that Lenin surpasses the Bible in “world reading,” actually is not saying much. He probably does among the 200 millions (or more) in Russia and its satellite states, but one cannot help wondering whether the actual sales of Lenin’s work all over the world will ever surpass those, say, of Dickens or Shakespeare? People still read the *Pickwick Papers* not only in English but in translations, but who reads Haggai, Joel, Philemon, or Revelation these days? Not even the whole weight of the radio and TV can make people turn to all this boring rubbish.

★

Vivacious Sarah Jenkins of “News Chronicle” will have to be careful, or she will get into an awful row with the Church. She recently asked “Will any Church of England authority have the nerve to preach about the evils of gambling after the pretty packet they made for British Aluminium on the Stock Exchange last week?” The “pretty packet” was in the nature of about £350,000, we think, so it is very amusing to find our bishops, parsons, and priests severely admonishing their “flocks” for betting, buying Premium Bonds, and spending a shilling or so now and then on football pools. And all in the name of “our Lord,” who (we are told) was so poor that he had nowhere to lay his head. But the truly Christian world is always amusing.

★

We note that the Glasgow “Evening Citizen” is at a loss to explain why “a race as deeply religious as the Scots should always have marked the pagan festival at the beginning of the New Year with rejoicing rather than the day of the birth of Christ.” This seems to us to be in more than a bit of a muddle. Do the Scots look upon festivities at the New Year as “pagan,” and if so, do they connect it in any way with “the birth of Christ”? Scotsmen are by no means loth to have a good time, that is, when it comes to eating and drinking; and if Christmas on December 25th promises something better than New Year, well, it

will be Christmas for them. As for the religious side... is it not all “pagan”?

★

The Box of Sealed Writings by poor, dear old Joanna Southcott, keeps popping up in the news every now and then, particularly when there is a “crisis.” We have an idea that quite a number of these boxes have turned up since the old lady at the age of 64 was going to give birth—as a virgin, of course—to another veritable Messiah, but who, alas, died of dropsy instead. She gave instructions that “the bishops” had to open one, but the last box opened had a few rabbit bones in it, as well as a few books, which included a very naughty French novel. The story of Joanna is perpetuated by the “Panacea Society,” and may it long live to add to the gaiety of nations. But who pays for the advertisements?

★

If the Panacea Society still perpetuates the Joanna Southcott nonsense, what are we to say of an article by Mr. Bernard Harris in the *Sunday Express* recently on the egregious Mrs. Eddy—an article which repeats the myths Mrs. Eddy and her followers have always taken good care to publicise, and which writers like Mr. Harris imagine to be true? Many of the statements in his article are just plain nonsense, but then, why should he read, for example, the famous Milmine biography, which exposes the lies and impostures all so fervently believed as true by the credulous believers of Christian Science—which, of course, is neither Christian nor science?

★

With the usual flourish of trumpets Canon Tom Scrutton was introduced the other Sunday on ITV’s “About Religion” as “a soap-box orator” since 1914, and ready to answer any question from his studio audience. This he did, holding a crucifix in his hand, with remarkable fluency—and no wonder. For sheer infantile ignorance, most of the questions would be hard to beat. Of course, the audience consisted mostly of fully believing Christians who were only troubled with what they considered a little laxity in the Church.

★

Not one member of the audience queried a single “fundamental” tenet of Christianity. They probably had never heard of any organised Freethought; and all Canon Scrutton had to do was to treat most of the questions with the contempt they deserved, and point to his crucifix as the final answer. We wonder whether Canon Scrutton has ever met a Freethinker (not just one who says he was an Atheist at the age of ten and now, thank God, accepts Christ) and was able glibly to answer him? We doubt it.

## Seventy-Five Years Ago

WHILE OUR FOUNDER, G. W. FOOTE, was serving 12 months’ imprisonment for blasphemy, his friend and colleague, J. M. Wheeler, wrote the following in THE FREETHINKER of January 20th, 1884:

“What justice can a Freethinker expect from twelve ignorant and exasperated opponents? How would a Protestant lecturer like to be tried by a jury of twelve Irish Catholics, or a Catholic lecturer by a jury of Orange men? No one who saw the kind of men who convicted Messrs. Foote, Ramsey and Kemp could say they were tried by their peers. Twice juries refused to convict and it is manifest that if but one liberty-loving person were among the jury, it would be impossible to get a conviction. But while the odious laws remain, it is always possible at any moment for any bigot or malicious fool to set the law in motion, and the prosecutor can always try another jury till he gets twelve unanimous Christians.”

# THE FREETHINKER

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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

THOMAS F. GALLOWAY.—We highly appreciate your generous praise of THE FREETHINKER, a most handsome compliment in view of the fact that you cannot share our opinions.

PAUL VARNEY.—When G. I. Bennett speaks of the dignity of human life he does not deny that it has had many undignified aspects; he holds out the hope that we can infuse into it the purpose and dignity which it deserves to hold.

## 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).—Every 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.

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, January 25th, 7 p.m.: Councillor J. BACKHOUSE, "Comprehensive Schools."

Central London Branch N.S.S. (The Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, January 25th, 7.15 p.m.:

DORA SCARLETT (Eyewitness in Budapest), "Hungary in Retrospect."

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, January 27th, 7.15 p.m.: Dr. D. STARK MURRAY, "What the Doctors are Saying."

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, January 25th, 6.30 p.m.: Prof. P. LEON, "Secularism and Platonism."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (N.C.S. Public Relations Hall, Broad Street).—Sunday, January 25th, 2.30 p.m.:

J. PECK, "Coal and the Economic Crisis."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, January 25th, 11 a.m.: J. HUTTON HYND, "The Extension of Human Sympathy." (200th Anniversary of birth of Robert Burns.)

Glasgow Secular Society (Central Halls, Bath Street).—Sunday, January 25th: J. P. MORRISON, "The Education of Burns."

Study Circle.—Friday, January 23rd, at 7.30 p.m., N.S.S. Office, 41 Gray's Inn Road, W.C.1.—"Religion's Mark on History," a course of six talks by F. A. RIDLEY, with full discussion. First: "The Origins of Religion." Fee 1/- per meeting. Non-members invited.

## Notes and News

NOTTINGHAM will be able to see Nigel Dennis's play, *The Making of Moo*, from January 28th to 31st. The production is by the Co-operative Arts Centre Group, and will be

## The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £30 14s. 6d.; Mrs. E. A. Guelke, 10s.; Miss D. W. Coleman, £5 5s.; W.H.D., 2s. 6d.; A. H. Briancourt, £1; W. J. Bennett, £1; A. I. Schue, 10s.; P. Kay, £1; F. Brown, £1; H. and R. Clark, 10s.; R. H. Scott, £5 8s.; G. Kirk, £1; L. Smith, £1; H. Rose, 10s.—Total to date, January 16th, 1959, £49 10s.

THERE has, as you will see, been a very good initial response to our recent appeal for funds to sustain THE FREETHINKER, and we hope that contributions will keep on coming in. We should like to write a personal letter of thanks for each one, but many of you say that an acknowledgment in the paper is sufficient.

Perhaps it is. But we thought that a little more was called for: that we ought to give you some idea of how we felt about your response. It proved difficult without using the old clichés. Then we realised that you had conveyed what was uppermost in our minds: that THE FREETHINKER is not just a paper which we write, edit, print and despatch, and which you buy; that it is in a very real sense your expression; that it is your voice, the voice of Freethinkers all over. So we decided to let you speak for us, as we try week by week to speak for you.

Mrs. L. Wearing commemorated her husband, who "was a true atheist, and enjoyed your paper for many years." Mr. A. W. Coleman's cheque was "a Christmas card to my old friend, THE FREETHINKER," and his sister, adding her own contribution, said "we must not let it die." Mr. W. Maybank echoed this sentiment for, he said, "ours is the greatest of all causes."

"I like your paper and admire your courage more than I can say," wrote Mrs. Charlotte Simpson, "and I would hate to think it could be brought to a standstill." "I do wish I could do more to ease the situation," said Mr. A. H. Briancourt, while Mr. W. H. D. promised to send 52 weekly postal orders of 2s. 6d. Mr. M. Byrn is also contributing more than one item.

Mr. R. H. Scott, of California, sent his sincere good wishes for the future, as did people like Mr. F. Brown, Mrs. E. Guelke, Mr. E. Henderson, Mr. P. Kay, Mr. W. Ostler and Mr. T. R. Williams. But it is fitting, we think, to end with Mr. L. Lewis. "Keep on with the good work," he wrote. "The temporary revival of the Roman Catholic Church was to be expected after two world wars. But given a period of peace, I think the enormous advance in science which will inevitably occur, will make all the religions appear trivial." "I have taken your paper for 30 years," he added, "and I would like to congratulate you on the present fine standard. Best wishes for your success."

at the People's Theatre, George Street, at 7.30 each evening. Regular readers will know how highly we praised this satire on religion, and we again wholeheartedly recommend it. All seats are bookable.

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WE have departed from our usual practice, this week, and put a reprinted article on the front page. The reason is simple: we think it is a very important article. The situation in France is disturbing to Freethinkers in all countries; we thought our readers should know what the loved and esteemed President of the French Freethought Federation thought about it and what action he recommended. M. André Lorulot is a charming man, as all who have met him will attest, and he is also a man of great courage and ability. We are sure "The Fruits of May 13th" will be read with interest and admiration.

# Christianity and Art

By COLIN McCALL

A SHORT TIME AGO I received a letter from a Canon of the Church of England. "Surely you must know"—he wrote—"that our religion has been responsible for all the best things in music, art, and architecture. . . ." Those are his actual words. Not *some* of the best art, but *all* of it. Now, this is quite ridiculous, of course, and in my reply I said I need only mention the art of Greece, Rome and India, to disprove his claim. The Canon obviously doesn't know what he is talking about, and he may as well be quietly forgiven and forgotten. But it occurs to me that a few words on the relationship between Christianity and art might be useful.

I suppose most people in this country have the idea that Christianity and art have been very closely linked in Europe, and possibly that the latter has been dependent upon the former. In one very obvious way this is, indeed, true. The wealth and power of the Church enabled it to be a patron of the arts. Many of the masterpieces of painting and sculpture in Europe are of Christian subjects; some of the finest buildings are churches. Yet, without detracting in any way from the merit of these works, I suggest that their importance can be exaggerated. Michelangelo's beautiful cupola of St. Peter's so dominates the Roman landscape that everybody notices it; many may miss his superlatively designed Campidoglio Square. Nobody can avoid Bernini's colonnade in St. Peter's Square, or his altar inside the basilica, yet they may overlook his lovely fountains that besprinkle the city of Rome. In short, we should remember that artists often execute both sacred and secular subjects, very largely according to demand.

The fact that an artist paints a virgin and child is not necessarily an indication that he is Christian, or even Christian-inspired. It is generally the fulfilment of a commission, and it may be that the mother and child subject, always likely to evoke our tenderest feelings (as Mr. H. Cutner remarked recently in these columns) has affected him in a quite human way. Though it is impossible to say so with certainty, I should think this has often been the case, judging by the paintings themselves. If it is asserted that we must invoke Christian religiosity to explain a magnificent painting of a Christian subject, we must logically invoke Pagan religiosity to explain an equally fine treatment of a Pagan theme. Clearly, we cannot do this, for the same painter is often responsible for both. The great Sistine Chapel ceiling is as much—and I should say, more—a monument to Michelangelo's glorification of the human body as it is to his glorification of God. Just examine it for yourselves—preferably, perhaps, in the Phaidon Press *Michelangelo* volume, for it is a little difficult to do so in Chapel itself (except, Mr. Bernard Wall tells us, during the tedious Easter services!) unless you can lie down and look at it through binoculars. See the wonderful muscularity and movement with which Michelangelo has invested his three hundred or so figures.

If there is some integral connection between Christianity and art, or if there is some quality in the religion that sublimates art, then this should be detectable. With the rise of Christianity, the coming of a new religion, there should have been a new, and greater, art. Did this happen? Roger Fry, perhaps the finest of English art critics and—as a matter of interest when huge prices are being paid for such paintings—the man who arranged the first Post-Impressionist exhibition in London, dealt with this ques-

tion in a lecture on "Art and Life" to the Fabian Society in 1917. "Perhaps the greatest revolution in life that we know of at all intimately"—he said—"was that which effected the change from Paganism to Christianity. That this was no accident is evident from the fact that Christianity was only one of many competing religions, all of which represented a closely similar direction of thought and feeling. Any one of these would have produced practically the same effect, that of focussing men's minds on the spiritual life as opposed to the material life which had occupied them for so long. One cannot doubt then that here was a change which denoted a long prepared and inevitable readjustment of men's attitude to their universe. Now, the art of the Roman Empire showed no trace whatever of this influence; it went on with precisely the same motives and principles which had satisfied Paganism. The subjects changed and became mainly Christian, but the treatment was so exactly similar that it requires more than a cursory glance to say if the figure on a sarcophagus is Christ or Orpheus, Moses or Æsculapius." (*Vision and Design*, pages 3/4.)

It might be possible, the same perceptive critic noted on another occasion, to claim that the Franciscan movement did bring a "great outburst" of Italian art. Indeed, said Fry, St. Francis's teaching was "tantamount to the foundation of a new religion. . . . St. Francis was the great orthodox heretic." He brought a humanity to Christianity, and Giotto, his visual interpreter, brought a humanity to Christian painting. Even here, however, the connection has been exaggerated. Fry later said that Giotto's forerunners had received less than their due, and Joseph McCabe drew attention to the omission of a passage in the English translation of Vasari's *Lives of the Painters*. While painting his memorial frescoes in the Church of St. Francis at Assisi, Giotto "relieved his feelings in a poem which drastically condemned the friars and their ideals." (*A Rationalist Encyclopædia*, page 245.) A stronger influence was the new naturalistic trend in sculpture of the Pisani school, due to the revival of classicism and observation of nature. Stimulated by it, Giotto (c. 1266—1337) gave life to his figures, expression to his faces, vitality to the art of painting. In perspective, however, he was deficient, and it was left to the later great Renaissance painters to master this difficult problem.

It is, curiously enough, these Renaissance painters who are most in our minds when we think of Christian art. And perhaps some people think of these artists continuously painting Christian subjects. This is quite wrong. Pagan myths provided subjects for many of them, while there was a great deal of portraiture. But the greatness of Renaissance painting lies essentially in its concentration on and increasing knowledge of nature and the human form. With Masaccio, for example, who, though he died tragically young (1401—1428?) was one of the greatest innovators of the period (his frescoes were "perfect works," said Leonardo da Vinci), we see a superb development of realism and understanding of perspective.

Renaissance painting, whatever its subject matter, was not the product of any divine inspiration. Great talent there undoubtedly was, but the art was developed painstakingly from the scientific study of nature. It was a great age of experiment and discovery, for painters as well as scientists. To give the credit for this to Christianity is as mistaken in the one case as in the other.

# Is God a Criminal?

By DR. VITALI NEGRI

(Acting President of the Freethinkers of Southern California, U.S.A.)

**Psychoanalysis of God.** On the second Sunday of the month of May 1958, I delivered a lecture before the Freethinkers of Southern California which, counting the additional time consumed in answering questions, lasted one hour and fifty minutes. The subject of my lecture was "Psychoanalysis of God and Religion." A summary of its conclusion may be stated in a few paragraphs.

In my search for God that I might ask Him to lie down on the psychoanalytic couch to undergo "free association"—a procedure enacted with all analysands—I had discovered not one but ten thousand Gods. All of these Gods were different with different names, yet with one status in common: all were acclaimed as omnipresent, omnipotent, infinite, and eternal, and each was a creator of matter and a director of the affairs of men.

By diligent study into the histories of the vanished peoples of the earth, I had discovered the birthplaces, childhood and adulthood of these many Gods, and also their burial places. For lo! From the thousands of popular Gods worshipped throughout the thousands of years of man's existence, all were dead but one. And all were buried in the very places out of which they were born: the minds of men.

For it is in the human mind that Gods are created and sustained, and it is likewise in the human mind that Gods die, either by virtue of the living intellectual processes of the brain (which perceives the unreasonableness of man-made Gods) or by virtue of the death of the brain, which thereby obliterates the conceptions of the mind.

**The God of the Bible.** Today only one important God remains alive. This "living" God is the God of the Bible and of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—a God who, according to millions of people, dwells in a vague locale called Heaven, is worshipped as sole Creator of the universe, proclaimed as Director in Chief of all phenomena, and who, according to the Christians, caused His Holy Spirit to enter into the body of Mary that she might conceive and bear His son, Jesus of Nazareth.

This is the God of Genesis, the God who spoke face to face with Moses, the God who drowned all human beings and all life except Noah and his entourage in the Grand Deluge. This is the God of Vengeance, the jealous God who punishes children unto the fourth generation for the sins of the father (and, presumably, the mother).

It is my analysis of this God which made me ask: Is God a criminal?

Indeed, I find this God terrible and beyond comprehension—the arch-criminal of all times. No one man has ever been so vicious; not Nero, not Hitler, nor any Inquisitor of the Holy Roman Faith. Millions have been massacred to save His pride, to bolster His vanity, to assuage His anger. No punishment is declared too extreme for the transgressor against Him.

I cannot but condemn such a God, and accuse Him! I accuse Him of the death of millions of creatures slaughtered in Holy Wars or ravished by disease, famine or droughts, or otherwise destroyed by the victory of evil over good, or of want and privation over sufficiency. I accuse Him of every injustice, slight or dastardly, that has been achieved by man against man. I accuse Him in the name of those human beings who stand exclusively and firmly on the authority of the Bible, which glorifies this God and states that nothing can happen unless it be the Will of God.

**The Will of God.** I, myself, do not recognise the authority of the Bible. I have been convinced from early childhood that nature itself is a perfect universal law and that the action of this law is the only cause and effect under which all things are manifested. I have spent all of my adult life teaching, lecturing, writing, and scientifically proving my convictions that the concept of the "Will of God" must be replaced by knowledge of the operative laws of Nature. Only by understanding the inevitable determinism of natural phenomena operating under one universal and impersonal law which has no kinship with or recognition of man's moral, social, legal or religious concepts, can we reasonably understand and explain events which are disastrous or beneficial to living creatures.

Verification of the perfection of Nature in all its aspects, whether peaceful or turbulent, has been the educational aim of my life. Whether teaching philosophy or psychology, either for the State educational system or for privately operated schools and colleges, or whether writing books, monographs, articles or pamphlets, or lecturing before all types of audiences—religious groups included, it has been my one purpose to elucidate the meaning of science and to destroy superstition, particularly man's belief in an anthropomorphic, personal God whose so-called "Will" may be influenced by prayer.

Will, as an instrument for imposing or withholding action, is an imperfect faculty possible to the human intellect only. It does not appertain to the impartial, unchangeable and perfect action of physical cause and effect. The action of universal law is not equipped with emotions, by which to be swayed, nor Will by which to alter its inevitable determinism.

(To be concluded)

## Robert Burns

(BORN JANUARY 25th, 1759)

By G. W. FOOTE

ROBERT BURNS died at the early age of thirty-eight. He himself knew well enough (he never tried to conceal them) the faults that half-wrecked his life. "But the precision," as Mr. W. E. Henley says, "has naught to do at this graveside." Sermonising is so easy, and nature is so despotic.

"The strength was great, but the weaknesses were greater; for time and chance and necessity were ever developing the weaknesses at the same time that they were ever beating down the strength. That is the sole conclusion possible. And to the plea, that the story it rounds is very pitiful, there is this victorious answer: that the Man had drunk his life to the lees, while the Poet had fulfilled himself to the accomplishing of a peculiar immortality; so that to Burns Death came as a deliverer and a friend."

Mr. Henley's criticisms on Burns the poet seem to us entirely sound. Burns was not a sudden miracle, as some think; he was the last and greatest of the Vernacular school. He was not a founder, but a consummator. The spirit, the ideals, the very forms of the school were all ready to his hand. Again and again he takes an old verse and improves it, setting his mark upon it for ever; or an old refrain, and makes it the *motif* of a splendid new song. He did not know the secrets of English; but "he had the sole ear of the Vernacular muse; there was not a tool in

her budget of which he was not master." And singing in the Vernacular he won his immortality.

Henley notices with satisfaction that Burns was "the most anti-clerical," as well as the most popular, poet of Scotland. "Being a Scot," Mr. Henley says, "he was instinctively a theologian; being himself, he was inevitably liberal-minded; born a peasant of genius, and therefore a natural rebel, he could not choose but quarrel with the Kirk—especially as her hand was heavy on his friends and himself." And again in a footnote: "He was ever a theological liberal and a theological disputant—a champion of Heterodoxy, in however mild a form, whose disputations made him notorious, so that his name was as a stumbling-block and an offence to the Orthodox."

Burns's "scruples" and "doubts," which Carlyle regretted, have naturally attracted the attention of the biographers. Allen Cunningham, for instance, writes as follows:

"When in the company of the demure and the pious, he loved to start doubts in religion, which he knew nothing short of inspiration could solve; and to speak of Calvinism with such latitude of language as shocked or vexed all listeners, and caused him to be regarded by some as a freethinker or a deist."

Cunningham, however, is very anxious to assure us that Burns was really nothing of the kind; and, after the style of the orthodox stories about the deathbeds of Voltaire and Thomas Paine, he introduces us to "Mrs. Haugh—a most respectable woman," in whose house he lived at Dumfries, and who was "much with him during his last illness." To this most respectable woman, we are told, he "lamented that he had sometimes doubted the truths of Scripture." This is meant to be edifying, but it is not convincing. The trick has been repeated so often that it has lost all its force. It only imposes on blind piety and invincible stupidity. What Burns wrote and spoke to the public and to his intimate friends is infinitely more important than anything he may have said (or not said) to a landlady, whether respectable or otherwise.

Allow as much as possible for the emphasis and exaggerations of humour; yet plenty remains to prove that Burns was a hater of priestcraft, a friend of Freethinking, and a sceptic in regard to the distinctive dogmas of Christianity.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### QUESTIONS ANSWERED

Mr. Michael McCafferty wants to know why we condemn the Papacy, and if it is our policy to cause a certain amount of disunity within Christian Faiths.

We show antagonism to all creeds that worship the "unseen" and the "unknown." Disunity causes discussion; discussion sometimes causes one to see the "light."

If Michael will read *Giving 'em Hell, Evolution of the Papacy, Freedom's Foe* and the *Devil*, he will perhaps understand why we Freethinkers deal so much with the Church of Rome.

I know as much about the Papacy and its antics as Michael. I attended St. Joseph's R.C. School and Church of the Assumption, High Street, Deptford, London, for seven years, and was "driven" to confession, communion and confirmation, but never went willingly. As soon as I left school I left the "Three C's" behind me, and now, at 81 years of age, they are still behind me.

We welcome Michael as a reader of our paper, THE FREETHINKER, and we will welcome him more if he will take the trouble to read some of the books by F. A. Ridley, McCabe, Adrian Pigott, Avro Manhattan and other writers. He will then understand (if he is not too bigoted like so many R.C.s) why we are down on the ridiculous methods practised by the R.C. Church. He says surely we must have some sort of religion. If we have, our religion is "To seek for truth" and do good. He finished his letter by saying he thinks he is an R.C.; let me tell him an R.C. is not allowed to think; the priests do all the thinking, and it is just a case of "follow my leader." To finish my comments on his letter, let me tell him: When someone returns from the space above and proves to us there is a heaven awaiting us all, we Freethinkers will be only too willing to join the heavenly throng. When!

If Michael lets me have his address I will gladly send him a

few pamphlets free and postage paid, so that he can read some of the views of Freethinkers.

FRANK LAMOON (Birmingham Branch N.S.S.).

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### SECTS AND SEXES

The Rev. Sydney Smith remarked: "There are three sexes, men, women and clergymen." I suggest *four*—adding "the minister's wife," who in some sects often seems fain to be a goddess. "Genus" is defined in our dictionary as "a taxonomic group of lower rank than a family, consisting of closely related species, in extreme cases of one species only." "The minister's wife" seems to be an extreme case. Anyhow, a man recently remarked to me that Methodism (which he knew of and had left—as he put it, for the good of his soul) would be the better for the removal of the artificial species referred to. In his view this would involve a quite minor, but intelligent, operation. X.

(Name and address supplied.)

### A BISHOP SUBMITS

Readers of the *Sunday Observer* (28/12/58) were advised by Dr. Chavasse, Bishop of Rochester, as follows: "I would submit that greater works than Christ did are effected by the discovery of 'M. & B.' and penicillin."

Verily! Verily! Freethought propagandists have not laboured in vain. R. G. FORSTER.

### CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

I fully agree with Dr. J. V. Duhig's remarks concerning Christian "worship." The entire liturgy, both Catholic and Protestant, may be summed up as follows: The congregation assembles in a mood of slavish self abasement, bewails its utter vileness and sinfulness "in the sight of God," and then goes on to render abject, grovelling thanks to the "merciful Father" who has graciously consented to spare a select few from eternal torment on condition that they obey "Christ and the Church."

"Mass," "Holy Communion," "Matins," "Vespers," "all the offices of the Church"; this is the theme they all chant *ad nauseum*—"Man is vile and deserves hell-fire"; a teaching at once brutal and brutalising.

My chief regret is that the Plain-Chant form, which is of no small musical merit, is allied to the wretched verbal rubbish of the Catholic liturgy. The wedding of such charming and serene music with such dismal and nonsensical words is, to say the least, unfortunate. S. W. BROOKS.

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