

The Freethinker

Volume LXXIX—No. 7

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Fivepence

SOME LITTLE TIME BACK in this column, I made a reference to one of the most informative and intriguing books on what may be termed the secret history of the Roman Catholic Church which I have ever read. The book in question was the autobiographical account of the famous Vatican Council of 1869-70, written by one of its actual participants under the *nom de plume* of "Pomponio Leto," and which was subsequently placed on the Index of Prohibited Books on account of its devastating critique both of Papal Infallibility as first officially defined at that Council, and of the unscrupulous "Tammany Hall" type of intrigue by means of which that result was secured by Pope Pius IX and his adherents.

(The original "Pomponio Leto" was a 16th century scholar and critic of the Papacy.) In that fascinating day-to-day record we can observe the Holy Spirit (who is supposed to take a special interest in such gatherings) actually making use of the crooked manœuvres of backstairs intrigue and politically-minded ecclesiastics, with the final result of establishing the first dictatorship of the modern Fascist type—the clerical fascist regime of personal dictatorship embodied since 1870 in the Papacy.

The Vatican Council Reassembles

The Vatican Council ended abruptly in September 1870, a few weeks after the solemn proclamation of Papal Infallibility (with only two opposition votes) on July 18th. The reason for its abrupt termination was not religious but political. The French garrison (which had restored the Pope to his secular sovereignty after he had lost it in the Revolution of 1848, led by Mazzini and Garibaldi) was withdrawn from the Papal States after the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71. Immediately, the Italian Army marched on Rome and extinguished the Temporal Power of the Pope. Upon which the Vatican Council promptly adjourned. And has technically "stood adjourned," in a state of suspended animation, ever since. Now—so the BBC joyfully informs us—John XXIII intends to call an Ecumenical—or General—Council of the Roman Catholic Church, to meet in the near future; presumably the postponed continuation of the indefinitely adjourned Vatican Council! (Let us hope that the new Council will also produce its "Pomponio Leto"!)

Is England Still Protestant?

We ask the above question again, as it seems necessary in view of the peculiar phrasology of the BBC announcement. For the radio says that Pope John intends to call an Ecumenical Council similar to such earlier General Councils as Nicea (325) and Trent (mid-16th century). Now, "Ecumenical" is a recognised theological term, implying a council which represents the *whole* Christian Church or *all* the Christian Churches. From the standpoint of the "Orthodox" (Eastern) and Protestant Churches, such councils as Trent or the Vatican Council—at which only Roman Catholic bishops were present—were not Ecumenical, but only Roman Catholic Synods. This is supposed

to be a Protestant country, and the BBC is supposed to be the propaganda and information service of a Protestant state! Actually, as we have had many occasions to note (during 1958 in particular) Broadcasting House is becoming more and more obviously under Vatican influence. At this rate it will soon be almost an unofficial representative of the Vatican congregation, *De Propaganda Fide*, the oldest and perhaps still most ubiquitous of all Ministries of

Propaganda (the word itself is of Vatican origin!) The latest BBC announcement is the most brazen so far. For, recognising the forthcoming Roman Catholic Council as Ecumenical, the BBC recognises, in effect, that Rome represents the only *bona fide* Christian Church; the other Churches being, presumably, "second class" Christians!

Church; the other Churches being, presumably, "second class" Christians!

Reunion—On Rome's Terms

So far, all we have been told is that the main object of the Council is to effect the reunion of a divided Christendom, a project in which his present Holiness is reported to take a special interest. However, one does not need to have more than an elementary knowledge of modern Roman teaching and pretensions to realise that no such reunion can be between equals. Prior to the declaration of Papal Infallibility, such a reunion was still theoretically possible, since the Pope was not then regarded as more than the most important bishop, holder of the highest administrative office. But not so since 1870! The Pope is now the infallible "Vicar of Christ," the unerring messenger of God to man. It is nowadays (as a learned Anglican theologian, Dr. E. L. Mascall, has recently admitted) a fundamental dogma of Rome that, if the individual Pope says one thing, and the *whole* Church says another, it is the Pope alone who speaks the truth, and who must be followed. Obviously, no negotiations between equals is possible under such terms. From the point of view which inspires Pope John to raise this precise question, reunion means, and can only mean, submission to Rome on what are, ultimately, Rome's own terms. Any idea of the Papacy ever agreeing to accept the position of a mere President of a Federation of Churches—as Dr. Fisher once suggested—can be dismissed in advance. No doubt, Rome would be prepared to make some minor concessions, once her supremacy and infallibility were acknowledged. The Protestant clergy could keep their wives—ecclesiastical celibacy is a feature of Catholic discipline only; it never has been a dogma, and at present it prevents many married High Anglican clergymen from going over to Rome. And the Mass might be said in English, as it is already said in other languages besides Latin in the Uniate (R.C.) Churches of the East. But that is all. In essential matters, reunion means the abolition of the Reformation and a return to the Age of Faith, when "all roads led to Rome."

Atheism is the Enemy!

Whatever its theological deficiencies, the Church of Rome is a worldly-wise body. The "Black International" is the

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

The Vatican Council Resumes

By F. A. RIDLEY

most experienced political party on earth. It does not make overtures for nothing, and it chooses its times well. Why, then, has it raised the question of reunion at this time? A little consideration of the world situation is, I submit, sufficient to answer this question. There is nothing like a common enemy for cementing alliances. Just as pessimists have suggested that only an invasion from Mars could unite our politically divided world, so only the rise of a foe destructive of all forms of Christianity could perhaps compel the Christian Churches to unite? That common enemy is now there: Atheism, rationalism, secularism, call it what you will! Whether in the form of "godless" Communism in the East or "godless" scepticism in the West, for the first

time in human annals, Atheism has ceased to be the secret doctrine of a few isolated heretics. Ever since the French Revolution it has been spreading among the broad masses of the world's population. Hence the sudden urge for unity: "If we don't hang together, we shall all hang separately"! Hence the reunion of Christendom tomorrow; and perhaps, since the spread of Atheism menaces them all, of all religions the day after? The reassembly of the Vatican Council implies the prior recognition of this fact. *Vis-a-vis* the rest of the Christian world, Rome is emphatically in a position to negotiate from strength, that constant diplomatic aim of all governments, and of dictatorships in particular.

The Neglected Question

I READ THE ARTICLE, "The Neglected Question by G. I. Bennett (THE FREETHINKER, 2/1/59) with a great deal of interest and some sadness.

Sadness—because it seems to me that this attitude of mind which blames all the poverty of mankind on overfecundity and completely rules out the possibility of economic remedies is not only mistaken, but dangerous. It in fact approximates to the religious attitude, "Blessed are the poor", etc., in this way. Religion, by encouraging contentment with poverty, resists all tendencies to revolt against present conditions. Now this theory of Mr. Bennett, that birth control alone could solve the problem of poverty and hunger, could have the same effect, and would discourage honest enquiry into economic conditions today.

Let me hasten to assure you that I am altogether in favour of birth control, from the point of view alone of the welfare of mother and child. Obviously, children receive more care in small families, and the mother enjoys more leisure. But there is a very poor case for birth control from an economic point of view. Before the First World War, when agriculture was less advanced, Kropotkin stated that Britain could feed 75 million people.

All over the world, and most particularly in the U.S.A. (where farmers are paid *not* to breed pigs and *not* to grow grain) production is being sternly limited. Even at that, it often turns out that "surplus" foodstuffs have to be destroyed, in order to prevent giving them away to people who need them! Wherever we look, in Europe, America, most of Africa, Australia and New Zealand, so far from there being any shortage of consumer goods there is a prodigality of real wealth. The only shortage one perceives is of purchasing power to allow the people to buy these goods, in fact there isn't enough money made out of paper and ink. Most of the world allows the paradox of poverty amidst plenty to exist as a disreputable fact. As for the East, where real famine does exist (often because of primitive methods of agriculture rather than overpopulation), the rest of the world would have no difficulty in helping them out with their surplus production, were it not for the dirty games of politicians and financiers.

Although it is an incontrovertible fact that religion is usually in opposition to birth control, I would like to point out one of my own observations from personal experience. I live in a mainly R.C. district, and what religion is more opposed to birth control than the Roman Catholic? But almost invariably I find that in the better working class families, two or three children are the rule. Only among the poorest and labouring classes will you find large families.

I think the lesson to be learned from this fact is that if poverty were abolished—as it easily could be, for there is no reason of physical shortage for its existence—birth

control will definitely be practised by the public for their own sakes, whether the priests like it or not! A general rise in the standard of living will lead to a more intelligent and less priest-ridden public. The use of the Social Credit system, with its National Dividend, would remove economic pressure and allow Freethinkers to speak their minds freely on this, and all other subjects. This real freedom of speech in itself will, I dare prophesy, open up new horizons for free thought.

J. GRUBIAK.
(Sec. Glasgow branch Social Credit P.L.)

A Reply

In view of Mr. Grubiak's remarks, I have read over my article and within its necessarily limited scope I see it to be deficient perhaps in only one respect. I might have added to it the single word *entirely*, so that I should have written about "the political dogmatists . . . preferring to ascribe the existence of hunger, poverty, and acute shortages *entirely* to economic causes that administrative reform or political socialisation schemes can dispose of."

Because that *is* the trouble. These people—and Mr. Grubiak also, apparently—do not see population control *as even a factor* in the existence of acute privation and malnutrition and wretched living standards, which are capable of such bedevilment in the sphere of international relations. I actually believe population control to be a factor of very large consequence in tackling the huge ecological problems that confront our world today, although I would not suggest—please note, Mr. Grubiak—that it is the *only* measure necessary.

Of course it is true that poverty exists in the midst of plenty—a fact that I deplore no less than Mr. Grubiak. But I am, I admit, much less sanguine than he that, if all available food surpluses were divided among the world's inhabitants, everybody would then have a diet of even bare nutritional sufficiency—granting that we were at the same time fully to exploit the resources of the soil. And suppose that at the outset everybody had a sufficiency. How long would it be before an accelerated jump in population numbers made overall shortage even more dire?

As I view it, that is the crux of the matter—not how much bigger a population any particular country, or countries, might provide for.

To be realistic, I think all socio-economic measures must be accompanied by education in family planning. We surely invite disaster—especially as concerns illiterate teeming populations—if in endeavouring to raise world living standards we fondly hope that improved economic conditions will alone and of themselves bring about the much-desired reduction in birth rates.

G. I. BENNETT.

What is the Church?

By R. UNDERWOOD

THERE ARE, of course, two ways in which we can speak of a church. One as a building used for religious purposes, the other as an institution embodying those purposes. The first can be discussed architecturally and sometimes historically and neatly dismissed. The second is a very different matter. It is neither so neat nor so dismissable.

The Church in this sense is primarily a pious abstraction as elusive as all abstractions. It can be a very convenient if not necessary abstraction, but it can also easily become an inconvenient distraction, grossly misleading as to its real significance.

Apart from the Roman Catholics—who would more aptly be called uncatholic Romanists—the expression “The Church”, in spite of the Catholics, is commonly used to denote the entire body of Christendom. Yet Christendom, strictly speaking, is not a Church at all. It cannot even be called the Christian Church. For besides the many and often conflicting meanings of the word Christian, the so-called Christian Church is nothing but a higgledy-piggledy collection of subsidiary Churches, all at bigoted variance with each other in their claims and teachings. Each one, of course, is in the right and all the others are in the wrong. They act in the spirit of the old Scottish Pharisee who prayed: “Lord grant that we may be in the right as thou knowest we shall never change our minds”. They often show more rancorous ill-will towards each other than could ever be shown towards any of them by a mere old atheist confuting religious truth with plain truth.

However, in spite of their differences and hostilities, they appear to be more or less at one in their most deep-seated beliefs or make-beliefs. With one or two exceptions among the smaller sects, they all believe, or believe they believe, in a supreme God, who, beyond all known mathematics, is one as well as three. They vigorously compete in proclaiming that the Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord, and preach a supernatural, redemptive salvation through his death and resurrection. It is only on the strength of such credulities that what is called the Christian Church hangs together as any sort of whole.

No doubt it can all be made to sound convincing to those appropriately conditioned. But some of us have more respect for intellectual independence and—unlike the old Queen—we are not bemused. Some of us indeed may well wonder what Jesus himself might verily say unto the monstrous procession of rivals and enemies who, down the ages since his day, have abused, fought, tortured and murdered each other in his name. His Church! Yet whether Jesus belongs to fact or fiction, no specious interpretation of the only available record we have of him can ever whitewash him into anything but a life-long layman who showed a cold disregard for priests and who, if he made anything clear made it clear that his God was no respecter of parsons. Jesusanity, such as it was, cannot be identified with Churchianity—not to say Churchinanity—such as it is.

Now to treat the Church as singular instead of plural is decidedly a convenience since we may more effectively deal with one thing at a time than with fifty things at once. Moreover the reduction to even such questionable unity does not greatly matter because anything of consequence that can be said of the Church as an entirety applies equally well to the individual component churches. In this way it becomes easier to expose and dissipate

illusions and to provide a clearer concept of what the Church really is. Particularly in its executive activities. It is these activities more than anything that give rise to the most insidious misapprehensions. For they are so constantly and so craftily slurred over that the complacent, average church-goer is scarcely aware of them and therefore rarely questions them.

To hear priests, parsons and other partisans talk, one might very well suppose that there is something called the Church which has a positive entity of its own quite apart from its human constituents. We are constantly adjured to heed what the Church teaches, what it decrees and so forth. Its advocates anthropomorphize it much as they anthropomorphize God. They speak of it as if it were some sort of personal, supramundane authority to which everybody should refer and defer on all matters of importance. Which is sheer nonsense. Disrupt the people who compose the Church and the Church disappears. It is a fact often lost sight of that from first to last the Church is nothing more than a very mixed assortment of human beings.

And in this assortment, as in all similar assortments, there is always that small minority who by hook and often by crook manoeuvre their way to positions of power and influence. Against this charge they invariably insinuate that the cream of course always rises to the top. They take good care never to insinuate that so also does the scum. With the possible exception of the State there is no sphere where wily, unscrupulous and ambitious time-servers can so easily become “by merit raised to that bad eminence”.

These minorities, whether they be hierarchies of proud prelates in stately conclave met, or the humbler elders of some little local Bethel, are the actuality behind the abstraction. They, more than all others put together, are the Church. It is they, and not some imaginary arbiter whom they pose, though they cannot always impose as the Church, who are responsible for inculcating the astounding variety of superstitions by which they are able to gain a coveted dominion over the fearful and credulous, an advantage which does more to mould their motives than they themselves probably realise. An advantage which they will not lightly forgo. Yet their right to order another's way of life can no more be vindicated than another's right to order theirs.

A more widespread insight into all this is what they most wish to prevent. For well they know that as soon as their dupes are put up to it, just so soon will their dupes refuse to put up with it. They will see that whatever the rigmarole dished up for their consumption, it does not emanate from some ineffable superhuman source called the Church, but from other human brains more scheming, more fable-minded, but just as fallible as their own.

DEBATE

MANCHESTER UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' UNION staged an interesting debate on Thursday, January 29th, on the motion, “This House should have no religious faith.” Mr. Colin McCall (General Secretary, National Secular Society) proposed, and the seconder was Mr. Jeremy Isaacs, former Vice-President of Oxford University Union. The principal opposition speakers were the Bishop of Middleton and the Rev. John Vincent (Methodist). Unfortunately, many members of the audience left the hall shortly before the end to avoid the fog, and their votes were uncounted. Of those voting, 48 were for the motion and 60 against, with 15 abstentions.

This Believing World

The "Sunday Graphic" is publishing a series of articles on Hitler "speaking from the grave," in which, as might be expected, he blames everybody—literally *everybody*—but himself for the final collapse of Nazidom. We have noted this not because of the articles, but because, with absolute defeat staring him in the face, he still dreamt of victory—why? "Victory is still possible," he claimed, "if only one held out against impossible odds. Providence might yet intervene." Hitler never gave up belief in "Providence," by which he meant "God." The reason why, in spite of his being a criminal monstrosity, he was never excommunicated by his Church was because, after all, Hitler believed in God!

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With the tremendous publicity the Roman Church received through the radio, TV, and the press of all countries when the new Pope was elected, it is not surprising that he has discovered how to bring again similar publicity for his Church. Soon the radio, TV, and the press of all countries will be busily occupied in advertising to the full the proceedings of the Ecumenical Council just called by the Pope, to which he has invited some of the "separated" Churches. The immediate object of this is, we are told, to discuss their return to the Mother Church, of course, but of that the astute Cardinals in the Vatican know there isn't a chance. What it really means is more and more world publicity, and *that* is all to the good.

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But we can't help wondering why the Archbishop of Canterbury, as the "Pope" of the Church of England, didn't think of an Ecumenical Council *first*, inviting the Roman Church to attend—also with the happy thought of "unity"; though this time the idea should be the Church of England swallowing the Church of Rome, and not *vice versa*—which is the only "unity" Rome understands. If only the Church of England had a tenth part of the cheek of the Church of Rome, this could have happened, and it would have proved very amusing to learn what the Vatican thought about such an Ecumenical Council taking place in England for a change. But it could never happen.

★

What did Mr. Tom Driberg think of his *own* religion—Anglo Catholicism—as he detailed his dismal story of the way Christians are dwindling away from church services and the Bible all over the country, in his TV talk on the British Sunday? Of course, people are still Christian, but they pay less and less service to God Almighty and Christ Jesus.

★

In his second talk, Mr. Driberg had the help of the Rev. F. Martin and an Olympic athlete and sturdy Christian, Mr. T. Farrell. Mr. Martin agreed that Sunday was *not* the Sabbath Day but the day when "our Lord" rose from the dead. He preferred to call it "the Lord's Day"—though, as a keen Bible student, Mr. Farrell strongly demurred. He could not give up the Ten Commandments with its "Sabbath Day." It was all very amusing and led us nowhere at all. Or did it?

★

Many "tall" stories now appear regularly in *The People*, and so long as Christianity is involved, everything possible is done to give them publicity. The latest example is the marvellous power of *prayer* which, no doubt, believers still think can move mountains. We are told (in capital letters) that PRAYER REALLY WORKS; and a gentleman named Len Coulter assures us that "no one has been able

to fault it"—that is, to find "a flaw" in "the most rigorously conducted laboratory tests" which, incidentally, took place in America. How right is this claim! Does Mr. Coulter really think that infidels and sceptics from England could possibly hold "rigorous" tests over there?

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Somebody called Loehr, of a "Religious Research Foundation," decided to plant some seeds, and allow half of them to "sprout" with holy water and prayer, and the other half without prayers or holy water, and see what happens. They got otherwise exactly the same treatment. And what happened? Yes, our guess was right. The seeds which had holy water and prayers came "two out of three times well ahead." Under the impetus of prayer, some corn plants shot to a height of 15 inches, easily outstripping the unblest plants. Moreover, if you wish to *retard* growth, all you have to do is to "curse" the plants. And this hopelessly pious nonsense, which could only come out of a "Religious Foundation," is called "the most fateful scientific experiment of the 20th century."

★

How much reliance can be placed on such religious rubbish is shown by Mr. Coulter confidentially telling us also that Dr. J. B. Rhine has "scientifically established the existence and power of telepathy"! Poor Dr. Rhine—no doubt he has tried to, but so far he has utterly failed. But the people Mr. Coulter writes for are the last people in the world to question any statement he makes in the name of religion. That is one reason why religion still prospers.

Last Rites

Administered by NAN FLANAGAN

A man, jumping from a long continental train bearing pilgrims to Lourdes, ran along the platform shouting: "Is there a priest on the train? Is there a priest on the train?" A priest, after casting an eye on his box containing blessed oils and wadding for the administration of the sacrament of Extreme Unction, anxiously put his head out of the compartment and shouted: "Yes, yes, I'm a priest!" The fellow made his way to him and asked confidentially: "Plaize, Father, will you lend me the loan of your corkscrew."

★

AN IRISHMAN, a Scotsman and an Englishman went to see the Pope. His Holiness, turning to the Irishman said that as Ireland, in spite of persecution, was one of the greatest Catholic countries in the world, he would permit the Irishman to kiss his cheek. He then leant towards the Scotsman and said that though there was still a small percentage of Catholics in Scotland, the Church was making headway there, so he'd permit the Scotsman to kiss his hand. . . . When he got to the Englishman, the Englishman had disappeared.

Some nuns I knew enjoyed that joke. In fact, Sr. Mary Ann, who had never seen a joke before, saw that one and she would go round explaining it with: "You see, sister, the Englishman was nervous as to what part of him the Pope would proffer him to kiss!"

—NEXT WEEK—

SCIENCE FRONT

By G. H. TAYLOR

THE FREETHINKER

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

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THE FREETHINKER can be obtained through any newsagent or will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, £1 10s.; half-year, 15s.; three months, 7s. 6d. (In U.S.A.: 13 weeks, \$1.15; 26 weeks, \$2.25; 52 weeks, \$4.50.)

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

Details of membership of the National Secular Society may be obtained from the General Secretary, 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1. Members and visitors are welcome during normal office hours.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

P. VARNEY. Again we think you misinterpret. Mr. Bennett does not see purpose in nature, except insofar as man is part of nature and formulates his own purposes.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Banch 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

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Midland Institute, Paradise Street).—Sunday, February 15th, 7 p.m.: C. T. POWELL, "Clairvoyance: How it is done—Fraud Exposed."

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, February 15th, 7 p.m.: A Lecture.

Central London Branch N.S.S. (The Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, February 15th, 7.15 p.m.: W. H. CARLTON, "Some Theories of History."

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, February 17th, 7.15 p.m.: JEAN GRAHAM HALL (Barrister-at-Law), "The Law and the Illegitimate Child."

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, February 15th, 6.30 p.m.: J. M. ALEXANDER, "Sex and Sin."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (N.C.S. Public Relations Hall, Broad Street).—Sunday, February 15th: BOB EDWARDS, M.P., "The Politics of Oil."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, February 15th, 11 a.m.: Dr. STARK MURRAY, "Man-made Diseases."

Study Circle.—Friday, February 13th, 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. Fourth: "The Reformation." Fee 1/- per meeting. Non-members invited.

Notes and News

TICKETS (21s.) are now available for the National Secular Society's 53rd Annual Dinner, to be held this year in the Paviour's Arms, Page Street, Westminster, S.W.1. In response to many requests, the date is later than usual; it is, in fact, March 28th, the Saturday following Good Friday, which should enable provincial members to attend more easily. And in this notable Freethought anniversary year (centenary of *The Origin of Species*; bi-centenary of Burns's birth; 150th anniversary of Thomas Paine's death;

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £102 1s. 6d.; J. D. Hocking, 10s.; K. R. Wootton, 10s.; W.H.D., 2s. 6d.; F. C. Wykes, £1 1s.; M. Beesley, £1; C. J. Cleary, 5s.; M. Byrn, 10s. 6d.; .. M. Wood, £1 10s.; Mrs. P. Varney, 10s.; H. R. Strange, 5s.; R. Strong, 10s.—Total to date, February 6th, 1959, £108 15s. 6d.

and centenary of Ferrer's birth and 50th anniversary of his judicial murder) it is most fitting that our Guest of Honour should be the President of the World Union of Freethinkers, Mr. C. Bradlaugh Bonner, grandson of the National Secular Society's founder.

THE *Nottingham Evening News* theatre critic hadn't a good thing to say about Nigel Dennis's *The Making of Moo*, which was presented at the Co-operative Arts Centre, Nottingham. This was hardly surprising, for the critic's personal prejudices shouted at you from the page. To write of Mr. Dennis's "knowledge of his subject being so superficial, his attack on religion so old-fashioned" is foolish. The critic should read the preface of *Two Plays and a Preface* before he talks of "superficial" knowledge; then he should read something of the evolution of religion. Opinions may legitimately differ on the dramatic quality of *The Making of Moo*, but the play contains a great deal of knowledge in a small compass. We may excuse the Nottingham critic for lacking this knowledge, but it has been pertinently remarked that one shouldn't parade one's ignorance in public.

APPEALING for funds, the Rev. Christopher Buckingham, priest-in-charge of St. Barnabas's Church, Downham, Kent, describes being in debt as "a most depressing situation" (*Kentish Mercury*, 16/1/59). But—says Mr. Buckingham—"this question of money must not be treated as something worldly and sordid. In fact, it forms part of every religion. It certainly forms part of Christianity, but we cannot on that account dismiss the charge of "worldly and sordid." Aren't these adjectives readily applicable to the larger of the Christian Churches today? Didn't Mr. Buckingham's own Church of England make a substantial profit from recent British Aluminium deals? And, anyway, it is the Bible that is responsible for the very conception of "filthy lucre." "Filthy," in our vocabulary, is a synonym for "sordid," and altogether Mr. Buckingham's intellectual position seems to be as "depressing" as his church's financial one.

WE have received a letter from Mr. Jack Scott, of R1—Box 211D, Livermore, California, U.S.A. He is a native of Suffolk, and wonders if there is any Freethinker in that part of East Anglia who would like to correspond with him.

MR. E. G. MACFARLANE, well known to readers of this paper, proposed the "Immortal Memory" at Auchterarder (Perthshire) Burns Night and composed a twenty-stanza tribute for the occasion. It was certainly up-to-date, as this excerpt testifies:

But feed his mind wi' Sputnik lore
Or tell him about Darwin,
I'll warrant then he'd raise a roar
The kirks would find alarmin'.

WE are happy to learn that Miss Willa Jules, daughter of Mr. John T. Jules, of the Fyzabad (Trinidad) Branch of the National Secular Society, has passed her finals as a State Registered Nurse at Stobhill General Hospital, Glasgow. Miss Jules is now taking a special course in midwifery and then intends to return to the West Indies. We wish her every success in her chosen career.

Against Our Anti-Stratfordians

By H. CUTNER

SOME TWENTY YEARS AGO or more, I tried to interest readers in the Shakespearean problem—the problem of the *authorship* of the plays which seemed to me to be the greatest of all literary problems. I tried to show that there was little evidence that William Shakespeare of Stratford-on-Avon could have written the plays, and that the probable author was Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford (1550-1604), who was claimed by contemporary evidence as the greatest of the Court poets as well as the greatest writer of comedies for the stage then living.

But I had another reason. Many of Shakespeare's critics have pointed out that the plays showed very little interest in religion—all the more remarkable because no subject under the sun occupied men's minds so much in Elizabeth's day. Whoever wrote the plays of Shakespeare must perforce have had little or no religion. Where then stood the Earl of Oxford? According to his biographer (B. M. Ward) he was an Atheist. I really thought then that the discovery that the greatest nobleman at the Court of Queen Elizabeth was an Atheist might have interested our readers. I'm afraid I made no greater mistake. For indeed I was assailed by a mass of vituperation which frankly astonished me. One writer, however, did more than astonish me. It was he who most indignantly insisted that it was far more probable that Will of Stratford *at the age of six* wrote the poems of Edward de Vere which made him the greatest of the Court poets than vice versa. But of course there was no end to the same kind of extraordinary criticism.

And this brings me to the latest book which I think I am right in claiming the author believes has annihilated the Anti-Stratfordians. It is written by Mr. R. C. Churchill, it is entitled *Shakespeare and His Betters*, and published by Max Reinhardt at 21/-. I heartily recommend it—just as I always recommend any criticism of the Mythic theories of John M. Robertson. Unless we read both sides of the question, especially when put as temperately in the main, and as courteously as does Mr. Churchill, we cannot say we know the problem.

Of course, he has to admit he has not read the many hundreds of books against the Stratford man—that would be a quite impossible task; but he does give a most comprehensive bibliography, and no doubt he has chosen various works as representative of the claims of the now dozen or so "claimants" as authors of the Plays.

It would, and I am sure he must recognise this, be quite impossible for me to take up the many points he makes against the Anti-Stratfordians in whatever camp they find themselves. It would require a bigger book than his own. But there are one or two points I should like to challenge him on. I may add, in passing, that I consider his section on Edward de Vere far and away the weakest part of his book, to say nothing of the fact that he nowhere appears to prove that it was Will of Stratford who wrote the Plays. He mostly takes this for granted. He takes, for example, for granted that "Shakespeare possessed books and could read them". There "is no doubt" about this. Well, I think I have read at least as much on the Shakespeare Problem as Mr. Churchill, and I have come across no evidence whatever that Will of Stratford could read or even write. I am ready to consider the evidence if Mr. Churchill knows it. As the Plays show concrete evidence that their author was very widely read not only in English, but in French, Italian and Latin, he must have been able to read. Which is quite true of

the *author* of the Plays. But unless his biographers have suppressed all the facts, it is not true of the Shakespeare they have given us.

Mr. Churchill thinks he has made mincemeat of the Baconians by telling them that "lack of knowledge accounts for most of their errors." Well, well! There are many strong arguments against the Baconians, but I would never have said that. My own experience over 40 years has been the appalling lack of knowledge of "Shakespeareans"—and no one exposed this more than John M. Robertson in the many volumes he wrote on the Shakespeare Problem as he saw it. He was, however, not particularly interested in the "biographical" side though, of course, he believed that Will of Stratford wrote the greater part of the Plays. By no means all which have his name, and certainly not all even of the Plays which are considered entirely from his pen.

To take up even a tenth of the points raised by our problem, and supposed to be answered by people like Mr. Churchill—his book gave me the impression however that he considers himself to be about the only one who *has* answered the Anti-Stratfordians—and who fondly imagine that we simply don't know what we are talking about. A typical example is the way he deals with what he calls "Aristocratic assumption" about which he has about 24 references in his index. Had he demolished our case in this matter, why all these references? Oxfordians claim—and I heartily agree—that the Plays are easily the most "aristocratic" plays in the language, that the man who wrote them was aristocratic to his finger tips with a knowledge of court and court procedure only a nobleman could possibly have known. Mr. Churchill spends page after page of sheer froth in trying to answer this claim and lamentably fails. Just to mention one "reply"—it appears that Dr. Benézét, an Oxfordian, said that Edward de Vere was endowed with "musical powers", and Mr. Churchill almost loses his temper in telling us all about William Byrd—not an aristocrat—who was immeasurably his superior. So what? I simply do not know. If Oxford wrote the Plays, he wrote them, and this has nothing to do with the claims of Byrd as a musical genius. Talk about a *non sequeter*. . . .

But let me deal with one point fully worth discussing. It is the problem of *Love's Labour's Lost*.

Almost every critic who has examined this play has been struck with the fact that it shows an astonishing acquaintance with the then Court of Navarre. In addition, it is one of the wittiest plays in the English language, brilliant and exciting, but exceedingly difficult to read and understand. Very few people outside the literary and dramatic professions have read it and—though it may be rash for me to say so—I doubt very much if Mr. Churchill has read it.

What is the date of the first production of the play? We know that the first *printed* edition appeared in 1598, "newly corrected and augmented", but many critics are sure that the play was produced, as the great Shakespearean scholar Howard Staunton says, "between 1587 and 1591"—that is, when Will of Stratford was about 23 years of age. Where did he get his knowledge of Navarre?

For a writer like Mr. Churchill, this is easy. All he did was to go to Mrs. C. C. Stokes who, in 1889, wrote a book entitled *The Bacon-Shakespeare Question Answered*, and there he found some interesting "facts" relating to Richard Field, the publisher of *Venus and Adonis*.

(Incidentally, he managed to squeeze in, so to speak, another "fact"—"It was to him that Shakespeare, with plenty of publishers to choose from, took the manuscript of *Venus and Adonis*, which Field published in 1593". And as there is not a scrap of evidence for this statement, he gives us two "authorities," Mrs. Stopes writing in 1889, and an American writer, Miss Chute, writing in 1951. Of course, they knew!)

It appears that between 1588 and 1589, Mrs. Stopes discovered that Field published seven pamphlets all mentioning Navarre; therefore, all young Shakespeare had to do was to read them, and hey presto! *Love's Labour's Lost* was born. Just as simple as that.

But four of the pamphlets were in French, two in French and English, and one only in English—*Life of Coligny*. So what? Why, Will of Stratford at 22 not only was a Greek and Latin scholar, but he also knew French and, naturally, Italian. And if one asks for *evidence*, it is simply because we Anti-Stratfordians are hopelessly ignorant. The whole burden of Mr. Churchill's book is to expose our ignorance of the "facts".

When J. M. Robertson was answering the Baconians on the question of law and law-terms used so extensively in the Plays, he produced hundreds of what he called similar allusions in the works of other Elizabethan dramatists. If Mr. Churchill was so sure that Will of Stratford borrowed all his knowledge of Navarre from the pamphlets published by Field, why did he not give us the parallel passages—on the one side, those from the French or English, and on the other side the exact quotations from *L.L.L.*? Did Mrs. Stopes read the pamphlets? Has Mr. Churchill himself read them, or was that not necessary?

The truth is, of course, that no one has satisfactorily explained how a young man from a milieu as ignorant and as illiterate as Stratford-on-Avon then was, could possibly have written at the age of 22 such a highly "aristocratic" play like *Love's Labour's Lost* packed with allusions to a foreign state which he never saw, but got hints about from a few pamphlets. The play is an enigma; for indeed no one knows for *certain* who wrote it, or how or when it was written. I frankly admit that we have no real evidence that Oxford wrote it, and a good deal that it may well have been some youthful effort by a number of young "aristocrats" who had been to Navarre and wrote from personal knowledge. One thing is certain—it was *not* written by Will of Stratford.

But what I have said should not debar readers from Mr. Churchill's book which I found highly entertaining and—yes, easily answered.

Catholic Truth

by DR. J. V. DUHIG

CATHOLIC TRUTH is different from ordinary truth. Let us see. Professor Louis Renouf's statement about Galileo in his Catholic Truth Society pamphlet, *Evolution*, quoted by Dr. Edward Roux (THE FREETHINKER, 12/12/58), is a classic example of Catholic apologetics in which assertions are either (a) unverifiable, devotional drivel about scab-ridden saints, worthless theological conjectures or deliberate fraud and lying as by Cardinal Gasquet and Hilaire Belloc, or (b) traditional in Catholic teaching and commonly accepted without question or reference to authoritative sources by Catholic polemicists such as the comic Arnold Lunn or Evelyn Waugh who, until corrected by A. J. P. Taylor, did not know the difference between the Spanish Inquisition (founded 1231) and the Roman Inquisition or Holy Office (founded by Pope Paul III, 1534-1549). Professor Renouf's statement appears to be

of the second order; it is simply not true in substance. He says, "the condemnation of Galileo was the result not of dogmatic teaching, but of the weight of the accepted scientific view against the case he presented in support of his then revolutionary ideas." The neat alibi in the second sentence is cleverly used to lend weight to the first which is the exact reverse of the truth, that is, ordinary everyday truth. The condemnation was precisely based on "dogmatic teaching." Galileo was charged by the Holy Office with promulgating a view of the Universe "contrary to Holy Writ." That and only that was the sole substance of his alleged offence. In an essay which I do not have by me Bertrand Russell gives a translation of the decree.

That Galileo's theory was unacceptable to some scientists of his time is true, but it is obviously irrelevant to the specific charge. It might be remarked, however, that the Copernican theory, the matter in dispute, was warmly embraced by Galileo's greatest contemporary, Kepler (1571-1630), who went on to demonstrate that the planetary orbits about the sun were ellipses. Whether the Holy Office knew this I do not know, but it was possible they did. But the Decree of Condemnation makes no reference to this aspect which supplies a classic Catholic hindsight alibi to the Church.

There is still no alternative view for Catholics to that of a geocentric Universe since the Church, "semper cadem," is supposed never to change; surely what was Holy Writ in 1633 is the same in 1959.

And I find it hard to understand the position of Dr. Roux's Catholic correspondent, Dr. Hodgson, as Genesis is supposed to be required dogma for Catholics. I remember too that as a medical student, studying biology, I "SAW" as Dr. Roux says the fact of organic evolution, but was afraid to say so openly, as in my day Evolution was sinful and heretical as opposed to the truth of Holy Writ, in this case the Book of Genesis. Things seem to have changed a lot in the never-changing Church.

And there is to be noted another departure from Holy Writ in which we read the fabulous rubbish about the Devil taking Jesus up to a high place to show him "all the kingdoms of the world." The man who wrote that believed in a flat earth. So that today the unfortunate Catholic child is taught the "fact" of a geocentric universe and a flat earth on Sunday; but in school all the rest of the week that what was in accordance with Holy Writ on Sunday is simply not true. Is it any wonder that children so bewildered by such outrageous equivocation become delinquents on such a large scale? The contradictions are so flagrant that any intelligent child sees through them and takes out his resentment in either crime or apostasy, in the eyes of the church a worse crime than crime. My apostasy, after the first shock of evolution, became acute when I asked a priest, if Adam and Eve were the first people, whether the grandchildren of this couple did not come through incest about which I had then just heard. He patted my head and told me not to be silly.

We see how far Professor Renouf, in his search for Catholic "Truth" has led us. All I want to know now, is how do Catholic polemicists become so silly and so clumsy and so lacking in elementary care in their spurious displays of scholarship and in taking things on trust without consulting proper authorities.

I have long ceased to trust Catholic clerics; they are all badly educated and shut off from sound reading thus leaving controversy to the laity. In his role of apologist for the Catholic Church, Professor Renouf has let the side down very badly; a professor should always be sure of his sources.

CORRESPONDENCE

BURNS

It is obvious to all who read Burns' verse that Burns was a free-thinker, and not addicted to the religious superstition so rampant in his period (and not yet dead, unfortunately).

A common misunderstanding is the notion that Burns was just a hired hand or ploughman working for a farmer. The fact is that Burns was a small farmer working on his own on his father's family holding. The small farm or peasant holding was a common feature of the country 200 years ago, until the greed of the rapacious landowning aristocracy almost eliminated this form of tenancy and established the large labour-employing farms.

Burns, however, was not exactly a poor man, except, of course, in comparison with the Lord of the Manor, who owned coaches and flunkeys. The rent of Burns' farm at Mosgiel was £90 per year, which would be equal to seven or eight hundred pounds today; so it was no wonder the poet found it difficult (eventually impossible) to make ends meet. The wage of a hired farmhand in those days was about £7 a year, living in with food and accommodation (of a sort).

So eventually Burns abandoned farming, though this must have been painful to him, independent as a peasant. He was later appointed an excise officer, which, of course, was not just a labourer's job. Burns, it should be understood, was a well-educated man and one of the best-informed men of his day. And his companions and associates were educated professional men.

Smuggling was common in Burns' day, especially on lonely coasts like that of Galloway, and with no transport except horse-drawn carriage or horseback, a smuggler-chaser's life must have been somewhat strenuous.

Burns had good cause to hate the landowning gentry, as every peasant must hate them. Being an Irish-born peasant myself, I understand:

"Al nicht they're mad wi drink an whoorin';
Niest day their life is past endurin'.
Stak' on achance a farmer's stackyard
An cheat like ony unhung blackguard;
There's some exceptions mon and woman,
But this is Gentry's life in common."

MARTIN M'CALPIN.

A PROTESTANT VIEW

I am a Protestant and I have been reading your magazine THE FREETHINKER since that wonderful article by Avro Manhattan on the late Pope. In view of Mr. F. A. Ridley's article in this week's issue, I decided to write to you and mention a few points. It is true that the real menace in the Western World is 'Rome.' Protestantism and Freethought can co-exist.

I don't think there is much Protestantism in this country today and it would seem that Colin McCall was at the time "Defender of the Protestant Faith" when arranging the protest meeting.

There was the Church of Scotland Synod at Glasgow, who appeared to be the only body of the Protestant Faith to counter the yielding towards Rome.

A Free Church paper, *The Christian World*, did point out that the late Pope failed to use his influence to ease the burden of Protestants in Spain, Colombia, etc., who are persecuted as opportunity offers.

The Protestant Alliance and the Editor of *English Churchmen* challenged the statement made by the BBC, who informed its listening millions that the deceased would be interred next to the tomb of St. Peter—the first Pope! The admission was made by the BBC that it ought not to have been said. The fact of Peter being first Bishop of Rome is, of course, doubtful.

These were just a few challenges I know of by Protestant bodies.

The motto of the Orange Society is "The liberty of England and the Protestant religion I will maintain." This, you will agree, is a good motto for both Freethought and Protestantism. If Rome regains Power, the Syllabus of Pio Nono, 1864, and Infallibility, 1870, will put an end to all liberties.

Rome is working ceaselessly to destroy Protestantism by propaganda, courses, etc. The latest is that she demands 75% of public money (Protestant money) to build their schools. Rome is a foreign mission with no legal right to establish parishes, etc. I wonder if there will be any organised opposition to the latest demand. I maintain that if they are not satisfied with State schools, then they must pay for their own. We all know the reason why they want their own schools, of course.

No doubt yourselves, along with us Protestants, have a hard fight ahead to maintain our liberties.

I have read Adrian Pigott's book, *Freedom's Foe—The Vatican*, and no doubt by the contents he is a Protestant rather than a Freethinker, but the contents should be read by all. I would recommend the following booklet to you as a supplement to the

above: *Rome's Mounting World Aggression and England's Imminent Peril*, by Rev. C. Leopold Clarke, 9.6:7., price 4d., obtainable from the Protestant Alliance or other Protestant bodies. This book should be of use as a pocket enlightener to your members.

In ending my letter let's hope that 1959 sees Freethinkers and Protestants countering the "Papal Blitzkrieg." E. BROOKES.

OBITUARY

FAWCETT NEWELL, who has died at the age of 79, was a quiet, retiring man, who yet made strong friendships with others of varied ages and in widely-separated places, our contributors, H. Cutner and G. I. Bennett among them. His principal hobbies were drawing and chess—and he was good at both—but his Freethinking dominated his life. He was a member of the West London Branch of the National Secular Society, and a frequent attendee at their meetings, and those of the Kingston Branch too. He also belonged to the Rationalist Press Association, and was often seen at the Conway Hall. During the war years, when evacuated to Blackpool as a Civil Servant, he helped to form the Blackpool Branch N.S.S. Fawcett Newell will be missed by the many Freethinkers who came to know him. They will join us in sending our sympathy to his widow and two sons.

The funeral took place at Ashford (Middlesex) Cemetery on February 6th, when the General Secretary of the National Secular Society conducted the service.

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