

The Freethinker

Volume LXXIX—No. 10

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

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IN THIS YEAR 1959 Freethinkers celebrate several anniversaries: it will be 150 years since Thomas Paine died at New York on June 8th, 1809, which was the year of the birth of Charles Darwin on February 12th; and George Meredith died fifty years ago. It will also be a hundred years since Francisco Ferrer was born, who was shot by order of a court-martial, "blinded by religious prejudice," on October 13th, 1909, fifty years ago. To all of these we owe something; to three certainly a debt which increases with the passing of the years.

Paine, a man of the people, spoke to the people in a language they understood; Darwin, the scientist, offered his revelation to the intellectual world; Ferrer, who had had but little education, sought to give to the children of Spain what had been denied him, and endeavoured to free the little ones from relentless indoctrination by the Churches. Paine escaped to the New World; Darwin was buried with honour in Westminster Abbey; Ferrer, condemned on a trumped-up charge, was murdered in a jail-yard.

Get the Child

The importance of gaining domination over the child mind has well been recognised by priests of all creeds, and the Wordsworthian paradox, "The Child is Father of the Man," has also been hailed as true by emperors and men of war. "Suffer the little children to come unto me" is one of the sayings attributed to their god that the Christian Churches have adopted as their own. Hence it followed, as night follows day, that, when a man of simple faith in humanity, established schools such as the Escuela Moderna (Modern School) in Barcelona, Valencia and elsewhere, he was even more to be feared than any scientist.

Conditions in Britain

In Great Britain, a country which prides itself on its heritage of liberty, the struggle for the schools between the Church Established and Dissent retarded universal education by over half a century. The conditions in Church schools in this country even as late as 1943, as revealed in the White Paper of that date, were too often thoroughly bad. It is not therefore surprising to learn that in Spain, a notoriously backward country, in 1900, elementary education though statutorily in existence for half a century, did not reach the lowest standards known here; that 24,000 schools were without light or ventilation, that annually 50,000 children died from maladies contracted at school and that half a million wandered the streets without ever having entered a school. The illiterates numbered ten millions; and teachers were paid less than day labourers—and what that might have been fifty years ago in Spain makes the imagination boggle.

Ferrer's Schools

It was to remedy this deplorable state of affairs in some small degree that Ferrer established in May 1901 the Modern School in Barcelona. Three years later when he came to the great Freethinkers' Congress at Rome he could

say that a further score of his schools were active in Catalonia and that others were springing up. Moreover, similar schools were founded in Amsterdam, in Lausanne and in Brazil. The going was too good; in 1906 the Spanish Government suppressed a dozen of these schools, but others rose to replace them, so that by 1908 there were in Spain over a hundred such schools, of which a notable example was the Nueva Humanidad school at Valencia founded by Prof. Torner, which was well equipped for scientific work. All these schools were secular, *i.e.*, no religious instruction was given, co-educational, with a scientific bias and emphasising hygiene in a country which knew it not.

A riot in Barcelona provided a pretext for arresting the Friend of the Children; the civil court acquitted him. Later Ferrer was re-arrested, imprisoned for over a year without trial, then brought before a military court for a trial which, in the words of the Conservative weekly *The Spectator*, "was no trial," which, said *The Nation*, "is a crime and a stupid blunder," and of which *The Star* wrote, "The murder of Ferrer has provoked a storm of anger which is unparalleled in the recent history of Europe... if ever there was a pure and exalted patriot, it was Ferrer; the man was of the same holy temper as Mazzini, and the only crime he committed was the crime of trying to deliver education from the control of the priest." This was the great crime. It was pretended that this man was a militant revolutionary anarchist—and what he had seen in his own land was surely hideous enough to render a generous heart revolutionary and violent. But he was not. Anarchist in philosophy, perhaps, but opposed to violence, a believer in the gentle methods of education, one who loved his fellow men. The true nature of the Church, which proclaims the worship of a god which is Love is revealed in its treatment of those who genuinely love mankind.

Suppressing the Schools

Not only did the Spanish Government of Maura, La Cierva and Merry del Val murder Ferrer, it suppressed 98 of his schools, arresting many teachers, banishing many others. These schools did not give religious, but moral instruction; as the clerically-controlled Spanish Government clearly demonstrated, these are not the same. Ferrer, when in England for six weeks in the summer of 1906, was particularly interested in books such as F. J. Gould's *Moral Lessons*, annotated copies of which were seized by the Spanish police as evidence against him. His schools endeavoured to teach the children to think as independently as they could; this was the great crime.

This coming September the World Union of Freethinkers will commemorate this noble man and render tribute to his work. On Sunday morning, September 6th, we shall pay floral homage at the foot of the fine monument to his memory which stands in the centre of Brussels, and a chosen few will try to express in words the admiration for the man and his work and the contempt for and horror of

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

1959

— By C. BRADLAUGH BONNER —

his murderers that we all feel.

When the day is over and we return to our homes, may there not linger in our minds two uneasy questions—"Are the children yet free?" and "Would the shooting of a relatively little-known teacher, however good, in distant Spain arouse 'a universal passion of righteous wrath' (*The Star*) today?"

75 Years Ago

(Concluded from page 66)

By G. H. TAYLOR

AT THE END of the triumphal two-hour procession which accompanied Foote on his release from Holloway Gaol was an informal breakfast at the Hall of Science, considerably delayed by the events of the morning. As there was only accommodation for 300, many must have been disappointed, though Foote characteristically mixed with the overflow, ready, as ever, to take the handshakes of his admirers. There was no false modesty in the man. This was Freethought Day and he was right in the heart of it, revelling in the warmth of his reception. Let us see the man as he was and not as some hero of fiction dashing for cover and leaving the glory to others. Let us find the flesh and blood and mind in our dead leaders, instead of echoing some stupid obituaries. There is so much to love and admire in Foote as to render unnecessary any catalogue of improbable virtues.

Nor did he lack humility: martyrs who died unsung were right in the forefront of his thoughts that morning, as was proved when he made his speech at the reception. The laurels heaped upon him had been won, not only by himself, but by Bruno and Servetus and the cloud of martyrs since Christian persecution began. But today their cause was concentrated in the slight figure of George William Foote, and it is to his immortal credit that he rose to the occasion. I have been told by his contemporaries that he would rise to great heights of oratory whenever prompted by warm applause, and so it proved on this occasion. It was as though his listeners were themselves participating in the speech, for he hardly spoke a thought without some sympathetic interjection or applause, rising at times to loud cheering and demonstrating. This was fuel to his fire.

When Bradlaugh, who was presiding, called upon Foote to speak, it was a signal for one of the most enthusiastic indoor demonstrations ever heard on a freethought occasion. All radical and secular clubs in London were represented, besides many in the provinces. Even the great Bradlaugh was—very willingly—playing second fiddle this morning. He had known Foote for about fifteen years (Foote was now 34) and had always admired and esteemed him, even through the "young man stage" when Foote had rebelled against some of Bradlaugh's judgments as to what was best for the party. Introducing Foote, he said:

The cheers which commenced to greet you when Holloway Gaol doors opened were the first words of the judgment of reversal of the highest court of appeal that civilised nations know—the court of public opinion, which thus reverses, annuls and destroys the sentence passed upon you by Mr. Justice North. (Prolonged cheers.)

There was a call for three cheers when Foote arose, but there was simply no need to regiment the cheering of freethinkers—who seldom cheer without good cause—and the "official" cheers were engulfed in the prolonged demonstration which met the returned hero. It was Foote himself who stopped the applause by beginning to speak, and soon the whole chamber was filled with an expectant

silence. The orator, in his element, was in complete control.

He began (and the cold printed word after 75 years can but faintly capture the spirit and imminence of the grand occasion):

I have looked forward to meeting my friends and the lovers of freethought and justice from the very moment I entered those subterranean apartments which lie beneath the dock of the Old Bailey. I heard then the roar, through the thickness of the walls and the earth, of an indignant crowd of my fellow countrymen outside, and today I am privileged to hear more than their indignation. I am privileged to hear the voice of their acknowledgment that when I stood before a judge who so far forgot the dignity of the Bench as to act as counsel for the prosecution—cries of "Shame"—I did not altogether disgrace the cause which I had the honour to represent. (Cheers.)

If I were to consult my own feelings instead of the calendar, I should say I had been in gaol twelve years instead of twelve months. To all prisoners confinement is painful, but the more so to one accustomed to such an active bodily and mental life as I enjoyed. Yet freethinkers, as Mr. Bradlaugh's enemies have found, take a deal of killing—(Laughter and cheers)—and I am happy to say that although my imprisonment has somewhat reduced my dimensions [Foote lost two stone in prison] I am still not unwell and I mean to plunge at once into the work from which Mr. Justice North—(hisses)—or perhaps I should say Judge North, took me. (Demonstration.)

The speech was wonderfully varied for the occasion. Here was the rallying call, now the touch of humour, then the sincere expression of the debt owed to the brave freethought martyrs of the past and of his own personal good fortune in being acclaimed by a true band of supporters in his lifetime; and now he would speak of the sufferings endured by Bradlaugh and Annie Besant. He perorated on a nautical metaphor, regretting his loss of weight but

the timbers of the ship are not much injured. The rogues ran me aground but they never made me haul down the flag—(shouts of "Bravo!"). Now I am floated again I mean to let the old flag stream out on the wind as before. I mean to join the rest of our fleet in fighting the pirates and slavers on the high seas of thought. (Loud and prolonged cheering.)

Among the many messages which were read was one from Manchester reporting arrangements for a meeting 4,000 strong at the Claremont Hall. But this was only one of the numerous functions already planned for the celebration, ranging from public demonstrations to tea parties in workmen's clubs. Did ever a man emerge from gaol with such a diary of immediate engagements? And the title of his stock lecture at this time was "How I Fell Among Thieves."

Before the day was over he was busy editing the issue of *THE FREETHINKER* for March 9th, in which he wrote:

THE FREETHINKER shall, as I promised from Holloway Gaol, be a greater terror than ever to priests and bigots: they shall hate it with the hatred of fear. I defy as I despise their power, and would rather return to the loathsome brick vault I have tenanted for a whole long year than suffer them to divert me a hair's breadth from the policy I have pursued since this journal was started.

In the following issue the "blasphemous" sketches were resumed, and there was an "Open Letter to Judge North." A copy of *THE FREETHINKER* with Mr. Foote's card and compliments was delivered to North's house by Foote personally.

A BERLIN FREETHOUGHT PAPER

THE Berlin Freethinkers, whose problems are in some ways distinct from those of their fellow-Germans, have recently issued their own paper, *Die Stimme der Freidenker* (*The Voice of the Freethinkers*), to supplement *Der Freidenker*, the general organ of the German Freethought movement. It was pleasing to see a translation of Mr. Walter Steinhardt's article, "Germany Re-visited" (*THE FREETHINKER*, 7/11/58) printed in the first (January) issue of *Die Stimme*, together with an appreciation of Mr. Steinhardt's understanding of the Berlin situation.

The Caesar under whom Christ Died

By F. A. RIDLEY

IF ANY SUBSTRATUM OF TRUTH underlies the Gospel stories of the trial and subsequent crucifixion of Jesus Christ by Pontius Pilate, that event can be dated about A.D. 30, at which time there actually was a Roman official named Pontius Pilate, who was Procurator—Lieutenant-Governor would represent its modern equivalent—of Judea. Pilate was, according to Josephus, his Jewish near-contemporary, a harsh, military martinet who disliked his Jewish subjects and was equally disliked by them. Eventually Pilate, who was not otherwise noted for anything in particular, and owes his place in history solely to his alleged role in the later Christian gospels, appears to have been dismissed from his post after the death of the Roman Emperor who had appointed him. And he seems to have vanished into obscurity, wherein the vivid imagination of Anatole France has depicted him in that masterpiece of anti-Christian satire, *The Procurator of Judea*. In this story, the former Governor, by then in retirement in an Italian spa, could not even recall the name of the Galilean Messiah whom he had ordered to be crucified!

The Roman Emperor who appointed Pilate and to whom, according to an early legend (also probably inspired by Christian sources), Pilate had sent a full account of the trial and crucifixion of Christ, was Tiberius Caesar, the stepson and successor of the great Augustus Caesar. Tiberius has undergone a most remarkable change at the hands of his later historians. In particular, of Tacitus who, half a century after the Emperor's death, painted with the venom of a satirist and the skill of an expert psychologist, a frightening and macabre picture of this aged monarch (42 B.C.-37 A.D.). Tiberius was in his mid-fifties when he succeeded Augustus, but according to Tacitus, was still young enough to engage in incredible debaucheries on the picturesque Mediterranean island of Capri (which he, so to speak, put on the map!), whither he retired during the later years of his reign. Modern research has, nowadays, cast grave doubts on this unnatural revival of juvenile lusts in an elderly and experienced soldier and administrator, as Tiberius had already proved himself to be before Augustus nominated him as his successor. And a more scientific approach has discounted the imputation of Tacitus and his successors as melodramatic fiction largely, at least, inspired by personal and political prejudice. However, a good deal is known about Tiberius both personally and politically, and many contemporary representations survive. Apart from the dubious features of his reign, which include both the Capri debaucheries and the trial and crucifixion of Christ under his jurisdiction, Tiberius is known to have been a capable bureaucrat and also as a general who commanded Roman armies in the field against the German Barbarians with reasonable success. A competent, though not a great Emperor is the verdict of his most recent historian. Naturally, the third Caesar was somewhat overshadowed by the gigantic figures of his two predecessors, the military genius, Julius Caesar, and the political genius, Augustus Caesar. Tiberius had, however, grave personal defects of a more authentic kind than those dubiously assigned to him by Tacitus, and the contemporary records depict him as a harsh, morose, pedantic man, with a probably authentic reputation for cruelty, and little liked by his subjects. The Caesar under whom Christ died was, it would appear, himself something of an historical enigma.

A brilliant psychological study of the enigmatic Emperor, *Tiberius—a Study in Resentment*, has recently

been published by Dr. Gregorio Maranon, in which the complex character and chequered career of the classical exile in Capri is subjected to a detailed study. Dr. Maranon seeks, and claims to have found, the unifying basic characteristic which underlay the contradictory character of the third Roman Caesar. This quality he describes as essentially resentment. Tiberius, he argues, had undergone severe psychological shocks in his youth, from which he had never really recovered. In particular, the profound humiliation suffered by his father (and by himself vicariously as a child) when his mother, Livia, divorced his father under peculiarly shameful domestic circumstances (she was pregnant at the time) in order to marry the young Octavian Caesar later to become the Emperor Augustus. The aristocratic Claudian family, to which Tiberius belonged, was famous for its untameable pride which, in another connection, Lord Macaulay has described in a famous ballad. Tiberius, argues our Spanish author, never got over this fearful psychological shock experienced in childhood and suffered throughout the rest of his long life. He died at 78 on Capri as a split (traumatic) personality. He was, declares Dr. Maranon, a typically resentful man, a state of psychic illness which the author proceeds to elaborate in considerable detail with precise reference to Tiberius's better authenticated characteristics. Other painful episodes in later life only served to depress and to intensify his traumatic resentment until it became a psychological obsession; notably his compulsory divorce from his congenial wife, Vispania, and his remarriage by order of Augustus with the latter's uncongenial daughter, Julia, whose debaucheries were the talk of the town and were celebrated by the more licentious poets of the period, such as Ovid. Finally came Tiberius's famous breach with his ambitious minister, Sejanus, who, along with his whole family, was eventually liquidated by the Emperor's personal direction, sent in a sensational letter from Capri. His Spanish biographer holds that the flight to Capri represented the typical reaction of a man dominated by misanthropic resentment, though he acquits him of the sexual enormities with which Tacitus was later to charge him. Tiberius, as he emerges from this searching scientific analysis, had a few good points—alone among Roman rulers, he disliked the sanguinary gladiatorial games. His complex character, unified by its underlying resentment, emerges from Dr. Maranon's brilliant pages as scarcely more pleasing, though certainly less melodramatic than the ghoully ogre of Capri whom Tacitus has passed on to posterity.

Such was Rome's third Emperor—and Capri's most famous, or notorious citizen. Such was the master in whose name and by whose authority Pontius Pilate signed—if he *did* sign?—the death warrant of Jesus Christ in this Caesar's reign. And, since the Christian Church teaches that we are ultimately saved by the Divine sacrifice on Calvary, Miss Gracie Fields's most famous predecessor on the Island of Capri was, indirectly, but authentically, the author of our salvation! Ironically, Tiberius, whom Dr. Maranon describes as a convinced Atheist and who did not conceal his contempt for the Pagan beliefs, once ordered the Pagan gods "to attend to their own affairs." Unfortunately, however, people in Palestine and in time in Rome, too, soon after came to believe that a new god unknown to Tiberius (and "translated" into one by his deputy, Pontius Pilate) had literally taken the Emperor at his word. How Tiberius would have resented it!

This Believing World

Mr. I. G. Collins, whose firm has just produced a new edition of the Authorised Version of the Bible, uttered a profound truth recently, when he said that "when the time comes for Man to take a Bible with him to the Moon or Mars, I am certain that it will be the King James's Version." Of course. We have pointed out in these columns over and over again that it is the only version we have which is written in the necessary "reverent" English, the result of a combination of circumstances which in all probability could never happen again. The story of Abraham ready to murder his son, the episode of Lot and his daughters, the Virgin Birth, the encounters of Jesus with his Devils, and similar edifying stories—there are hundreds of them—would be laughed out of court if read in any kind of modern English as literal truths. They are, however, all *religious*, as the A.V. so brilliantly emphasises.

★
But that famous defender of the Bible, Dr. C. H. Dodd, who is Professor Emeritus of Divinity at Cambridge, will have nothing (or very little) to do with the renowned A.V. Every word, every comma, was once God's Precious Word; but, as Dr. Whiteley, of the Modern Churchmen's Conference at Cambridge, implied, "not these days." The A.V. must have "saved" millions and millions of earnest Christians from the flames, but its antiquated language would have no more influence on the fires of Hell in 1959 than a bucket of cold slosh. "If we retain the thought forms of the New Testament," says Dr. Whiteley, "we present the doctrine in a wholly indigestible form... we have betrayed the Gospel..."

★
So we are going to be blessed with another New Translation which, like all the other new ones which are still pouring from the press, will be—it is hoped—understood; and which, in any case, took ten years to prepare. Dr. Dodd promises "no jargon." Fancy calling that "well of pure English undefiled," the Authorised Version, "jargon." If poor G. W. Foote had added this expression to his other "blasphemies," he would no doubt have been given five years hard by the Roman Catholic Judge North instead of a paltry 12 months.

★
We note that a lady who went regularly shopping has just been sentenced to six months' imprisonment because she taught her two-year-old daughter to "pinch" other shoppers' purses. It would be a fairly safe bet to make that she was not only properly taught Christianity at school, but will be a devout Bible reader and attend all religious services in prison; and will always welcome a chat from the prison chaplain. There's nothing like Christianity as an antidote to crime.

★
Just as that famous screen actor, Sir A. Guinness, is quite sure that all Atheists are God-fearing men, so we must not be surprised to learn that a Mr. Alisdair Gray, a Scottish artist, who, we are told, is an Agnostic, is painting a mural in a Glasgow church; and he has assured the Press that "he can paint a realistic impression of the face of God." To paint the true features of God Almighty, it is absolutely necessary to be an Agnostic—thank Heaven!

★
In much the same way Canon Bryan Green, in a recent issue of the *Birmingham Daily Post*, is very happy to find "in the realm of psychology we are fortunate in England to have a number of first-rate men who are believing and practising Christians." No doubt this is quite true. But perhaps one reason is that if they did not agree with their

Christian patients in this matter, they would have no practice whatever. Is it not a fact that the most inhibited, neurotic, and hysterical patients are Christians?

★
TV's "Meeting Point," discussing "What is Man?" the other Sunday, brought forward Fr. A. Andrew to prove Man "a spiritual being" created by God—but the worthy Father seemed far too fuddled to be able to explain anything. His difficulty was that he actually accepted the "facts" of Evolution and then was unable to stop standing on his head, so to speak. At some "historical" point in time when "ape-man" became Man, God gave him a "spirit" and Christ Jesus came down to "save" him. Alas, Fr. Andrew could only moan, when asked from what, from "sin"; and he never got any further. We wonder what his Bishop thought of his pious performance?

The Passing Show

Norbertine Fr. van Straaten, founder of the organisation for Aid to Priests expelled from the East, has a training school scheme in Belgium that will prepare priests for "the future apostolate" behind the Iron Curtain (which will, we presume, be opened to admit Catholic sunlight). He estimates at a minimum of 15,000 priests and 25,000 nuns.

★
 The Cardinal Archbishop of Bologna, has issued another warning against the growing danger of secularism in Italy. Showing a rapid growth and increasingly radical tendencies, it aims, he declared, at "relaxing divorce laws, suppressing R.C. schools, promoting irreligion and encouraging a general laxity of morals." Meanwhile in U.S.A. the American National Conference of Catholic Youth has petitioned every state for stricter divorce laws.

★
 At a Jewish conference in Ontario Rabbi Lelyveld declared that "Love is secondary in the traditional Jewish concept of marriage." The Rabbi, an Executive vice-president of American-Israel Cultural Foundation, explained that "the purpose of marriage is not to allow two people to live happily ever after but to serve as a base for rearing of children and the transmission of Jewish values."

★
 The Austrian Socialist Party, to judge from an article in their journal, *Solidarity*, by the Archbishop of Vienna, would seem to be abandoning their former anti-clerical attitude.

★
 Following the proclamation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus as Patron of Cagliari Prison, Sardinia, in a dedication ceremony attended by a high official of the Italian Department of Justice, the Archbishop of Cagliari blessed 300 crucifixes, one for each cell. We confidently predict that here will be an enthusiastic Catholic Action group whose numbers will never diminish. D.S.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY 53RD ANNUAL DINNER

followed by DANCING
 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

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 Branch N.S.S. (The Mound).—Every Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. CRONAN, MURRAY and SLEMEN.
- London (Marble Arch).—Meetings every Sunday from 5 p.m.: Messrs. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER and C. E. WOOD.
- London (Tower Hill).—Every Thursday, 12—2 p.m.: Messrs. J. W. BARKER and L. EBURY.
- Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every weekday, 1 p.m.: G. WOODCOCK. Sunday, 8 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, MILLS and WOOD.
- North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Every Sunday, noon: Messrs. L. EBURY and A. ARTHUR.
- Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY. Sunday, 6.30 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

INDOOR

- Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, March 8th, 7 p.m.: A Lecture.
- Central London Branch N.S.S. (The Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, March 8th, 7.15 p.m.: Mrs. M. RITTER, "Second Thoughts on Juvenile Delinquency."
- Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, March 10th, 7.15 p.m.: J. M. ALEXANDER, "Is Freemasonry a Religion?"
- Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, March 8th, 6.30 p.m.: COLIN MCCALL, "The Humbug of Telepathy."
- Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-op Hall, Parliament Street).—Sunday, March 8th, 2.30 p.m.: W. G. CLARK, "Which Way? Left or Right?"
- Orpington Humanist Group (Sherry's Restaurant).—Sunday, March 8th, 5.30 p.m.: M. L. BURNET, "Is a World Government Necessary?"
- South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, March 8th, 11 a.m.: O. R. MCGREGOR, B.SC., "The Family Today."

Notes and News

THE Belfast debate on February 17th between Lord Pakenham and Mrs. Margaret Knight, supported by physicist, Dr. D. M. Mackay and philosopher, Professor W. B. Gallie, respectively, aroused enormous interest. Held under the auspices of the Queen's University Literary and Scientific Society, it was open to the public, and fully 1,300 people attended. Lord Pakenham proposed the motion, "That Religion is Necessary to Morality," and Mrs. Knight, of course, opposed. Only students were allowed to vote, and the motion was carried by 175 to 99, though it seems it is still being hotly debated in the Belfast press. From Belfast, Mrs. Knight travelled to London, where she addressed large meetings at the London School of Economics on February 19th and University College the day after, the subjects being "Man Needs No God" and "The Rise of Christianity." Then on the 24th it was Sheffield University Social Science Society and the now notorious "Morals Without Religion."

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £126 4s.; S. C. Merrifield, 2s. 6d.; W. J. Edmunds, 10s. 6d.; E. D. Brannan, 9s.; D. Ferrier, 19s.; C. J. Cleary, 5s.; Mrs. Vallance, 10s.; J. Grubiak, £1; Slough Humanist Group, 10s.; P. Turner, £1; Mrs. M. Downes, 12s. 5d.; N. Cluett, 2s. 6d.—Total to date, February 27th, 1959, £132 4s. 11d.

MALCOLM MUGGERIDGE is nothing if not provocative, and there are too few provocative journalists today for us to gib because one of them says something we don't like. But if what is said "makes confusion worse confounded," it is a different matter. And before his departure for Moscow to cover the Prime Minister's visit, Mr. Muggeridge wrote: "Life may not be all that wonderful, but no one except an empty atheist can fail to sense that it has some point." (*Sunday Pictorial*, February 22nd.) There is enough misunderstanding already about atheism (even among some of our humanist friends) to warrant a few comments on this sentence. It is, to say the least, vague. We are not sure whether Mr. Muggeridge believes all atheists to be "empty" or whether he is singling out a particular type, the "empty" type. If the former, then he is being foolish; if the latter, he is saying little or nothing, for is an "empty" atheist worse than an "empty" theist? Surely, emptiness is deplorable in both? And what is meant by life having "some point"? If Mr. Muggeridge is referring to "moments of exquisite happiness in terms of love and understanding and delight in just being alive" (as the context would suggest), in what way does atheism bar one from sensing these? Clearly it doesn't. These, in fact, are aspects of life that the atheist cherishes and extols. It is the theist, by contrast, who is always telling us that these "are not enough" and that without immortality this life would be "empty." Perhaps Mr. Muggeridge will elucidate now he has returned from Moscow.

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THE latest addition to the list of British Freethought publications is the Slough Humanist Group's *A Voice of Reason* (10 pages duplicated, price 6d.), obtainable from Mr. J. Radford, Green Ginger Hollow, Rogers Lane, Stoke Poges, Bucks. Mr. Radford and Mr. Ernie Crosswell, both keen FREETHINKER readers and National Secular Society members, offered their new periodical for sale outside St. Paul's Church, Slough, the other Sunday morning as the congregation left. "This sort of thing should not be allowed outside a church," was the comment of 70-years-old Mrs. E. M. Chapman, but she comforted herself with the thought that "no genuine Christian could be influenced by such people." When interviewed by the *Slough Express* on the Sunday, the vicar of St. Paul's, the Rev. Guy Fothergill, refused to talk, but by Monday his lips were sufficiently unsealed to utter: "I do not disclose my personal views to the Press on this subject, on horse-racing or on anything else." So, alas, are we deprived of pearls of wisdom by one man's modesty!

★

FOLLOWING Mr. F. A. Ridley's successful series of six lectures to the Study Group, Mr. Peter F. Moore (author of the article overleaf) has agreed to give two talks on "The Rise of the Papacy" and "The Byzantine Empire." These, too, will be held in the National Secular Society office on Friday evenings at 7.30 p.m.; the dates, March 7th and 14th respectively.

—NEXT WEEK—

THE POWER OF THE JESUITS

By F. A. RIDLEY

A Medieval Sceptic

By PETER F. MOORE

ALTHOUGH I describe William of Ockham as a sceptic, he himself would have been horrified by the implications. But he forged the weapon whereby the Rationalist is best able to attack the Catholic view of the world. The main strength of Catholicism lies in the way reason can be made to serve the interests of dogma; and by a further application the whole field of knowledge can be shown to be Catholic. In the second Counter-Reformation now under way, the subtleties of the Schoolmen are being employed to give an air of intellect to the fundamentally weak doctrines of the Church.

While the Pagan knowledge of Greece and Rome was lost in the Dark Ages, theology could develop without fear of contradiction. It is true the Church faced dangerous heresies which almost smashed it, but their intellectual bases were weak, and the Dominicans had no difficulty in combating them. The Arabic versions of Aristotle, which came into Europe after 1200, were of a different order. They provided a cogent and logical theory of the universe. Unfortunately they were Pagan and Materialistic. The necessity for a fixed hierarchic system outweighed the dangers of heresy and the impossibility of suppressing the Aristotelian "corpus" forced a synthesis into being, mainly through the genius of St. Thomas Aquinas. All looked set; the dangerous elements in philosophy had been subdued.

Into this beautiful and imposing conception of a world where the "God idea" cannot be avoided, William of Ockham threw the most revolutionary spanner prior to Kant. William was born at Ockham, Surrey, about 1300. He became a Franciscan, and as such was bound to oppose any idea put forward by the Dominicans. Between 1312 and 1318 he studied at Oxford. By 1324 he had his first bout with authority, being summoned to Avignon on account of certain alleged unorthodoxies. In 1326 fifty-one of his propositions were condemned; 1328 saw the final breach with the Papacy and, with Michael of Cesena (the General of the Franciscans), he fled to the Emperor Lewis of Bavaria, who continued the age-old imperial struggle against the power of the Popes. Ockham remained the imperial propagandist ("You protect me with your sword, sire, and I will defend you with my pen!") until his death at Munich during the Black Death of 1349.

The political aspect of Ockham is of vital importance in understanding just how radical he was. Throughout the Middle Ages the Papacy and the Holy Roman Empire had been at loggerheads. But up to this time, all of the brains and most of the law had been with the Pope. Even the great Emperor Frederick II had been brought to his knees by the skill of the Papal Chancellery. But, with Ockham the Imperial cause acquired one of the best minds in Europe. The doctrine of "State Supremacy" was developed in its first effective form. Ockham asserted that the temporal powers of the Church were unjustified, in view of the separateness of religion and nature. And so the growing national states obtained their intellectual basis and were able to fight the Papacy on its own ground.

Ockham's fame rests largely upon the so-called "Razor" which, in fact, was evolved by generations of teachers and logicians. But Ockham put the razor into a formula which endured. "Use the barest minimum of hypotheses," struck at the roots of revealed religion, where the number of unproved hypotheses is too large for reason. One of the tenets of Catholicism is that reason and theology are the twin roads by which man approaches God

without direct revelation. And with all sources of learning under ecclesiastical control, the teaching should have been able to limit awkward rationalist questions.

The main line of teaching in the early Middle Ages was based on very bare scraps of classical learning, but these proved useful insofar as they taught a fixed order of things, divided into categories, species and genus. All of which was in line with the prevailing economic system, with its hierarchic and immutable society. There was a little Plato and a lot of highly sophisticated Neo-Platonism, reality being non-material, and matter just a poor copy of it. The further concept that abstract virtues have "reality" in the platonic ether took hold of the Medieval mind. The problem of Universals was launched, giving gainful employment to countless philosophers! The situation was roughly: Did species, genus and categories have any validity in actuality, or were they mere words? The Church allowed comparatively wide latitude, as it could not suppress; but it came down hard on extremists of both sides, as tending towards heresy. Ockham showed, by use of the Razor, that only individual things had reality; and that the Aristotelean categories were merely useful ways of arranging data, without any validity of their own outside the use to which they can be put. This line of thought had been inherent in the Franciscans for a long while, and the logic of the position led to a belief that knowledge can only be acquired by direct experience. This, in turn, led naturally to an experimental approach to the physical world. The Church viewed this with abhorrence, for it could see science as a deadly enemy, even at that early stage.

It was in the field of theology, however, that Ockham was at his best. The double function of God as regulator of morals and cosmic policeman, with hell as an eternal penitentiary for evildoers, and God as creator of the universe, was bound to cause trouble once the incompatibility of these concepts was detected. If God runs the universe according to moral laws, and these are immutable, God himself is limited by these laws. Therefore He cannot be omnipotent. But if he is Creator of the Universe, the moral and natural laws are conditional, and are valid just so long as God wills them so. And if he can control everything in space and time, it follows that he knows beforehand the virtuous and the wicked. The saved and the damned are therefore predestined, and "Free Will" is untenable. But Ockham introduced a refinement. As God was absolute, He could save or damn at will, without regard to morals. In fact, Ockham's followers pushed these ideas to their extreme form and made Christianity unsuitable as a social ethic, so paving the way for Luther and Calvin, and the eventual development of the Individual ethic. The Black Death gave terrible point to these ideas. With over a third of the population of Europe dead, could the survivors still believe in a well-run Universe?

The Franciscans had, in addition, a strong mystic tradition, which made them combat the Thomist syntheses on principle. Ockham showed that reason was misused in trying to prove the existence of God. One of the "fundamental proofs" involves the Aristotelean "First cause." The "Razor" made the First Cause an unnecessary hypothesis. After that, theology and revelation stood alone, unsupported by reason. It only needed somebody to say that revelation was hallucination, and that theology made up its rules as it went along, for religion to become ridiculous.

"Creation's Amazing Architect" Again

By H. CUTNER
(Concluded from page 71)

TO PROVE that the "Architect" of Creation, amazing or not, really did do the job, Mr. Walter J. Beasley tells me that not only did he photograph all round Israel and near countries, but he showed his manuscript to a Professor. This gentleman of Geology in the Melbourne University. "had no sympathy at all with the Christian scriptures," but agreed with the chart in the book and gave him "other details" he had omitted. Not only that, the publishers got a "Geologist" to go through the manuscript as well as another "professor," who made some corrections; and Mr. Beasley then got Prof. D. M. Goldman to admit that his knowledge of Hebrew was "true to spirit of the Hebrew language." And, still more than all this—it took Mr. Beasley ten years to gather the material for his book.

I am quite sure that all this is true—but what it has to do with proving that the account of "Creation" in Genesis is true positively eludes me. Mr. Beasley points out that if I knew anything whatever of translating work, I would know how difficult it is to translate Hebrew or German or French; but here again I am mystified. What has my ignorance of translation to do with the first chapter in Genesis? Here it is translated *for me* in a Book which is invariably called "God's Precious Word," and this translation is the one upon which Mr. Beasley rests his case for the Amazing Architect. I am not actually a stranger to translation, but my ignorance (even if it were there) is completely irrelevant. I carefully examined many of the conclusions arrived at by Mr. Beasley, and all I could find out was that he was almost always quite wrong.

Knowing this, and utterly unable to answer my criticisms, Mr. Beasley falls back upon one of the most stupid and ignorant arguments believers in "true" Christianity invariably trot out. It is that I am "up against certain institutions who call themselves Christian Churches," but which have "long ago departed from the very book upon which their foundations rest." It is a great pity that Mr. Beasley did not specify these Christian "institutions" with proof that they have given up their Bible. I am often being told this, even by parsons, but *never* given any names or evidence.

However, let me assure my opponent that when I deal with Christianity, I mean "true" Christianity, that is, the Christianity of Christ Jesus with the full backing of people like Mr. Beasley. Frankly, I don't know the others. Every Roman Catholic I have met is a wholehearted believer in the Bible, so is every Baptist, Calvinist, Christian Scientist, as well as every Jehovah's Witness. All these would no doubt consider that even Mr. Beasley has "departed" from the True Faith—whatever that is. Get a "true" Christian to argue with another "true" Christian as to what is "true" Christianity, and we Freethinkers need only shut up and laugh.

Personally, whenever I have met a Christian who insists that you must believe implicitly in the Christianity of Jesus of Nazareth, I find he gets almost livid with rage when I bring out a few very well-known texts that famous God wanted everybody to learn by heart—the one, for example, where he says that you must *hate* your father and mother to be his disciple. Or what about "damning" everybody to Hell who does not believe? There are dozens of similar texts, all guaranteed to get any true Christian boiling up with anger—but, and I must emphasise this, what has it all to do with proving the truth of the first chapter of Genesis?

Nothing whatever—as Mr. Beasley very well knows. He wrote a book to prove that it was absolutely in conformity with science, and when criticised, he wastes pages to prove that the prophecies against the Jews were all fulfilled, and insists that he took a lot of snapshots around the Holy Lands, and that his Hebrew is impeccable!

Mr. Beasley is also extremely hurt because I "challenge everything in the Bible." Well, does he want me to believe that he accepts *everything* in the Bible? Does he believe that a serpent spoke perfect grammatical Hebrew to Eve, that "the pillars of heaven tremble," that Eve was made from a man's rib, that Adam and Eve "heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden," that Methuselah lived to the age of 969 years, that the "sons of God" courted earthly women, that all languages spring from the Tower of Babel, that the Devil wafted Jesus through the air and put him on a pinnacle of the Temple, that the Holy Ghost can descend in the shape of a dove, and hundreds more delightfully similar imbecilities, all from the Precious Word? As an out-and-out believer himself, can Mr. Beasley "cast out devils"? And do they (the devils) "also believe and tremble"?

The truth is, of course, that the "institutions" which Mr. Beasley holds up in such contempt as not practising true Christianity, have long since been *forced* to "civilise" themselves, and reject the absurdities I have detailed. The spokesmen put forward by the Churches on the radio and TV much prefer to concentrate on those teachings in the Sermon on the Mount "pinched" from other ethical systems—teachings which are mostly secular and have no more to do with Christianity than green cheese. Mercy, love, justice, tolerance, kindness, are attributes of most men and women whether or not influenced by religion. If Mr. Beasley does not know it, let me tell him that we have two societies in this country, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, and the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Hundreds of thousands of horrible cases come before our courts, mostly brought by these societies, and the culprits are almost always Christians. So are most of the criminals in our jails. Has Mr. Beasley ever heard of a Jew ill-treating his children and sent to prison?

As readers will understand that Mr. Beasley couldn't find time to answer my criticisms of his book, perhaps he will be able to find time to answer my criticisms of "true" Christianity. Or perhaps the Faith will come out better if he holds his tongue.

BURNED AT THE STAKE

We shall never know how many freethinkers have been burned at the stake by the worshippers of the gibbet. The last freethinker burned at the stake in Cardiff was brave old Rawlins White, a fisherman who lived by the side of the River Taff. As a Deist he had addressed meetings and had cast doubt on the silly stories of the Old Testament, which he considered was an insult to the intelligence of any God. Anthony Kitchen, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Llandaff, gave orders for the burning in public of Rawlins White as a warning to other heretics and, on a morning in the sixteenth century, White was burned alive at the top of Richmond Road in Cardiff. Before the burning of White, Quakers from the town of Quakers Yard, with a large number of other dissenters, had been done to death. A tablet has been placed in the wall of a Baptist Church in St. Mary Street, Cardiff, commemorating the burning of Rawlins White. Most of the members of this church swallow whole the stories of the Old Testament, but I am glad this tablet has been erected.

PAUL VARNEY.

T. M. MOSLEY HONOURED

THE Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society owes a great deal to Tom Mosley (Vice-President of the National Society) and it has decided to honour him in a very fitting way. On Sunday, March 22nd, its meeting will take the form of a tribute to the man who was for so long its Honorary Secretary, and is still one of its most active supporters. Tom is known as ever on intellectual argument, and is a man admired by supporters and opponents alike. When it is remembered that he received only a very meagre schooling and spent most of his life in the pit, this admiration is increased. Tom Mosley is not only genuinely a "self-taught" man but very well self-taught. Like all of us, he owes much to the late Chapman Cohen, but John Stuart Mill was perhaps the first philosopher to engage his youthful attention. And philosophy remains his primary interest at a youthful 74 years of age.

CORRESPONDENCE

CHINA

As an offset to the doleful world-pictures presented by your contributors, R. Reader and G. I. Bennett, may we take a look at what is happening in the People's Republic of China? This country was, till a few years ago, the classic ground of famine, poverty and disaster. Famine has now been eliminated—even after the natural disasters of four or five years ago available produce was so distributed that no one was left hungry. This was attested by European residents in China and travellers in the country. In the year 1958, following organised irrigation, deep ploughing, new methods of cultivation and manuring, agricultural produce was such that every inhabitant of China received 3lb. per week of food grains alone. Workers in the newly formed communes had meals supplied free in communal canteens and restaurants, free working clothes, health services and schools for their children. These conditions have to be planned and worked for, but do show that poverty and hunger can be abolished.

(Mrs.) G. MATSON.

MR. CUTNER ON IRENAEUS

The passage Mr. Cutner quotes from Irenaeus's treatise *Against The Heretics* is familiar, presumably, to all students of early Christian literature. Irenaeus believed that Jesus was nearly fifty when he died; but nearly fifty is not the age of an old man. It is Mr. Cutner, not Irenaeus, who says that Jesus died in his bed. Irenaeus accepted the four Gospels and the Epistles of Paul (he makes a long quotation from the Epistle to the Galatians), in all of which the crucifixion of Jesus is insisted on. He was a bishop of the Church, and has long been a canonised saint. He administered the Eucharist. He argued that Christ's blood was shed as a ransom to free us from the Devil. Tertullian knew his treatise in the Latin translation within a few decades of the appearance of the Greek original. All these facts completely destroy Mr. Cutner's paradox.

Irenaeus's opinion of the age of Jesus is quite compatible with the tradition that Jesus was born under Herod the Great (B.C. 37-4) and suffered under Pontius Pilate (Procurator of Judea, A.D. 26-36). How Irenaeus reconciled all the evangelical data I do not know. But many today attempt such a feat.

A. D. HOWELL-SMITH.

BURNS

In celebrating Burns's bi-centenary most writers have omitted to mention the poet's religious heterodoxy. This may be due to ignorance or the desire to gloss over anything of the kind.

In 1955 the late James Barke, to whom we are indebted for five novels on the life of Burns, published and edited an edition

of the poems, which included, for the first time, a poetical satire on King David of Bible notoriety, entitled "Look Up and See."

Further to this: some years ago *The Truthseeker* published a poem attributed to Burns entitled "The Divinity of Holy Blunders." More recently this poem, which is an amusing satire on Bible stories, appeared in THE FREETHINKER. I once wrote to Barke with reference to the poem and included a copy of it for his attention. In reply he said there were one or two versions and he hadn't made up his mind about it. However, I found out, from the Burns Museum, that the poem is authentic but through clerical influence has been suppressed. Barke may have been similarly influenced, which may account for its omission in his edition of the poems.

Thinking this ought to be made public, I submit this letter for your attention.

T. L. PEERS.

TRY IT

Calling "the wise men from the East" astrologers, as Phillips does in his *The New Testament in Modern English*, won't make that story any the more acceptable as something really happened. What its ancient compiler overlooked was that stars are either rising or setting all the time, except when at the azimuth, and that lasts only for an infinitesimal part of time; except for a star or stars vertically over one of the Poles, which is or are apparently stationary, and so no help as a guide either.

Suggesting that the star of the story was really what we now call a planet or a comet does not improve matters, as they are also ever rising to setting. Try to follow one! I won't envy you.

It may be said, the story must be construed esoterically, or the plain words do not mean what they say! But who then is to decide what they do mean? Or "following a star" may mean just following your hunch. Your solution is a good as mine. Why go to even that trouble? What does it matter to us in 1959, anyway?

LEONARD MARTIN.

WANT A BARGAIN?

A bargain? In a bookshop yesterday I saw the following displayed in a prominent position in the window: "BARGAIN. *The Mind of Pius XII*. Reduced to 7/6."

DAVID L. WEBSTER.

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