

The Freethinker

Volume LXXIX—No. 9

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Fivepence

AT 7 O'CLOCK on the morning of Monday, February 25th, 1884, the doors that had closed upon our founder, G. W. Foote, in Holloway Gaol, twelve months previously, opened again. Seventy-five years have passed and it is not easy to recapture the glory and the enthusiasm of that day.

The great demonstration that awaited him was not merely the spontaneous welcome of the heart in the joy of seeing an old friend: it was that and much more. It was of

the head as well as the heart; it was the fulfilment of a year's resolution made by many a man and woman to be there on the day of his release and to make plain to the Christian bigots that truth could not be silenced by persecution. Had Foote been a man of

lesser stature there would still have been a demonstration. Three months previously Ramsey, his partner in "crime," his colleague in "blasphemy," had been released after serving his nine months and though the morning was rainy and uninviting, there had been scenes of enthusiasm to such an extent that some of the carriage horses had taken fright and had been difficult to control. It had become increasingly obvious as the months passed that the day G. W. Foote reappeared as a free man would be the signal for a popular freethought demonstration not only in the immediate vicinity of the prison but taken up in secular societies and groups throughout the land.

"The Freethinker" Survives

During the imprisonment THE FREETHINKER was the principal liaison between Foote and his supporters, and in the capable hands of young Dr. E. B. Aveling, the paper kept in the closest possible touch with its imprisoned editor, from whom frequent contributions continued. Through the paper, readers and supporters had been kept informed as to the circumstances and time of Foote's release, and an official reception party included Charles Bradlaugh. THE FREETHINKER proudly displayed its badge "Prosecuted for Blasphemy," and the cruel sentences imposed by the Catholic judge, Justice (!) North, only served to strengthen the determination of sturdy lovers of liberty not to yield to the Christian bigots. Had this resolution been less firm, THE FREETHINKER would have perished. Some equivalent, doubtless, would have arisen in good time, but the clock would have been set back.

Blasphemy

Foote's "offence" was really that of popularising the heresies of professors of science and philosophy and selling them to the public at one penny. So far as the Church was concerned, heresy and atheism hidden away in weighty and expensive volumes in the recesses of library shelves, were regrettable but not damaging. It was quite a different matter to have the absurdities of the Christian Holy Book exposed in public. Today, many a person who has never heard of Foote may express himself with candour on the subject of religion without having to face imprisonment on a charge of blasphemy. True, the blasphemy laws are still on the statute books, but apparently they are considered

so lightly as not to be worth the trouble of getting them taken off. Thus does one age take for granted what has been won by the anguish of half-forgotten pioneers.

Scenes of Enthusiasm

An early morning in February is perhaps not the most propitious time to call out workers and their wives for a united demonstration. And in 1884 there was no radio or TV to announce and feature the event. As for the Christian-controlled daily press, little could be expected from that quarter. Yet as early as 6 a.m. the crowd was collecting, a crowd which was to reach 3,000 outside the prison alone, besides many along the route to the Hall of Science, where an informal reception and breakfast

would take place. Nor does the figure of 3,000 give a true picture, because, owing to the fact that people had to get to their work, it was a *changing* crowd, coming and going all the time. Certainly there were some who saw the whole thing through from beginning to end, and of these eyewitnesses one declares he "heard but a single hiss the whole way," another that he "heard never so many Huzzas in his threescore years." The carriage horses had this time been better selected but there was some shying in the case of tram horses making slow progress through the dense crowd.

People had come from various parts of England to be present, including a party from the Manchester N.S.S. branch. A man had come from Guildford on a tricycle and, knowing the way, had picked up and directed sundry individuals and groups as he rode into the Holloway district. Brakes in succession were drawn up outside the front entrance to the gaol, where, in the four roads, were parked scores of other vehicles.

All the London branches of the National Secular Society were represented, most of them strongly. A large contingent of women of the Finsbury Branch bore a huge banner, bearing Foote's famous reply to the judge: "My Lord, the sentence is worthy of your creed." The branches of N.-W. London and S. London also displayed banners: "Welcome to G. W. Foote, the Freethought martyr!" In Birmingham a little girl of a freethought family had marked off each day on the calendar till Foote's release. At various N.S.S. strongholds in the provinces preparations were already at an advanced stage for Foote's projected meetings.

A Freethought Martyr

Although the official time was 7 a.m. for Foote to take leave of his dismal brick vault, it was not till 8.10 that his carriage conveyed him to the gates. Meanwhile, two carriages had entered to meet him, containing his wife and her father, Mr. Angel; and Charles Bradlaugh and his two daughters, Annie Besant, Dr. Aveling and the Rev. W. Sharman, one of the tiny minority of religious representatives who had vigorously opposed the harsh and ridiculous sentence.

When Foote was seen to emerge there arose a mighty cheer, gaining in strength from those at the back, who

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

75 Years Ago

By G. H. TAYLOR

could only guess the reason for it. Progress for the carriages was for a time almost impossible. Then started the procession to the Hall of Science to the running fire of cheers and congratulations. The word "fire" is more than metaphorical, for there were victory beacons to be seen along the way. The day, which had begun bright, had now become sunny, nature being no respecter of religious bigotry. Over 100 brakes, traps and cabs were in the procession, but the majority of people were on foot. Their object was to get a view of the hero and shake his hand if they could get near enough, and to shout themselves hoarse. Such were the scenes the whole way till the Hall of Science was reached. One observer records seeing three nuns hemmed in by the crowd and probably oblivious of what it was all about. Another huge crowd had collected in Old Street. Omnibus and tram drivers and conductors, cabmen, road workers, shop assistants and clerks were among the many who hailed the released man. As for the many Christians who doubtless saw the procession, perhaps some belated sense of justice stirred in their minds, dulled by religion.

Perhaps, after all, there was something in the godless creed that could move a multitude.

(To be concluded)

THEATRE

Danton's Death

AT THE LYRIC THEATRE, HAMMERSMITH, LONDON, the 59 Theatre Company is giving us our first chance of seeing the very remarkable play, *Danton's Death*, by George Büchner. As far as the Company can discover, it is the first professional performance of the play in England, and London Freethinkers should make a point of seeing it.

It deals with the period of Robespierre's ascendancy and, as the title implies, the fall of the Titan, who, it is reported, told the headsman: "Show my head to the people; it is worth showing." The dramatic possibilities are splendidly exploited by the young German author, eldest brother of Ludwig, the Monist author of *Force and Matter*, so well known in Freethought circles. George died in 1837 at the age of 23, after a short but stormy, revolutionary life, and another brother, Alex, tells us how this premature death in exile "cast a grave shadow on the hitherto untroubled happiness of the family." Their mother felt the loss particularly badly.

Yet this tall (6ft. 2in.), slim, fair-haired, short-sighted young man (as we deduce him to be from the Darmstadt police description on the warrant for his arrest, printed in the theatre programme) left us a near-masterpiece in *Danton's Death*, a subject which clearly attracted him, and which must attract all who admire greatness.

For, whatever his faults, Danton was great. Carlyle drew his portrait in fittingly heroic terms: "So passes, like a gigantic mass, of valour, ostentation, fury, affection and wild revolutionary force and manhood, this Danton, to his unknown home. He was of Arcis-sur-Aube; born of 'good farmer-people' there. He had many sins; but one worst sin he had not, that of Cant. No hollow Formalist, deceptive and self-deceptive, *ghastly* to the natural sense, was this; but a very Man: with all his dross he was a Man; fiery-real, from the great fire-bosom of Nature herself. He saved France from Bunswick; he walked straight his own wild road, whither it led him. He may live for some generations in the memory of men."

He may indeed! And Büchner's Danton, excellently played with remarkable physical resemblance by Patrick Wymark, is of this mettle. He has retired to his home and

spends much of his time in amours; but he is Danton, he fears naught, for "Robespierre daren't act against him." His friends urge him to act first: the danger is imminent. He takes his time, but at length he consents: he returns. And the greatness returns! The mighty saviour of France has lost none of his oratorical powers (he is, after all, only 35); he is on the verge of swaying the people; but St. Just and Robespierre defeat him by trickery and he lands in the Luxembourg Prison with his friends, Camille Desmoulins, Herault, Philippeau and Lacroix.

Here, too, is Thomas Paine, writing his *Age of Reason*, due, by accident, to escape the fate of the others. In his immortal book, Paine hoped for "happiness beyond this life." For Danton, death meant oblivion and Büchner shows him ridiculing a fellow prisoner who, "to make himself safe," would "take extreme unction, turn towards Mecca, and have himself circumcised."

The 59 Theatre Company has done Büchner well. The twenty-one scenes take place before a permanent, but cleverly varied, backcloth by Malcolm Pride, and they are well directed by Finnish-born Casper Wrede. The acting, too, is of a uniformly high standard. Apart from the Danton of Patrick Wymark referred to above, special mention should be made of Harold Lang's Robespierre, veritably sea-green but not quite incorruptible, and the Camille of James Maxwell, who has also translated and adapted the play.

Danton's Death is, then, a notable theatrical occasion. A stimulating play about stirring times and remarkable men, written by a young revolutionary, it has much to offer the theatregoer and has particular interest for Freethinkers. And, for once, the theatre programme is well worth the sixpence so often justly begrudged. It contains a profile of the author (including the police description), as well as facts about the historical background to the play and the main figures involved. C.M.C.C.

REPORT

ON SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 15TH, C. T. Powell, of Leicester, well known as a psychic researcher in the Midlands, lectured and gave a demonstration of clairvoyance and fraud to the Birmingham Branch of the National Secular Society. Mr. Powell has been a freethinker for many years, yet he passed round numerous certificates of clairvoyance to the audience.

Amid much laughter he gave a demonstration. He told things to total strangers, some of whom were stooges, some not.

"The only spirits I ever saw were ones in a glass," he said, showing a stack of certificates for healing, clairvoyance, etc. (one from the S.N.U.) and producing a heap of newspaper cuttings from the psychic and national press, which stated he had proved life after death—in which he did not believe!

All spirit phenomena could be explained away, Mr. Powell stated. He also said he had dozens of letters from people whom he had cured of complaints they never had—his healing certificates did the trick!

This Sunday, at 7 p.m., the Birmingham Branch will hold its Annual General Meeting under the chairmanship of Mr. W. Miller. W.M.

WISDOM WELL

Father expected a good deal of God. He didn't actually accuse God of inefficiency but when he prayed his tone was loud and angry, like that of a dissatisfied guest in a carelessly managed hotel.—CLARENCE DAY.

Yes, quaint and curious war is!

You shoot a fellow down

You'd treat if met where any bar is,

Or help to half a crown.

—THOMAS HARDY.

When it is a question of money everybody is of the same religion.—VOLTAIRE.

She thinks that even up in Heaven

Her class lies late and snores

While poor black cherubs rise at seven

To do celestial chores.

—COUNTESS CULLEN (*A Lady I Know*).

Science versus Religion—1959 Style

By F. A. RIDLEY

DURING THE 19TH CENTURY, "the Century of Stupendous Progress," science first became a potent social factor. Prior to the Industrial Age, the study of science had been an exclusive occupation practised in isolation from the general run of contemporary social life. On the periodically recurring occasions when some scientific discovery of an unusually daring character came into open opposition to the accepted dogmas of the Churches, the scientific heretic usually submitted. Galileo did, of course, in the most famous of all such causes, and the sensational discovery was driven underground until overwhelming evidence accumulated in its favour. Then, the Churches, without undue publicity, quietly came to terms with it. This is actually what occurred in the case of the epoch-making discoveries of both Galileo (or rather, Copernicus) and Darwin. One may relevantly add that this age-old conflict between science and religion existed even prior to Christianity. When Aristarchus of Samos, the Copernicus of antiquity, first propounded (by sheer deductive genius, since no techniques of astronomic observation then existed) the heliocentric theory, he, too, had been threatened with prosecution for "impiety" by Pagan theologians. (c. 250 B.C.)

Prior to the Industrial Revolution, which really dates back to about the middle of the 17th century—the era of Newton, Spinoza, and the foundation of the Royal Society—science represented a very minor human activity, and one which was usually kept under strict clerical supervision. This was, and remained, the normal state of things precisely because there was no influential class primarily interested in scientific development as such. This state of society, hitherto virtually unchanged since the origins of human culture, was abruptly ended by the Industrial Revolution—probably the most important event which has so far transpired in the recorded annals of mankind. And it was one which would certainly constitute a far more accurate date for the origin of our current scientific era than does the present hypothetical year of the birth of a perhaps mythical Christ, computed by uncritical medieval monks. Since the rise of modern industry, science has acquired more and more social importance and has, simultaneously, tended to pass more and more out of clerical control; a sociological development due ultimately, not so much to its own intrinsic merits, but rather to the rise of powerful and successively socially ascendant classes, none other than our old friends the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Both classes, however bitterly opposed politically, owe their origin and continued existence to the Industrial Revolution—that is, ultimately to scientific development. Failing the theoretically possible, but in practice, extremely unlikely reversion, to an agrarian society like that of pre-industrial ages, it is now difficult to see how this evolutionary process can ever again be reversed. Contrarily, present-day political and economic developments in the formerly "backward" pre-industrial continents like Asia, Africa or Latin America, underline the famous aphorism of Marx that "The advanced lands reveal their future image to their backward contemporaries."

Looking backward on "the century of stupendous progress" (as McCabe once aptly termed it), one may at first be surprised at the still immense social and even political power that the Churches still possess in this year of inter-planetary research, 1959. Certainly the too optimistic forecasts of many 19th century socialists and rationalists have proved, if not fallacious, at least premature. For religion

has not disappeared automatically in the more advanced and technically evolved lands of what still periodically describes itself as "Christian civilisation." In what were, at any rate, until very recently, the two most scientifically advanced lands in the modern world—Germany and America—we have had respectively a Nazi racist regime of a literally prehistoric kind and a religious revival. Membership of some religious group appears to be a requisite of the "American way of life." The ultimate explanation of this is to be found, not in the scientific foundations of our present social order, but rather in its political superstructure. In the pre-industrial era, a religious outlook stemmed directly from the social conditions of life. Find an agrarian civilisation and you find a religious one simultaneously. Nowadays, religion, except in some fast disappearing "backward" (*i.e.* pre-industrial lands, no longer subsists as a direct reflection of mankind's social immaturity. It really has no relevance in an industrial (*i.e.* scientific) society. It exists today, ultimately for political reasons; in particular as an adjunct to, and as a parasite on the current cold war. On, at any rate, a superficial view of the Western world today, religion does not appear to be losing ground—quite the contrary. But actually this revival is largely artificial, as any revival must be which finds itself in opposition to the scientific basis of modern society (as the present one does); and is dependent for its continuation on uncertain political conditions.

This last state of things applies particularly to the present remarkably successful comeback of the Roman Catholic Church, which actually is due mainly to its present alliance with the anti-communist political reaction, whether as formerly in its fascist, or as at present, in its democratic form. (There are precedents, in Rome's long history, to this policy of political intrigues, in particular the times of the Reformation and the French Revolution.) Now, however, both the cold war and the conflict with religion and science, appear to be taking on new and unforeseen forms. Religion is increasingly becoming an embarrassment to the West in its anti-Russian activities.

In a brilliant article in *The Rationalist Annual* (1959), Professor J. B. S. Haldane points out that in the present age of headlong scientific development which began with the launching of the Sputniks, the Churches and the whole religious mentality in general, are becoming an increasing liability to the anti-communist Western camp; the Bishops are losing out to the Sputniks. Whatever the merits or demerits of Soviet society may be, it has relegated religion to the margin of society. Science represents the acknowledged basis of communist society. Contrarily, the West enters the scientific and ideological race with one hand tied behind its back, and weighed down by the mountain of medieval lumber imposed on it by its religious allies—in particular, of course, by the Roman Catholic Church, its anti-communist ally number one—as was exemplified recently in the fantastic publicity which marked the present Pope's coronation. It is now becoming clear that this increasingly awkward situation is impressing itself on our rulers, whatever their ostensible political persuasion. We find that even the most reactionary political troglodites are now passionately declaring that science is nowadays our only hope of survival. How will the Bishops fare in this coming Sputnik-conditioned age? The historic conflict of religion with science now appears to be entering upon a new, and perhaps decisive phase.

This Believing World

We wonder what the many "spirit" healers we are now blessed with, all of whom claim that their "cures" are exactly like those performed by "our Lord" when he went about "doing good" nearly 2,000 years ago, think of the claims made by some Rumanian doctors as reported in the *Daily Mail*? Neither spirits nor Jesus are responsible for any of the cures, which are the result of some simple drugs. Miss Olga Franklin, who reports them, gives us a picture of an old man, 100 years old, who was so crippled with arthritis at 98 years of age, that he couldn't use his limbs and fingers, and was completely bald.

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And now? His head is covered with dark grey hair, he can run two miles, and "skip and jump like any man in the prime of life." His grip was so strong that he made Miss Franklin yelp with pain "as he crushed" her fingers. The *Daily Mail* reports many such cures, all done without spirits or God Almighty or Jesus, but with a few simple drugs. If the claims are true (and they appear to be well authenticated), all the heavenly "spirit" apparatus could disappear, and there would be more cures in one week than all the "spirit" healers could perform in a lifetime.

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It is very interesting to note that two Ontario clergymen—a Baptist and a Unitarian—have discovered that Christmas is after all a Pagan holiday, and insist that we should "not put Christ back into Christmas." The Baptist said it was like the solar feast of Mithras, and that "it started pagan and it has never changed." Strange how often Christians have found how right the despised infidel has often been in his criticism of Christianity! But if we are thus slowly gaining ground, we wonder how long it will be before the whole of Christianity will be discovered "pagan"?

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In the same connection we note that the Rev. Donald Soper, who has been discovering for himself how hopeless it is to defend so many Christian claims, now pathetically admits that "it is idle to look for the Star of Bethlehem with a radio-telescope." Even he must see that the story of the Star of Bethlehem is as ludicrous as that of the virgin-born Babe of Bethlehem, and similar gems from the Gospels which have long been exploded by Freethinkers.

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Still, that relic of Nonconformism, *News Chronicle*, cannot yet give up even what Mr. Soper has found ludicrous, and stoutly maintains that "no religious truth is disproved" by any later discoveries in the properties of matter, though it admits that "the mystery of existence is not explained," even if "the literal truth of Genesis is discounted." But if Genesis is thus given up, what about the "Fall of Man"? If the Fall of Man is as mythical as the "Creation" story, where does Jesus come in? Is he no longer "our Blessed Saviour"?

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In Alistair Cooke's American broadcast the other week, he dealt with Abraham Lincoln, the 150th anniversary of whose birth this year is being enthusiastically celebrated all over the U.S.A.—and he was not afraid of pointing out that not only was Lincoln accused of being an "unbeliever" during his lifetime but that his first biographer boldly declared he was an Atheist. Most Americans—and people of other nations, too—almost get hysterical when acclaiming the wonderful virtues of the famous President; so it is good to know that at least these virtues were not the products of a belief in Christianity. We hope listeners were not too shocked at Mr. Cooke's broadcast, delivered as it was on a Sunday!

TV's religious programme, "Meeting Point," is on "the Cross questioned," and the Rev. W. A. Whitehouse was put forward to answer questions on "Is this God's world?" The reverend gentleman—to put it mildly—appeared completely muddled for his task, and all he could do was to mumble about the story of Jesus Christ, in which he was a complete believer. The questions asked him were mildly heretical, and Mr. Whitehouse could only blankly get up some sort of a "reply," which even the chairman, John Hale, found most unsatisfactory. However, Mr. Whitehouse was to be followed by a Roman Catholic priest—which means all will be right again in the Christian world.

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In the London "Star" the other day Anne Edwards told the story of her young daughter, who asked if she could "be a Jew," and when the reply showed a lamentable lack of enthusiasm, she asked if she could become a Catholic. Miss Edwards brought up the young lady and her other children as Quakers—for, of course, they just had to have some religion. The Quakers never teach that it is only their sect which "saves" people—"a thing," Miss Edwards adds. "I find downright irreligious and un-Christian." But then even Jews do not claim theirs is the only religion which saves you. The whole episode proves how fuddled and confused people can be when thinking about religion.

Ingersoll and "Agnosticism"

AS MANY NEW READERS, especially those to whom Ingersoll is only a name, will be misled by Dr. Negri's allusion to him in his article, "Is God a Criminal?" may I point out that for Ingersoll there was no difference whatever between Agnosticism and Atheism. Here are his own words:

QUESTION: Don't you think that the belief of the Agnostic is more satisfactory to the believer than that of the Atheist?

ANSWER: There is no difference. The Agnostic is an Atheist. The Atheist is an Agnostic. The Agnostic says, "I do not know, but I do not believe there is any God." The Atheist says the same. The orthodox Christian says he knows there is a God; but we know that he does not know. The Atheist cannot know that God does not exist. —Works, Vol. V, pages 245-8.

This extract is from an "Interview" headed "My Belief"; but in his last lecture, Ingersoll again made his position clear. This was in "What is Religion?" Part VI. In it he insists that "matter and force" are his cornerstones, and they "cannot be destroyed, cannot be annihilated." If, he adds, "these cornerstones are facts," then it follows that "matter and force are from and to eternity." And he continues:

It follows that there could not have been any intelligence, any design, back of matter and force... It therefore follows that the supernatural does not and cannot exist... If matter and force are from and to eternity, it follows as a necessity that no God exists; that no God created or governs the universe; that no God exists who answers prayer... (My italics.) And so on.

Nothing could be clearer than that Ingersoll "denied" God in the clearest terms though he preferred to call himself an Agnostic.

Yet Dr. Negri tells us that Ingersoll took refuge "in an eternal question mark"!

During his thirty years as a Freethinker, Ingersoll had to learn, as we all have done; and when in the evening of his days he came to consider what exactly is religion, he wrote for all to read: "It follows as a necessity that no God exists." That is as Atheistic as it is possible to be, and Dr. Negri should have known it before accusing Ingersoll of any "eternal question mark."

But, of course—like all of us—even Dr. Negri also has to learn.

H. CUTNER.

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.

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 Cinema, Paradise Street).—Sunday, March 1st, 7 p.m.: Annual General Meeting. Chair: W. MILLER.

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, March 1st, 7 p.m.: A Lecture.

Central London Branch N.S.S. (The Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, March 1st, 7.15 p.m.: J. WATSON, "Evolution and the Bible."

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, March 3rd, 7.15 p.m.: Dr. C. BIBBY, "T. H. Huxley's Views on Education."

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, March 1st, 6.30 p.m.—78th Anniversary. Guest Speaker: T. M. MOSLEY. Musical items.

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (N.C.S. Public Relations Hall, Broad Street).—Sunday, March 1st, 2.30 p.m.: Rev. B. RICKETT, "Law, Liberty and Licence."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, March 1st, 11 a.m.: W. E. SWINTON, PH.D., "The Moon."

Study Circle.—Friday, February 27th, 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. Sixth. "Has Religion a Future?" Fee 1/- per meeting. Non-members invited.

Notes and News

News that "the Yanks are coming" may have put the fear of God up some of their enemies in the last war, but the latest invasion of Britain is unlikely to prove so effective. Sixty U.S. Baptist ministers and 12 lay preachers recently arrived here to spend a fortnight preaching in universities, colleges, rotary clubs and churches. "Our aim is to strengthen people's religious bonds with their churches," said the leader, Dr. Warren Walker. We think they will find it a little harder than it seems to be "back home."

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WE learn from *Time* magazine (9/2/59) that for the first time in the country's history, the United States Congress has more Roman Catholics than it has members of any other religious denomination. According to statistics issued

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £116 2s.; R. Gerrard, £1; North London Branch N.S.S., £1 1s.; Anon., 1s.; A. G. Bedane, £1 1s.; T. R. Williams, £1 1s.; J. B. Miller, £1; C. J. Cleary, 5s.; S. W. Brooks, 3s.; W.H.D., 5s.; S. M. Caines, 5s.; Kingston Branch N.S.S., £4.—Total to date, February 20th, 1959, £126 4s.

by the Library of Congress, there are 103 Roman Catholic Congressmen (91 in the House and 12 in the Senate), of whom 88 are Democrats and 15 are Republicans. This is eight more than in the last Congress. The next largest religious denominations are Methodist (99), Presbyterians (67), Baptists (64) and Episcopalians (63). There are 13 Jews and, curiously, one Sikh. "Five reported no religious affiliation at all."

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A RECENT (31/1/59) article on Australia by Mr. Kingsley Martin, in the *New Statesman*, contains some interesting remarks on the Roman Catholic Church's role in the political life of the Dominion. Archbishop Simonds, the coadjutor of Melbourne admitted [writes Mr. Martin] "that the Church has taken part in politics—which the Australian Church has hitherto denied"—and the Archbishop repudiated his predecessor, Dr. Mannix, who had warned the faithful that "Every Communist and every Communist sympathiser in Australia wants a victory for the Evatt party"—in the last election, that is. Now, Mr. Martin suggests that the Church realises that it must repudiate the breakaway Democratic Labour Party and "work to heal the breach in the A.L.P. [Australian Labour Party] if Catholicism is ever to regain its power."

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THE *Ilford Recorder* (29/1/59) reports that the local council "have agreed to make a £200 cut in the price of land in Stoneleigh Road, Ilford, which they are to sell to the Brentwood Roman Catholic diocese." The councillor who urged the reduction, Mr. Owen Waters, said that "the council had earlier set a precedent by selling land to another denomination for 40 per cent. of its housing value." (Our italics.) This sort of thing should—but apparently doesn't—bring a protest from ratepayers.

★

IN Bolton, Lancashire, we are glad to say, opposition to another concession—the proposed 75% grant to Roman Catholic and other denominational schools—has been strongly expressed in the *Bolton Evening News*. Equally strong support was, of course, forthcoming, and several side-issues were introduced (such as why the original objector, Mr. J. Higgins, had forsaken the "faith of his fathers"). We heard, too, the inevitable complaint that Catholics were paying twice over for the education of their children. It so happens we were sitting next to a schoolgirl in the bus the other morning, and she was doing some last-minute swotting. Maths? English? History? No. She was learning by heart why the Mass was equivalent to the cross—an essential item of education, no doubt!

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY	
53RD ANNUAL DINNER	
SATURDAY, 28th MARCH, 1959	
ALL (Day after Good Friday)	
WELCOME at the PAVIOURS ARMS	
PAGE STREET, WESTMINSTER, S.W.1	
RECEPTION 6.0 P.M. DINNER 6.30 P.M.	
Vegetarians catered for Evening Dress Optional	
Guest of Honour: C. BRADLAUGH BONNER	
(President, World Union of Freethinkers)	
TICKETS 21/- each from the Sec., 41 Gray's Inn Rd., W.C.1	

People of No Conviction

By G. I. BENNETT

BIOGRAPHICAL WRITING has a perennial appeal to men and women in very different walks of life, not least because it satisfies in some measure our natural human curiosity to know how our fellows have fared in the mental challenges and spiritual conflicts they have had to face along their way. And perhaps no phase of a person's life is more interesting, viewed in retrospect, than the early formative years when intellectual and emotional reactions to the world outside begin to assume a particular pattern that in most cases remains much the same ever after.

It is of this psychologically embryonic period that Mr. Robert Hudon writes in his article, "Personal Story" (*THE FREETHINKER*, 23/1/59), a very readable account of how he—surely a most precocious youngster!—reacted to the orthodoxy about him in what must have been the most unfavourable of Catholic environments for an inquiring young fellow like him. I find engaging the homely directness and simplicity of his narrative, and, since I know he has not given us the whole story, I hope he will go on some time to tell us more about himself and the way in which he, as a freethinker, met his difficulties and troubles in his Canadian Catholic world.

As coincidence would have it, writing in *THE FREETHINKER* only a week before the appearance of Mr. Hudon's article, I made reference to my early home and school life relative to religion (Protestant religion in my case), and I cited the two earliest rationalist books to come my way that started me on a path of inquiry ending in my complete abandonment of supernatural faith. Joseph McCabe's *Twelve Years in a Monastery*, which Mr. Hudon describes as his "most important discovery" around the age of 20, I too read and greatly enjoyed. But when I came to it, my outlook was wholly rationalist, and it did only what any book can do after one's views have become settled in favour of its underlying philosophy: it broadened, deepened, and confirmed me in my convictions.

Mr. Hudon seems in an alien environment to have been by original disposition a truth-seeker, whereas most of us become such only by dint of critical self-culture in the years that follow the indoctrinations of childhood. Robert Hudon tells us that he felt himself to be alone in holding freethinking views, only realising by degrees that there were others whose intellectual position was similar to his own. Now, since it is through other minds that most of us who seek the truth come eventually to the rationalist or freethought standpoint, we do not suffer from Mr. Hudon's desolate feeling of being the only one of his kind in the world. But how rarely do we meet these other minds in the social relationships and chance encounters of everyday life?

Speaking personally, it is very seldom I have experienced the sharp religious opposition and cruel coldness that Mr. Hudon apparently met with almost everywhere. But what I have encountered so often and in so many places that I have long accepted it as a commonplace of ordinary English life is indifference—indifference in matters of thought and ethical feeling—indifference in so much that most concerns us as mature, civilised human beings.

At bottom, few people think as we do. The world at large is full of triviality and superficiality. Reflections upon the fundamentals of existence, questions concerning man's actual place in the universe, enlist the interest of very few. Disliked and avoided are speculations that run along heterodox channels, and lead to conclusions that make no

concession to human vanity or to man's age-old desire for immortality. This aversion to rational thinking is very marked. But, even worse, there are many indifferentists who really don't know what they think and are quite happy about it, caring for little or nothing beyond the distractions of commercialised sport and entertainment, material possessions, creature comforts, and sensual enjoyments. For my part, I should rather any day have to deal with a man of strong, honest convictions, even though his convictions are not mine, than with one who has none. The former, at all events, has some anchor and represents rather more than flotsam and jetsam drifting on the ocean wastes of life. And, as a rule, one knows where one stands with him. The let's-have-a-good-time, couldn't-care-less spirit abroad in the world today, if it were to prevail over conscientiousness and a sense of responsibility in thought and conduct, would open the gates to a far from happy future.

It may be countered that indifference is better than wrongly-directed enthusiasm—that at least it does not inspire persecution. But to me it is an unhealthy social condition not without its dangers. People of no conviction may in certain circumstances be caught up in mass movements marching on hollow slogans and become partisans in unworthy causes. They are the potential supporters of clever but unscrupulous political and religious leaders who care nothing for human rights and liberties.

It is easy to mistake indifference for tolerance. But tolerance reflects a positive attitude of mind—the attitude of the thoughtful man who is anything but flippant in things that matter, and who has arrived at certain essential conclusions, certain basic principles, about life. His vigorous, individualistic belief that every man has the right to work out his own salvation enables him, after Voltaire, to tell his honest opponents: "I don't agree with what you say but I'll fight to the last for your right to say it."

Genuine seekers after truth are still, unhappily, the "odd men out" in society, who in another day and age would have been hounded to death for their awkward beliefs and inconveniently conscientious objections. It often happens that they are, as their predecessors were, men without church associations or creed, whose radical convictions have been beaten out in spiritual isolation and in the lonely recesses of the mind. From them heel-clicking obedience and unintelligent docile compliance are not to be expected; and Napoleon Bonaparte, like all authoritarian tyrants, was well aware of that. "Don't talk to me of men without God," he once said. "I knew men without God in 1793. You don't govern men like that—you shoot them!"

Napoleon would not have said that, I fancy, of the indifferentists. They could in the last resort be called to order and infused all too readily with shallow, intellectually shoddy enthusiasm. But people of independent freethinking cast I compare with the "throw-outs" of the herd: those evolutionary eccentrics or "sports," in whom gregariousness is not quite instinctive; who, if they must be separated from their fellows, somehow seem, despite solitariness and occasionally inevitable unhappiness, to get along their ill-trodden path fairly well. I think they stand for what is best and most valuable in our intellectual, moral, and spiritual culture, and by them the flickering rushlight of real civilisation was in the past, is now, and will in the future surely always be held.

"Creation's Amazing Architect" Again

By H. CUTNER

THE AUTHOR of *Creation's Amazing Architect*, Mr. Walter J. Beasley, F.R.G.S., has sent me a long four-page "reply" to the recent criticism I made on his book. It is not really a reply at all—indeed, he expressly says that he has not "the time to answer" my criticism "in full detail." I am not surprised.

Mr. Beasley is the President of the Australian Institute of Archaeology, and had this not been the case I would have ignored his book. What astonished me was that a man of his intelligence and knowledge could possibly have championed the first chapters in Genesis—chapters which eminent Christians themselves have despairingly given up as "poetry," and without any scientific value whatever. For example, Bishop Gore in his *Belief in God* says,

It is certain, in my judgment, that the early chapters of Genesis—the accounts of Creation, Eden, the Fall, the Flood—are not historical records, but inspired folklore; and the subsequent records of the beginnings of Israel are tradition, and not strict history, actual memories of fact modified in tradition (page 167).

I could multiply this "judgment" a hundred times. In any case, Mr. Beasley, though he had no time to answer me, proceeded at once to prove that Bible "prophecies" were literally unerring. This was particularly the case with those "prophecies" in which "the Jews" were threatened as to what would happen to them if they rejected Jesus Christ as their Messiah.

Apart from other reasons, nothing in all this religious nonsense has surprised me more than the way Christians absolutely fume at the mouth when they think of Jews rejecting Jesus. Their books are full of it. Here is this impudent "race," still rejecting their own special Messiah. Thank God—as Mr. Beasley almost shrieks—"the Lord will scatter them among all people, they shall be oppressed and spoiled, a byword among all nations . . ." and so on. There must be at least many thousands of books and pamphlets backing up Mr. Beasley to the utmost, gloating as he does, "how the expression 'you Jew' has always been used as a term of meanness, reproach and despising."

And what has all this to do with the Genesis Creation story? I really do not know. Either Genesis is right or it is wrong; and my criticism, if it could have been answered, should have been dealt with in detail. Mr. Beasley, instead of spending so much of his time in yelling at Jews could have far more usefully answered me on the specific points I raised.

In addition to gloating over the way the "prophecies" about the Jews have been, thank Heaven, so thoroughly realised, Mr. Beasley assured me that he had travelled in the Middle East, and so had visited many of the most famous biblical scenes. He reminds me of the parson who addressed his flock on his return from the Holy Lands. "If anybody doubts the historic reality of the Flood,"

he thundered, "let me say that I have seen Mount Ararat, and here is the proof of the Flood"—and he showed his astonished (I hope) audience a large stone he had picked up from the mountain. Mr. Beasley assures me that he took lots of photographs around the Persian Gulf but, alas, I must be given up as a blatant infidel. For the life of me, I cannot see how snaps around the Persian Gulf prove God made man on the sixth day of Creation.

But let us examine some of these "prophecies" which have been fulfilled in the way the gentle followers of Christ have treated Jews through the centuries. The point I ask the reader to remember is that Mr. Beasley insists

that Christians made life a Hell for the Jews because they rejected Jesus Christ. In the first place, as becomes an ardent Fundamentalist, Mr. Beasley has no doubt whatever that the Pentateuch was written by Moses. Now Moses lived according to his Bible between 1571 and 1451 B.C. If he (or God) "prophesied" that all Jews would have a Hell of a time because they rejected Jesus Christ, how is it that the name "Jesus Christ" occurs *nowhere* in the "sacred" text of the Old Testament, and certainly nowhere in the Pentateuch? How is it that the word "Messiah" does not even occur once in the whole of the Pentateuch? How could the Jews have known that Moses was referring to Jesus Christ who was not to be born until 1 A.D. or 4 B.C. or whatever date Christians like to give him these days?

And how does Mr. Beasley know that the "prophecies" really referred to the rejection of Jesus by the Jews? After all, in the year 598 B.C., Jerusalem was taken by the Chaldeans, and a little later it was completely destroyed, the king taken prisoner and most of the people transported to Babylon. In the face of this, Mr. Beasley tells us that it was all due to the Jews refusing to acknowledge Jesus Christ as their Messiah! How the unfortunate captives or the survivors could possibly know that Jesus Christ (born 600 years later) was going to be their own special Messiah is one of those religious mysteries which only good Christians can unfold.

But one of the most important prophecies comes from Deuteronomy—a book which Mr. Beasley quotes with immense relish. It is,

And the Lord shall scatter you among the nations, and ye shall be left few in number among the heathen, whither the Lord shall lead you. And there ye shall serve gods, the work of men's hands, wood and stone, which neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell . . .

The operative word in this wonderful "prophecy" (which is heartily disliked by all Christians) is "heathen." There were between six and ten millions of Jews living in Germany, Austria, Poland and Russia before the war. The populations of these countries were mostly Roman Catholic or Protestant or Greek Orthodox, and believed not only every word and comma in the Bible as being Divinely inspired, but all had complete faith in Jesus Christ. Yet the Bible calls them heathen! Not only that, the Bible said that the Jews—according to Mr. Beasley—because they rejected Jesus Christ, would all "serve" gods made of wood and stone! This is even sillier than calling Christians heathens! If there is one thing that Jews never do now, it is to "serve" wooden and stone gods. For this, you have to go to "the one true Faith," Roman Catholicism, where certainly "gods" of wood and stone are "served."

But Mr. Beasley, after letting himself go against the Jews (he obviously believes that they are a "race" of people distinct from all other races), decided after all to say something about the "Amazing Architect," and his marvellous "Creation"; and as my space has run out I shall deal with what he says in the next article.

(To be concluded)

—NEXT WEEK—

1959

By C. BRADLAUGH BONNER

CORRESPONDENCE

NO HELP FROM GOD

Whenever I hear about anybody who has come through a great ordeal I shall point it out to you—I mean those who did *not* resort to prayers or religion but had enough strength in *themselves* to do so.

I was listening to a broadcast the other day of an interview with the woman who wrote the book, *Seven Years Solitary*. She was a foreigner, married to an Englishman and taken as prisoner by the Germans in the last war. They tried to get her to admit she was spying for the British. In giving a short summary of her experiences she did not resort to any prayers or look for any "Divine" help. At least she did not mention having done any such thing during her interview.

Despite the hell she went through, she came out with flying colours. If this was a case where Divine aid was resorted to, the "Holy" men would have broadcast the story around the world as an example of what prayers, etc., can do.

When such an instance happened as described above, I don't see why Freethinkers, the N.S.S., etc., should not broadcast it, if for nothing else but to show the fallacy of what the "Holy" men contend.

M. D. SILAS.

ST. THOMAS

"The concept of God as an alternately benign or angry Father residing somewhere in the ether without form or body but possessing human emotions, human thoughts, and human weaknesses, and a cupidity that demands constant placation, must be destroyed. Such nonsense is not fit even for the kindergarten of men's minds." So writes Dr. Vitali Negri (*THE FREETHINKER*, January 30th, 1959). Dr. Negri would not find a better confirmation to what he has written than that of St. Thomas Aquinas in the first Questions of the First Part of the *Summa Theologica*.

G. M. PARIS, Editor, *The Faith*, Malta.

[Dr. Negri did not place Aquinas in the mental kindergarten, but many Roman Catholics dwell there all their lives. St. Thomas was circumscribed by the very limited state of knowledge in his day.—Ed.]

TRUTH OR COMFORT?

The sole purpose of Freethinkers appears to be to ridicule religion and to try to show how the human masses are living under an illusion of a loving father's care with the promise of everlasting life. Although Freethinkers realise, through logical reasoning, that God is a myth, many thousands, perhaps millions, of people live for their religion and their faith has stood them in good stead through many trying periods.

The village church and Sunday school mean much more to their members than just a religious meeting place. Usually the Sunday school is the centre of a healthy social circle and helps to bring people together for a short period each week. The large majority of these people are quite contented with their lot and have no desire to live any other way. If their illusion is squashed, then their happiness is threatened, like the child who is told that Daddy is the one who provides the Christmas presents and not Father Christmas, and that "Noddy" isn't a real person but is just a doll operated by strings.

Under these circumstances, are Freethinkers perhaps in the dangerous position of doing more harm than good in promoting their views? The truth sometimes hurts but is it worth it?

D. PENKETH.

[Are we to conclude that our correspondent would prefer children not to learn that there is no Father Christmas, because the knowledge would interfere with their contentment?—ED.]

RADIO FREEDOM IN NEW ZEALAND

Mr. Dave Shipper's article in *THE FREETHINKER* on the activities of the Radio Freedom League is excellent. I must, however, point out one inaccuracy. Mr. F. C. Jordan, our very capable and enthusiastic secretary, is *not* a Rationalist, as reported by Mr. Shipper. Mr. Jordan is an *Anglican*. However, he is well known to and highly respected by many Auckland Rationalists. Inciden-

tally, he has for several years past been legal adviser to the New Zealand Rationalist Association. A member of the N.Z. Social Credit Party, N.Z. Howard League for Penal Reform, United Nations Association, he became associated with the Radio Freedom League at its inception and more recently, as honorary secretary, has rendered invaluable and unstinted service.

ARTHUR O'HALLORAN, Chairman,
Radio Freedom League, Auckland, New Zealand.

OBITUARY

ELIZA JANE PERRETT, the oldest member of the National Secular Society, died on January 10th, at the age of 100. She was born on April 23rd, 1858, and during her late teens was a Sunday school teacher, but, after marrying a Metropolitan policeman (who subsequently rose to the rank of inspector) and spending many years in Malaya, she abandoned religion and became a Freethinker. To her deathbed she never faltered in her views, being outspoken in her condemnation of the Churches, and insisting at the last on a Secular Funeral. This was conducted by Mr. P. G. Young at Portchester Crematorium on February 13th.

Eliza Perrett raised a family of three sons and a daughter, but tragedy struck swiftly and her husband and all her sons died during a very short period, and she was left alone with her daughter, Elsie. She worked long hours for many years to make a home for the two of them, and for this she was rewarded in her old age, when her daughter cared for her to the exclusion of all else.

Mrs. Perrett was a woman of remarkable charm. She was highly intelligent, had a deep sense of service to mankind, and her cheerful hospitality encouraged a constant stream of visitors to her home.

The newly-formed Portsmouth Branch of the National Secular Society paid her a fitting honour by electing her its President. With her death, the Society has lost a real link with the past, for she had been a close friend of William James Ramsey, who was imprisoned for blasphemy with G. W. Foote and H. A. Kemp in 1883.

We send our deepest sympathy to Mrs. Perrett's daughter, Mrs. Elsie Cockram.

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