

The Freethinker

Volume LXXIX—No. 16

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Fivepence

MOST CHRISTIANS, that is, believing Christians, must often thank God that the intense critical spirit of the nineteenth century on everything appertaining to the Bible, appears to have largely departed as the twentieth century marches onwards. If there are any critical works on the sources or origins of Christianity now being published, then they must thank God that few people read them. There can be no other reason why such an article as "The Jesus of History" could appear in a journal with the reputation of the *Sunday Times*, for it would be difficult indeed to find anything so naïve, elementary, or one showing such an utter ignorance of the simplest New Testament criticism. The writer, Dom A. Morris, Abbot of Nashdom of the Anglican Order of Benedictines, actually begins his article with, "We could still be aware from allusions by Jewish and pagan authors that Jesus Christ existed." Obviously, the Abbot must have heard vague rumours that some blatant infidels questioned the actual existence of "our Lord"; and so, without specifying any of the Jewish and pagan writers who affirm his existence, he turns at once to Christian writings to learn something about Jesus, and in this he will be heartily supported by all believers. But the point to note here is that most, if not all, the readers of the *Sunday Times* will believe the Abbot is giving them the "Gospel" truth and will take for granted that there are in Jewish and pagan sources full notices which unequivocally prove that Jesus was really an historical person. In reply to this—I challenge the Abbot to give us chapter and verse from the books he refers to. And I must add that there are *no* contemporary "Jewish and pagan authors" who refer to Jesus. The only way in which Christians have been able to produce them is by forging most of the passages referred to. And this is admitted—very sorrowfully of course—by at least some Christian authorities.

Early Dates

The Abbot, like so many similar writers, appears to think that if only we could give Christian works an *early* date, then he has proved his case. For example, he tells us that the "first epistle to the Thessalonians was written in A.D. 49." There is not a scrap of evidence for this, but naturally his readers may not require such evidence. If he says it, it must be so. And there are few of them, if any at all, who would make a point of finding out for themselves if the statement is true.

Nobody knows when the Epistle was written. The Rev. Dr. Giles says it is "now thought to have been written from Corinth, A.D. 52," a date also given by Dr. William Smith in his *Bible Dictionary*. But our Authorised Version says it was written from Athens. Christians can take their choice, of course, but there are other theologians, like Prof. Van Manen, who deny that any of the Pauline Epistles are authentic in the sense that somebody called Saul in the Book of Acts was converted to Christianity and, changing his name to Paul, began to write letters to

"churches" in various parts of the East. There is not a scrap of evidence that Saul ever wrote a line—or indeed that there ever was a Saul. Josephus knows nothing of him, and his attempts to convert the Jews of his day to the new religion. Josephus knows nothing whatever of the "martyrdom" of Stephen. In fact, the Jewish historian knows nothing of any of the incidents related in Acts, nor does any other writer. Acts is just sheer fiction.

It is claimed that Marcion in the second century really put Paul on the map, but nobody has been able to explain why the famous Justin Martyr, writing about 140-50 A.D. two defences of Christianity as well as a dialogue with a Jew named Trypho *never*

mentions Paul. He does not mention the Gospels either, and Christian commentators are at their wits' end to account for this strange silence.

Who Was Paul?

Prof. Van Manen says, in a hotly-disputed article in the *Encyclopedia Biblica* on Paul and particularly against those who defend the four "genuine" Epistles—Romans, Corinthians and Galatians—that "neither fourteen, nor thirteen, nor nine, nor eight, nor yet even the four so long universally regarded as unassailable" were written by "Paul." He adds, "They are all, without distinction, pseudepigraphia" of the second century. But no one expects the average reader of the *Sunday Times* to read what the *Encyclopedia Biblica* has to say about the "Apostle to the Gentiles" and his work.

Actually, there are two Epistles to the Thessalonians, and if they were written by the same man, it is extraordinary that they completely contradict each other on the vital "coming again" of Christ. In the first, he was coming almost at once so that "we that are alive" could meet "the Lord in the air." In the second, we are told not to be deceived "for the day shall not come" unless "there come a falling away first"—whatever that means. The Rev. Dr. Giles in his *Christian Records* says that the contradiction "has not been satisfactorily cleared up."

Our Abbot of Nashdom, to show how very critical he can be, admits that such things as the Virgin Birth, the Miracles, and the Resurrection, are "difficulties"; but why bother about difficulties? What everyone must do is to read the Gospels, and they will find in their pages "the sublimest teachings the world has ever heard." We are not vouchsafed any of these sublime teachings—it is so much easier to say that they are there. The answer is that, mixed up with a lot of secondhand ethical teachings, is a lot of hopeless drivel which most priests would prefer was not there. When Jesus tells us to hate our parents, wife and children, even bishops, let alone some of our freshly-ordained curates, find it extremely difficult to explain that what Jesus really meant was to love them. And when "our Lord" proceeded to call everybody who came before him "thieves and robbers," it is not easy to defend the thesis that this is the "sublimest" teaching

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

"The Jesus of History"

By H. CUTNER

the world has ever heard.

The Abbot is, however, quite right in calling his article "The Jesus of History," and then refusing to have anything to do with history. For, of course, there is no Jesus of history. Where is he to be found? In *secular* history? Where?

The Jesus in the Gospels is "virgin" born exactly like pagan gods, he performs "miracles," he meets the devil, he believes in "angels," he walks on water quite easily, he cannot be killed being a God—and so on. Where is the "history"? Who vouches for all this nonsense? The Gospels themselves are quite anonymous, nobody knows who wrote them, when or where, we are by no means certain that they were originally written in Greek (it could have been Latin) and nobody heard of them until about the year 180 A.D.

Pauline Theology

As for Paul, does anybody in his senses believe that the early followers of the new religion could have understood any of his fantastic "theology" which really makes a Heavenly Being, the Christ, the Messiah, his object of adoration, and not at all a *man* (except in some "suspect" passages) called Jesus; and is in reality all based on pagan gnosticism but heavily edited and changed to suit the later Church. Until Marcion brought him out of oblivion,

Paul was virtually unknown. Even now he is mostly unintelligible—as the Duke of Somerset says in his *Christian Theology and Modern Skepticism*, "There is scarcely a single passage in the Pauline Epistles, or a single doctrine in the Pauline theology, which is not darkened or embroiled by the ambiguity of the expression." This is quite true, and so we have the Abbot of Nashdom going to Thessalonians rather than to the Gospels for his proof that there was an historical Jesus. As was pointed out in an article in the *Hibbert Journal* for July, 1947, by Ray Knight, "Nowhere does Paul say or suggest 'this that I preach was preached by Christ himself only twenty years ago, and there are many yet alive who heard him'; on the contrary, he repeatedly declares himself sole author of the revelation, to him alone has the Gospel been entrusted, and when he visits the original disciples, they can teach him nothing" (Gal. 2, 6). But how many of the readers of the *Sunday Times* know this fact or care two hoots?

Most people, even those who do not accept Christianity as such, are content to believe that the "historical" Jesus was a man, a Good Man, that is, he went about "doing good." I do not share this view; I believe he is a myth, an invention, a creature of gnostic imagination. And it is a long time since I read an article dealing with him so naive and infantile as that of the Abbot of Nashdom.

Catholic Lies

By MEDICATE

MANY PEOPLE go to Lourdes in the hope that they may be the odd person in several millions to benefit by immersion in its waters. Such a one was Mlle. Fretel (see C.T.S. pamphlet *Lourdes*). She is said to have suffered from tubercular peritonitis from January, 1938, to October, 1948. She was taken to the grotto in a "semi-conscious state," and immersed on the 6th, 7th and 8th of October. The first two immersions, we are told, had no effect; the woman was unconscious and so her faith could not help her. One wonders at this stage why Mlle. Fretel suffered from T.B. peritonitis for such a long time; cures were not infrequent in medicine even half a century ago. The patient is usually kept in bed, preferably in the open air, on a nourishing diet, and is treated medically, *rarely surgically*. However, our patient was not so fortunate. She had a laparotomy in 1941, which didn't do her any good. A laparotomy is an operation on the abdomen, performed to ascertain the nature of disease. The C.T.S. pamphlet which states that this operation "sometimes causes the disease to recede or become less severe" is guilty of falsehood. *A laparotomy cannot cure anything*, but would determine the nature of the disease, T.B. peritonitis, in 1941, three years later than stated. Without treatment, the patient would certainly not last more than *six weeks*.

On her being immersed for the third time, we are told, the priest hesitated to give Mlle. Fretel communion because of frequent vomiting, but merely gave her a small fragment of the "Host." Fairly quickly her abdominal distension subsided, and she recovered her health *without the use of medical treatment!* But this too is an untruth, since the C.T.S. tell us that *she had injections of streptomycin for six weeks previously*. An earlier case of T.B.P. was that of Marie Baillie in 1903. Alexis Carrel, who accompanied her to Lourdes, is supposed to have said, "If Marie recovers it will be a miracle, and I shall become a monk." Her cure took place in front of the grotto, Carrel saw "her blanket flatten little by little, above her abdomen."

Who has not seen such things happen on the stage, when performed by a competent illusionist? There is a simple explanation as to what could have happened in both of these cases.

Probably both women were suffering *not* from T.B. peritonitis, but from peptic ulcers, in which case they would have been dieting, perhaps for several years, taking plenty of milk, and little or no exercise, which would in all probability cause chronic constipation. On arrival at Lourdes, the nuns or doctors would probably give them an aperient, the result of which would be too nauseating to describe in a C.T.S. pamphlet. However, a flattened abdomen would undoubtedly prove to the faithful that another miracle had happened. Details could always be filled in later. One wonders why even Catholic doctors lend themselves to this kind of deception! Or do they all subscribe to the Jesuit dictum that "the end justifies the means"?

Thomas Paine Exhibition

AS READERS WILL BE AWARE, the 8th of June this year will be the 150th anniversary of the death of Thomas Paine, the famous English Freethinker and revolutionary. To mark the occasion, an exhibition, open to the public, will be on view at the Marx Memorial Library from May 30th to June 13th.

The exhibition will include, besides early editions of the writings of Paine and his contemporaries, a wealth of illustrative material—portraits, caricatures, scenes of the events of the period, medallions struck in honour of Tom Paine, etc. Numerous exhibits are being loaned from the collection of the late Mr. Adrian Brunel, who made a many years' study of the life of Paine.

The Marx Memorial Library is at Marx House, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London, E.C.1, and it is open from 3 p.m. to 8 p.m. Tuesdays to Fridays, and from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Saturdays.

Ambrose Barker

(1859 — 1953)

By ELLA TWYNAM

APRIL 20TH, 1959, will mark the centenary of the birth of Ambrose Barker, a life-long militant Freethinker. As he lived, retaining all his faculties unimpaired, to within two months of his 94th birthday, he must be well remembered by many of our readers.

He was a frequent visitor to the old National Secular Society office in Farringdon Street, and I went there with him on the very morning, during the last war, when we were shocked to see the adjacent FREETHINKER building demolished by bombing in 1942. In 1937-38 we had often visited the offices while Ambrose's booklet on *Henry Hetherington* was in process of publication. On one occasion Chapman Cohen took us out to tea, and I will remember their animated conversation.

During his later years Ambrose was continuously and urgently entreated to write his autobiography. He has, indeed, left behind him a manuscript—less than a hundred pages—of "reminiscences" dealing, however, more with movements with which he had been prominently associated than with his personal affairs. From these pages and what he told me I am able to furnish the following facts.

Ambrose George Barker was born on April 20th, 1859, the fourth son of Joseph Barker, of Earls Barton, a village seven miles from Northampton. His father was an Owenite Chartist, a staunch supporter of Bradlaugh and a regular reader of the *National Reformer*. He was founder of a co-operative society and store which became a flourishing concern.

When Ambrose was nine years old his father led the Radicals of Earls Barton in a march to Northampton to support Bradlaugh in his 1868 election campaign. Ambrose was given a glowing account of all that happened by his eldest brother who went with the party.

One day, when about thirteen, Ambrose arrived home from school to find his father entertaining an honoured and most welcome visitor, James Watson, who had been a prominent Chartist, and a personal friend of and co-worker with Henry Hetherington in publishing freethought works. Ambrose was greatly impressed by the grand old man's personality and was very pleased and proud to have been spoken to by that worthy of whom he had heard so much. Two years later Watson died, in his 75th year. Linton wrote his *Life*.

Ambrose proved so promising a pupil at Earls Barton School that, when his master was appointed to the headmastership of Church Road School, Leyton, he was offered, and accepted, the post of student teacher at the same school. Ambrose started teaching there in 1878 and spent the whole of his professional life at the school. During the 1914-18 war, he was acting headmaster; he had been teaching 44 years at the same school when he retired in 1922.

One of the first things Ambrose did on coming to London was to join the National Secular Society and attend the Sunday meetings at the old Hall of Science. He enrolled himself a student at the evening science classes held by Dr. Edward Aveling. Ambrose was hungering and thirsting for knowledge—and yet more knowledge. His appetite for learning was insatiable. He rapidly became Dr. Aveling's most brilliant pupil, passing every examination he went in for and winning certificates of distinction, as well as a number of books, including Spencer's *Story of Sociology* bearing the label "The

Queen's Prize awarded to Ambrose Barker in the Examination of Science Schools, May, 1881."

Though physically robust and extraordinarily energetic, Ambrose took little interest in sport and games in which most young men indulge. Instead, he threw himself wholeheartedly into promoting progressive movements. He was one of the founders of the Labour Emancipation League, and in 1881 he joined the Stratford Dialectical and Radical Club, of which, shortly after, he was appointed honorary secretary. Earlier he had become a member of the International Club in Rose Street, Soho. There he met Kropotkin who, at his invitation, addressed a public meeting of the Stratford Club at which Ambrose was chairman. A few years later, when William Morris founded the Socialist League, Ambrose was one of the foundation members.

He had a rich, thrilling, musical voice, a gift for oratory and a lucidity of argument that he devoted to public speaking, both for freethought and the other causes for which he lived and worked. He regularly addressed open-air meetings at Victoria Park, Mile End Waste, Stratford Broadway and other open spaces.

In later life, Ambrose was associated with J. W. Gott's Malthusian Socialist League, the League Against Imperialism, the Libertarian League and the Freedom Group. He was appointed editor of *Freedom* in 1930, just after his 71st birthday. I joined the group immediately and with Ambrose went to the meetings and monthly dinners. Of the guests of honour at the latter, I remember only two—both distinguished and charming people I felt honoured to meet—the widows of Kropotkin and H. W. Nevinson. Ambrose, ably assisted by John Turner, continued to edit *Freedom* for five years, when a long, serious illness caused him to resign. John Turner succeeded him.

Ambrose joined the Rationalist Press Association within a few years of its formation and for 40 years he was honorary secretary for the Walthamstow district. He resigned after his 90th birthday, but remained a member and a reader of the *Literary Guide* (now the *Humanist*) to the end of his life.

During the long years he was teaching, Ambrose habitually spent some hours of the Saturday holidays in book-hunting expeditions, and he continued to do this up to 1950. Every autumn his great friend, Dr. Max Nettlau, of Vienna, the most eminent authority on sociological literature in Europe, visited Ambrose, and they would go book-hunting together, taking empty attache cases and bringing them back filled. Another enthusiastic book-hunter, George Underwood, literary editor of THE FREETHINKER, would sometimes accompany Ambrose, but he usually went on his own. In his later years he and I always hunted together.

Our first meeting was certainly unconventional. It took place on a glorious hot noon-day in mid-June, 1924, when Ambrose was inspecting some old volumes in a shop at Islington Green. I looked in to ask the proprietor whether he had yet found the edition of Lucretius he had promised to have ready for me. He had not. Ambrose put down the book he held and as I left the shop, he came up to me and said, "Will you accept the Lucretius from me?" Of course, I accepted unhesitatingly, overjoyed at the prospect. Without exchanging names or addresses, we just arranged

(Concluded on next page)

This Believing World

Dom Augustine Morris, the Abbot of Nashdom, concluded his articles in the *Sunday Times*, "Is Christianity True?" with one on "Put Faith to the Test"—which is a particularly easy thing to do, though no Christian has ever tried it to our knowledge. The relevant passage is in Mark: "In my name [Jesus's] shall they [Christian believers] cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover." We should like to see the Abbot "put Faith to the test" with drinking a pint of nitric acid, handling a poisonous cobra, and curing an incurable cancer patient. If he could *regularly* do these things, then he certainly has proved also that Christianity is true. But he couldn't.

★

The British Medical Association's pamphlet on Marriage has been definitely shelved, but we wonder whether the ban was really due to outspoken views on chastity and the like. According to the *Methodist Recorder*, "there is no chapter on family planning," but one "on choosing an apple." The editor of the pamphlet, Dr. Winifred de Kok, claimed "everything that has been written is fact," which makes the following excerpt quite thrilling: "Traditionally it was an apple that lured Adam from chastity and started all our troubles of over-population." Even the *M.R.* found this too much to stomach.

★

A "Limited Company" is being formed "to revolutionise the financial life of the Church of England." It calls itself "Planned Giving Ltd.," and it is already hard at work roping in more and more "capital" by training church-goers in canvassing, and leaving envelopes for regular contributions—a scheme, by the way, well known to the Salvation Army. Of course, all employees must be regular communicants of the Church of England. Clergymen are already beamingly giving the venture their pious blessings, one of them, the Rev. Clifford Rhodes—well known as a not-altogether Fundamentalist—declaring "business methods of money-raising should help a great deal." Anyway, so long as the money is raised.

★

The Queen Mother and Princess Margaret are getting into awful trouble with the Protestant Truth Society, whose faith in the Bible even outshines the average Catholic's Faith in the Pope. Why shouldn't they visit the Pope, or even a Jewish rabbi? After all, they all believe in the same God, and even in most of the Precious Word. Freethinkers stand for tolerance in these matters—but the Protestant Truth Society is only tolerant of Protestant Fundamentalism, that is, bigotry in its worst form.

★

A Jewish convert, the Rev. E. L. Lloyd, speaking for the Propagation of the Gospel among the Jews, found every tolerance in Israel towards missionaries, and claims that he *met* "many Jews who were converts" which, no doubt, is quite true. But he did not claim that he himself converted any—which is rather strange; for he addressed "a meeting just before Christmas attended by 200 Jews." Did not the Wondrous Story of the Virgin Birth of the Son of the Living God and the Incarnation completely knock their Judaism into smithereens? Perhaps, like Trypho, with whom Justin Martyr had a famous Dialogue about the year 150 A.D., they laughed him out of court.

"**Spirit healing**" is so perfect these days that not only are you absolutely cured by "absent" healing, but you can write a letter to a healer, and *you are cured* before you post it! *Psychic News* gives particulars of one of these cures—a lady with very severe head pains wrote to a healer, and she proudly reports, "As soon as I had written that letter and before it was posted I knew that I had been healed." This beats the "well-known" healer, Mr. Harry Edwards, who has, we believe, over a million cures to his credit. Yet we cannot recall that even one of these was cured before coming in some contact with him. When it comes to unashamed credulity. . . !

The Magi

RECENT CORRESPONDENTS to THE FREETHINKER have referred to the Magi who are alleged to have come from the East to pay tribute to the infant King of the Jews. It is worth noting that the better educated among the Protestant clergy are aware that this story is a pious fantasy. In the standard text-book, *Peake's Commentary*, Rev. Principal A. J. Grieve writes (page 701), under Matthew II, 1-12:

"There is a story that in A.D. 66 Tiridates of Parthia went with a train of three Magi laden with presents to Nero, 'whom they worshipped as Lord and God, even as Mithras,' and adds ironically: "If the anti-Christ of early Christian belief received such homage, the real Messiah could not have received less."

The Magi were Persian astrologers who were partly responsible for introducing the idea of a future life among the Jews. To translate the term Magi by Kings, or Wise Men, is merely to add mendacity to credulous invention.

The story of the guiding star is the type of astronomical speculation to be expected from writers who could arrange to have an eclipse of the sun at a time of full moon, as is reported at the time of the Resurrection.

If the Magi came from the East, and the star guiding them was in the East, they must have walked backwards.

D. JOSEPH.

AMBROSE BARKER

(Concluded from page 123)

that he should bring the book next week. This he did. In the course of conversation following, we found we had a mutual friend in Mr. Leon Kashnor of the Museum Book Store. We decided to go on there and then together to see our friend. He told us lots of nice things about each other and took us out to tea. Our host was in his element, delighted to be able to initiate what was to prove an enduring friendship linking his own two friends together for life.

Ambrose had the finest library of freethought literature in Britain, and his Paine collection is *unique* in Europe—I am not so sure about America.

Early Freethought literature represented mainly by the works of Peter Annet, La Mettrie, Voltaire, D'Holbach, Toland, etc., and the publications of Eaton, Benbow, Hetherington, Watson and Carlile, Foote and Bradlaugh—the latter collection including specially bound volumes of his Debates, I recently presented to the Reference Room of the Public Library at Northampton, Bradlaugh's constituency in Ambrose's home county.

—NEXT WEEK—

FRAUD AND TELEPATHY

By DR. EDWARD ROUX

THE FREETHINKER

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

TELEPHONE: HOLBORN 2601.

Hon. Editorial Committee:

F. A. HORNIBROOK, COLIN MCCALL and G. H. TAYLOR.

All articles and correspondence should be addressed to THE EDITOR at the above address and not to individuals.

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

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

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

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, April 19th, 7 p.m.: A Lecture.

Dagenham Branch N.S.S. (214 Fitzstephan Road, Dagenham).—Friday, April 17th, 8 p.m.: C. MCCALL, "The Necessity of Freethought Today."

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, April 19th, 6.30 p.m.: J. ROBINSON, "Some Secular Myths."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, April 19th, 11 a.m.: W. E. SWINTON, PH.D., "Music in a Scientific Age."

The Fifty-Nine Society (Leinster Hotel, 57 Ossington Street, W.2—at junction with Moscow Road).—Thursday, April 16th, 7.30 p.m.: D. TRIBE, "The Modern Revolutionary." Thursday, April 23rd, 7.30 p.m.: J. M. ALEXANDER, "Secrets of Freemasonry."

Notes and News

WHAT was the "greatest tragedy in the history of mankind"? Lest you should waste your time thinking of wars and natural catastrophes, atomic bombs and earthquakes, we will tell you that, according to *The Star* leader (March 12th), it was the death of one man—"if it be lawful to call him a man." Even in its own context, this strikes us as absurdly out of proportion. What about the Fall, which condemned the whole of humanity? What about the slaughter of the innocents?

★

Two nights later, another London paper, *The Evening News*, informed us that the Cross "stands not for defeat but for a triumph. . . ."

★

ON the night between, Friday, the thirteenth of March, *The Star* reported the founding in Dover of a Society for the Sustentation of Superstition. The founder is 23-year-old Eunice Richards, who hopes to get thousands of members "pledged to keep superstition alive." She probably will, simply because there are many people as silly as she is herself. In case you think us hard on the lady, we tell you that she carries more than a dozen lucky charms, gets out of bed on the "right" side, never sings before breakfast, wouldn't think of sitting on a table or looking back at her home after leaving it; she offsets a bad dream by

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £176 13s. 6d.; A. V. Peies, £1; M.R.N., 14s.; O. Grindahl, 4s. 9d.; In memory of William Ingram (Winnipeg), £2; J. C. Cleary, 5s.; W.H.D., 2s. 6d.; W. E. Huxley, 5s.; J. Davis (North London Branch), 10s.—Total to date, April 10th, 1959, £181 14s. 9d.

sticking a pin in her stocking, etc., etc. But two years ago "she was involved in a road accident and is still undergoing daily hospital treatment." Bad luck, Eunice.

★

A CATHOLIC writer in the *Illustrated Chronicle* (Leicestershire) recently claimed that a local church, the Holy Cross Church, possessed a relic of the original Cross, "well authenticated." Writing as Secretary of the Leicester Secular Society, Mr. C. H. Hammersley offered £5 to any charity if a piece of the relic could be proved by the radio carbon test (used on the Dead Sea Scrolls) to date back to the time of Jesus. The challenge was made in about 150 words and dodged in about three times that amount.

★

DR. J. V. DUHIG's article on "The Character of God (THE FREETHINKER, 9/1/59) is now available as a penny leaflet. We were pleased to note, too, that it was reprinted in the March issue of *The Liberal*, organ of the Friendship Liberal League of Philadelphia. The same issue of *The Liberal* reports the first sermon of the Rev. Duncan Howlett, who succeeded the Rev. A. Powell Davies, deceased, at All Souls' (Unitarian) Church, Washington. Mr. Howlett said that natural science had eliminated dogma and that theologians should do likewise. Absolute systems, he added, "have one by one crashed and fallen to pieces." Readers of Dr. Davies's splendid books on *The Ten Commandments* and *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls* may not be surprised that such a reasonable sermon should be delivered in All Souls', Washington, but they may well join *The Liberal* in asking, "Is it religion?"

★

"I EXPECT the news will come as a shock to many people," said ex-Church of England parson, the Rev. Walter Hannah (author of *Darkness Visible*, a book attacking Freemasonry) when he became a Roman Catholic priest recently (*Sunday Pictorial*, 15/3/50). Personally, we think Father Hannah (as he is now) overrates his own importance. Who cares? If you are slightly interested, Father Hannah is going to Canada. What did interest us was his announcement: "I know all the answers now." Which confirms that he overrates himself.

★

MR. W. WALKER—we read in a letter in the *Newcastle Evening Chronicle* (28/3/59)—"seems determined by some perverse proselytism to corrupt and scandalise Christians." The writer, who signed himself "Ex-Atheist Convert," was a Roman Catholic, and he accused Mr. Walker of making a "vulgar thrust at the Real Presence in the Blessed Sacrament." As friends and colleagues of Mr. Walker's, we cannot, of course, claim to be impartial in our judgment, but we personally see nothing vulgar in what he said. Commenting on the report that a Roman Catholic priest had three times gone into a burning church to rescue the Sacrament, Mr. Walker suggested: "If the mystical implications are not vitiated by mastication, digestion and body metabolism when the body is eaten, then those implications should be impervious also to chemical changes brought about by fire. And would incidental burning have constituted irreverence?" he asked. We don't know, but it seems that common sense becomes "vulgar" when applied to the Sacrament.

A South American Theocracy

By F. A. RIDLEY

THE ENGLISH STATESMAN George Canning once remarked that he had "called the New World into being to redress the balance of the Old." Though the eminent Prime Minister may not have known this fact, his remark was literally true in relation to the Roman Catholic Church and the then newly discovered American Continent. For by an ironical accident of the kind of which history is not sparing of examples, just at the precise moment when the Protestant Reformation successfully wrested half of Europe, its traditional continent, from Rome, Spanish and Portuguese Crusaders brought the New World, the Americas, into the now universal organisation of the Catholic Church. Throughout the Middle Ages—the Ages of Faith—the Papacy represented the real ruler of European society, whilst perhaps half the land of Europe in a predominantly agrarian society, was Church property, while such culture and education as then existed were entirely controlled by the Church. There, too, for the bulk of the past four centuries since the initial conquest of the Americas by the Spanish Conquistadores in the Latin American continent, similarly "all roads lead to Rome." The Church has been the real ruler of Latin America, by far the most powerful single force throughout the continent, wherein the earlier condition of medieval Europe was reproduced virtually unaltered. It is, in fact, only in the present century with the beginning of modern science and industrial techniques in Latin America that any substantial modification of clerical control has at last become visible.

Latin America is perhaps the traditional area in which theocracies, both Pagan and Christian, have flourished most successfully. In pre-Christian centuries there were the priestly theocracies of the Mayas and Aztecs in Central America, whilst prior to Columbus, there existed in Peru the very remarkable Inca theocracy, the Children of the Sun. In Christian times, the Jesuits created in what is now Paraguay a collectivist theocracy which upon any showing must be regarded as (along with the earlier Inca regime, from which many of its features appear to have been borrowed) one of the most remarkable of recorded sociological experiments. Nor was the "power and secret of the Jesuits" entirely eliminated from South America by the temporary suppression of the Order in 1768. Several times during the century and a half which has now elapsed since the end of Spanish rule in the Americas, clerical regimes have been temporarily established in one or other of the congeries of Republics.

Perhaps the most remarkable of these was that established by President Garcia Moreno—1875—in the small, still largely aboriginal Indian Republic of the Equator, a small former province of the Inca Empire, situated, as its name implies, directly on the Equator. Rather illogically, this South American state is always referred to by its Spanish equivalent—Ecuador—*viz.*, the Equator. The French translate this as the Equator perhaps more logically. Between 1862 and 1875, Garcia Moreno, as twice President of the Republic, installed in this small American country a complete clerical theocracy, in which the civil power was entirely subordinated to the Catholic hierarchy, and in which the complete control of education was entrusted to the clergy. The Jesuits, previously illegal in Latin America, were specially recalled by Moreno and soon acquired a dominant position in the Republic. A former friend of mine who had lived in Quito, told me that even now the Jesuit church built for the Holy Fathers by President Moreno's orders, still remains the most sumptuous and conspicuous building in the Equatorial capital, a legacy from, and testimonial to, one of the most curious episodes even in the so often curious history of Latin America.

President Garcia Moreno enjoys an historic reputation in the annals of Catholic sociology, for he appears to have been the first of that now quite numerous sub-species of Catholic dictators who consciously modelled their social legislation on the pronouncements of the Vatican. In the present century, Franco in Spain, Salazar in Portugal, and (in pre-war Europe) Dolfuss in Austria, all belong to this *genus*. A French anti-clerical pamphlet even describes the Austrian dictator, Dolfuss, as "a 20th century Garcia Moreno." Nowadays Catholic sociology is ostensibly based on the Papal Encyclicals, *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*.

In Moreno's day, the key document emanating from the Vatican was represented by the notorious *Syllabus of Prohibited Errors*, issued by Pope Pius IX in 1864, one of the most reactionary documents ever issued from the Vatican, and which centred around the declaration "Let him be accursed who shall presume to declare that the Roman Pontiff can, or ought, to come to terms with Toleration, Liberalism and Progress." However, in one land, at least, the remote Republic on the American Equator, this brazen contradiction of the basic tenets of modern civilisation was hailed with enthusiasm. (No doubt the social conditions there were still largely medieval.) Its principles were immediately put into effect, not only in the *Concordat* which President Moreno promptly concluded with Rome, but as we shall soon see, even in the civil constitution of the Republic itself. When in 1870 Pius IX lost his temporal power over the Papal States which (by a majority of 48,000 votes against 46) opted for union with the newly formed Kingdom of Italy, Moreno addressed a solemn protest on behalf of the Republic of the Equator to every State in the Americas, which protested in the strongest terms against "this monstrous sacrilege which has led to the enslavement of the Church and of the Roman See." The little Republic was immediately taxed to the tune of 52,000 French gold francs to recompense Christ's Vicar for the loss of his former revenues as temporal ruler of the Papal States. Upon the receipt of this sum, Pius (who, incidentally, enjoyed the distinction of being the first Pope to have set foot on American soil before his election) is said to have murmured sadly, "If Moreno had only been a powerful European monarch, then I might have got Rome back."

Clerical influence on the Equator reached its height in 1869 when Moreno, having suppressed an anti-clerical rising, was re-elected President, and promptly provided the State with a new and completely theocratic civil constitution. This truly remarkable document ran as follows: "In the name of God, Three and One, the national convention adopts the following constitution: The Catholic Roman and Apostolic Church is declared to be the sole religion of the State to the exclusion of all other public and/or private cults; as such it retains all the rights and prerogatives that the Law of God enjoins and which the civil authorities herewith guarantee to recognise and to enforce. No one can either vote at elections or hold any office in the State who does not actively profess the Catholic faith. Every individual citizen is herewith deprived of his civil rights upon conviction of belonging to any society which the Church has prohibited." As a pious

sequel, the Republic was officially placed under the special protection of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ. The pious President's clerical biographer, Fr. Berthe, adds this revealing comment: "A masterpiece of logic! If drunkards, tramps, bankrupts and criminals are deprived of the vote, Freemasons and Rationalists richly deserve the same treatment. For none of the above is so harmful to the State as the heretic who is perpetually seeking to undermine the moral basis of the social order itself." (Under this constitution no magistrate could be appointed until he had satisfied the clerical examiners that he knew both the catechism and the civil legal code.)

By 1875 the clerical dictatorship had reached its zenith—and also its end! For on August 6th, President Moreno was assassinated—by Freemasons, according to his clerical biographer—and the Equatorial theocracy abruptly ended, to the profound sorrow of the Vatican. "God does not die" were the fanatical President's last words. True! But Moreno did, and his clerical dictatorship perished with its Founder. At Quito, on the Equator, the sun casts no shadow at noon, but Garcia Moreno and his Jesuit masters cast a dark shadow upon the Republic of Ecuador; nor were they, unfortunately, the last of their kind in either America or Europe.

Vasectomy and Birth Control

By G. H. TAYLOR

HOWEVER unattractive the notion of human sterilisation may be, even more unattractive is the birth, minute by minute, of numbers of children doomed to be starvelings. There is today no great surgical difficulty in sterilising either sex, but the case for sterilising males is obviously much stronger than for females, since the former can become fathers many, many times, while the latter are becoming mothers once. Vasectomy requires no hospitalisation, can be quickly and safely done, and the subject is deprived neither of desire nor potency. It is already being done in Japan, Puerto Rico and India (where it has the approval of Nehru). It is interesting to note in passing that Puerto Rico offers a most fascinating study to the Freethinker today.

Here is a predominantly Catholic population who have no contact with any freethought movement, yet the opposition to Catholic *practice* (not to doctrine) is coming in several effective ways from the application of scientific knowledge to counteract the effects of religious degeneracy. It was here, for instance, that experiments on a scientific scale were first made in regard to the new steroids (birth control pills). Doctrinal opposition by the Catholic authorities, though loud and ignorant, has so far had little or no effect on progress. Will the doctrinal attack follow? One awaits developments with added interest.

In India, a three-day vasectomy camp has already been held, at which 150 volunteered for the operation. Dr. S. Chandrasekhar, whose paper to the World Union of Freethinkers was reproduced in these columns, is currently conducting a wide survey, sponsored by the Madras Government, on the attitude of Indian couples towards family planning and sterilisation. In an already existing report on five years of family planning surveys, Professor Baljit Singh has found that relatively more Muslims than Hindus are favourably disposed towards birth control. An Indian correspondent to the *Manchester Guardian* has reported that the average Hindu, however, tends to be under-sexed, and temple prostitutes (Devadasis) are almost a thing of the past. Here again then, the conclusions of

the book, *Geography of Hunger* by J. de Castro, are contradicted. He stated, with but the shoddiest evidence, that hunger would increase sex indulgence and so add to the population. As I have before shown (in my articles on *Problems of Demography* last February) all the evidence since collected has completely disproved Castro. Not that it was collected for that purpose! There is no need to set out to disprove what hasn't been proved.

The big birth control (family planning) congress which has just been held in India will, it is hoped, have a wide publicity, for Indian villagers in backward parts are only dimly aware of population increase, and sex education is most urgently needed; millions still do not associate sexual intercourse with procreation. Children "given by God" are a matter for sacred belief in Indian rural areas, whereas here, of course, they are merely the subject for a few excellent limericks. Among Catholics, the view is an unhealthy hybrid between the scientific and religious explanation of births. This was shown in the televised programme on the subject of birth control in which Sir Julian Huxley took part just before he left for the Indian conference. He was opposed by Archbishops Heenan (R.C.) and Ramsey (C. of E.). The Catholic knew exactly where he stood, whereas the Archbishop of York merely floated about comfortably as part and parcel of the establishment. In this programme both Huxley and Bertrand Russell scouted the idea that science could provide for all possible mouths. And even if this pipe-dream could become real, it would not solve the problem of over-population, since food shortage is only one of the difficulties. Housing space, distribution facilities and a hundred more problems follow in the wake. The basic problem as posited by Malthus has been shown to be a real one to a degree that not even he could have contemplated, for today nations are making birth control part of their policy in public health and welfare programmes. Better methods of contraception, including the tablet for oral use, and hormone contraceptives for injection, are coming into widespread use.

From South Africa

OUR CAPE TOWN CORRESPONDENT, Mr. James J. Ravell, informs us that a Cape Town Rationalist Association has now been formed with himself as secretary and Mr. M. E. September as chairman.

The inauguration followed a February 9th visit from Dr. Edward Roux, leader of the Johannesburg Rationalist Association and editor of the *South African Rationalist*, who spoke on "Scientific Humanism" in the Cape Town City Hall.

One of the new group members is Dr. Walter Rose, a retired dentist, well-known in Cape Town, who in his youth helped to inaugurate the North London branch of the National Secular Society in 1905.

The formation of a Cape Town group will have repercussions elsewhere in South Africa. Rationalist activity in the Union has so far been confined mainly to the Johannesburg area, the Rationalist Association of Johannesburg being the only organisation until now.

It is now proposed during the next few months to work out a constitution for a South African Rationalist Association (reports the March *South African Rationalist*), which will embrace Cape Town, Johannesburg and soon other branches.

Representatives of at least four different political bodies attended Dr. Roux's Cape Town meeting and questioned the speaker regarding the Association's attitude to particular political movements.

Among the questions was that very thorny one (particularly in South Africa) as to whether Rationalists believed in a multi-racial or a unitary society.

Dr. Roux stated that the Rationalist Association was a non-political body which welcomed members of all parties who supported freedom of conscience, separation of Church and State, and secular education.

They were out to debunk superstitions, whether religious or racist, and to encourage healthy scepticism. The Association would take a definite stand in favour of such things as right of minority radio expression, and against such things as compulsory Christian national education.

At the present time rationalist activity on a nation-wide basis is more than ever necessary in South Africa and, we trust, hopes for a speedy growth of a national organisation will soon be fulfilled.

DAVE SHIPPER.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

MEETING held on Wednesday, April 8th. Present: Messrs. Ebury (chair), Alexander, Arthur, Barker, Corstorphine, Gordon, Hornbrook, Johnson, Moore, Plume, Taylor, Mrs. Trask, Mrs. Venton, the Treasurer (Mr. Griffiths) and the Secretary. New members were admitted to Birmingham, Central London, North London and Wales and Western Branches, which, with individual members, made 10 in all. National Council for Civil Liberties literature on the Mental Health Bill was read and noted. Polish Free-thought journals received would be put before the London Committee of the World Union of Freethinkers. Annual Dinner report was given and it was agreed to try to book the same room for March next year. Secular Education League report and Thomas Paine Memorial meeting arrangements to date were given by the Secretary. Mr. Hammersley's appearances on BBC radio were noted with satisfaction, though there had been no time to notify members or readers of THE FREETHINKER. The E.C. Annual Report was read and, with some additions, was adopted. The next meeting was fixed for Wednesday, May 6th, 1959.

CORRESPONDENCE

RELIGIOUS NIGHTMARES

I was most interested in the case of Mr. P. Lysaght, which was reprinted in THE FREETHINKER (20/3/59), whose daughter, aged eight, had nightmares after hearing stories about the massacre of the Innocents, and Salome and John the Baptist's head.

Personally, I think that part of the blame here lies with the parents, who, being Christian, have confirmed the truth of these stories, to an obviously sensitive child, who, whilst being taught that God is a loving father, etc., is also expected to learn that He does not always look after little children or holy men, an obvious contradiction which pious parents *would not be able to explain away*. A feeling of insecurity thus instilled into an immature mind would undoubtedly cause nightmares.

Since Mr. Lysaght is unable to deal with these stories the way I do myself, by telling the child that they are only fairy tales anyhow, the only thing he can do is to withdraw his child from religious instruction. The irony of the situation being that most children who are withdrawn are those of religious parents, and not of Freethinkers.

C. H. HAMMERSLEY.

RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION IN SCHOOLS

We, too, faced recently a similar decision as did Mr. J. B. Potheary (THE FREETHINKER, April 3rd, 1959).

The Slough Humanist Group debated publicly last year the question of withdrawal of schoolchildren from religious instruction. The opinions were rather sharply divided. The option of most members went against withdrawal.

When our five-year-old son entered school about six months ago, my wife and I considered it better (or rather, the lesser of two evils) to allow him to partake in whatever religious instruction was offered and not to make him the "odd man out" in class.

Up to now we had no cause to regret this, nor do we feel it should have a detrimental effect on the child's future development. We are confident that we shall be quite able later on to present to him the Freethought point of view and to encourage him to judge for himself between fact and fable.

When he now comes home repeating the stories he has heard about Jesus, etc., we are careful neither to ridicule nor to attach

too much attention to them. But, as soon as *he asks us* questions, we shall reply in the vein advised by Mrs. Margaret Knight: "Some people believe these stories to be true, some do not. Your father and mother do not believe them, because..." etc.

May I recommend to Mr. Potheary to read or re-read Margaret Knight's "Morals Without Religion." It is most helpful to our problem.

WALTER STEINHARDT.

OBITUARY

ON a periodic visit to Porthcawl, South Wales, I was sorry to learn of the death (in January) of Wales and Western Branch member Mr. Mackay.

Mr. Mackay, a Scot who had been long resident in Wales, was aged 82 and had been a FREETHINKER reader for many years. He joined the Wales and Western Branch N.S.S. immediately upon learning of its existence and was a strong supporter, although unable to travel.

I understand his relatives gave him a Christian burial, which I doubt very strongly such a fervent freethinker of long standing would have wished.

D.S.

WE regret to announce the death, after an operation, of Maud Adelaide Peers, wife of Thomas L. Peers. Mrs. Peers, who was 80, was cremated at Nottingham Crematorium on Tuesday, April 7th, and a secular service was conducted by T. M. Mosley (Vice-President of the National Secular Society), who was a great friend of Mr. and Mrs. Peers. Mr. Peers is a member of the Nottingham Branch N.S.S. and of the Rationalist Press Association, and has been connected with Freethought for over 60 years; he was arranging debates between clergymen and the late Charles Watts as far back as 1904. We sympathise with him in his irreplaceable loss.

T.M.M.

IS SPIRITUALISM TRUE? By C. E. Ratcliffe.

Price 1/-; postage 2d.

(Proceeds to THE FREETHINKER SUSTENTATION FUND) THE WORLD MENACE OF CATHOLIC ACTION.

By A. Stewart.

Price 1/-; postage 2d.

THE POPES AND THEIR CHURCH. By Joseph McCabe.

Price 2/-; postage 4d.

CAN MATERIALISM EXPLAIN MIND? By G. H. Taylor.

Price 3/6; postage 6d.

THE PAPACY IN POLITICS TODAY. By Joseph McCabe.

Price 2/6; postage 5d.

A SHORT HISTORY OF SEX WORSHIP. By H. Cutner.

Price 2/6; postage 6d.

FREEDOM'S FOE—THE VATICAN. By Adrian Pigott.

A collection of Danger Signals for those who value liberty. 128 pages. Price 2/6; postage 6d.

THE DOLLAR AND THE VATICAN: Its Character, Methods and Aims. By Avro Manhattan.

3rd Edition—Revised and Enlarged.

Price 21/-; postage 1/3.

ESSAYS IN FREETHINKING. By Chapman Cohen.

Series 1, 2, 3, 4. Cloth bound.

Price 7/6 each series; postage 7d. each.

PRIMITIVE SURVIVALS IN MODERN THOUGHT.

By Chapman Cohen.

Price 3/- (specially reduced price); postage 5d.

MATERIALISM RESTATED (Third edition). By Chapman Cohen.

Price 5/6; postage 7d.

PAMPHLETS FOR THE PEOPLE. 18 of Chapman Cohen's celebrated pamphlets bound in one volume. Indispensable for the Freethinker.

Price 5/6; postage 8d.

WHAT IS THE SABBATH DAY? By H. Cutner.

Price 1/3; postage 4d.

AGE OF REASON. Thomas Paine's masterpiece with 40-pages introduction by Chapman Cohen.

Cloth 4/-; postage 7d.

HOW THE CHURCHES BETRAY THEIR CHRIST.

British Christianity critically examined. By C. G. L. Du Cann.

Price 1/-; postage 3d.

THE BIBLE HANDBOOK (10th Edition). By G. W. Foote and W. P. Ball.

Price 4/6; postage 6d.

A CHRONOLOGY OF BRITISH SECULARISM.

By G. H. Taylor.

Price 1/-; post 2d.