

# The Freethinker

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— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

## The Christian Counter— Revolution of the 4th. Century

By F. A. RIDLEY

ABOUT THE YEAR 200 A.D. a Roman Christian named Minucius Felix published a pamphlet entitled *The Octavius*, denouncing the new Oriental cult of Christianity which was then beginning to make headway throughout the Roman Empire. About the same time, Christianity made its first royal convert, who, contrary to popular belief, was not Constantine but a frontier potentate named Abgarus, King of Edessa, on the Euphrates, a buffer-state between the Roman and Persian Empires. In the course of his Dialogue, Minucius Felix makes one of his characters, who is supposed to be putting the case for Paganism, utter the following prophetic remark, "With us, only actions are criminal, but with you [*i.e.* Christians] thoughts are equally criminal." With these epoch-making words, a dark shadow appeared on the horizon of human history, a shadow which, at first insignificant and unnoticed, grew rapidly throughout the next two centuries until it finally engulfed the Roman Empire and the Western world. The shadow of religious intolerance, the jealous God hitherto only domiciled amongst the Jews, was now to assume universal shape and dominion as the God of Christianity—and of the Inquisition! For about the same time as the early Christian Apology cited above, a more famous figure in the early Church, St. Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, first gave utterance to the terrible belief under which the Western world was to groan for the next fifteen centuries: "*Extra ecclesiam nulla salus datur*" ("Outside the Church there can be no salvation").

### Celsus and Constantine

The annals of the Christian religion prior to Constantine (who, so to speak, put it on the map) are vague and ambiguous. But there appears to be some reason to assume that by about the end of the second century Christianity began to gain ground fairly rapidly, contemporary with the thereafter rapid decline, presaging the eventual fall, of both the Roman Empire and the classical Græco-Roman culture. Writing probably towards the middle of the third century, at a period when the German Barbarians were beginning to overrun an empire and civilisation too exhausted to defend itself effectively, the Roman conservative Celsus (about whom otherwise nothing is known), in the course of his extremely acute and far-sighted polemic against the new Oriental religion, *The True Word*—a polemic apparently inspired as much by political as by religious motives—obviously feared Christianity and regarded it as a possible danger to the future, not only of the Pagan gods, whom the Christians refused to worship, but equally of the Roman Empire, which they still refused to defend in battle against the Northern Barbarians, who were eventually to destroy it. It is probable, from the increasingly confident tone assumed by the Christian writers of this transitional period (*e.g.*, Tertullian and Origen) that after the time of Marcus Aurelius, the more far-sighted leaders of the Church, already looked forward

hopefully to the day when the Roman Empire would acknowledge the supremacy of the Cross. That eventuality, however, did not come to pass in the time of Celsus or of Tertullian (who, incidentally, declared that "we"—*viz.*, the Christians—are "everywhere," and uttered a thinly-veiled threat of a Christian insurrection in the event of continued persecution by the Pagan Empire). Perhaps the reason for the delay lay in the growing strength of the rival Oriental cult of Mithra, which in 274 (under the fanatical Mithraist Emperor Aurelian) established its solar festival, December 25th, "the Birthday of the Unconquered Sun," as a state-endowed festival. However, after 312, the Emperor Constantine, who had

begun also as a Mithraist, officially recognised Christianity as a legal religious cult on terms of complete equality with all other Pagan cults. This concession was only made after a fierce persecution by the preceding Mithraist Emperor, Diocletian, had failed to expel the Christian cuckoo which was so successfully fouling the Roman nest.

### The Era of Transition: 312-379

It has become customary to refer to Constantine as the first Christian Emperor. Actually, this designation requires considerable qualification, for, as a modern Swiss historian, Jacob Burckhardt, indicated, Constantine went on striking coins and building temples impartially to Christ and to Mithras right up to the end of his life. (He was only baptised on his deathbed and then by an Arian heretic.) Even more important, Constantine made no attempt to suppress either Paganism or Christian heresies. He was not a Christian in the sense previously outlined by Minucius Felix; he did not act on the assumption that thoughts were as wicked as deeds. Actually, the death of Constantine was followed by an era of confused transition in which Paganism, orthodox Catholic Christianity, and heretical (Arian) sects held power alternatively under the protection of successive Caesars. The most sensational of these oscillations in the fluctuating fortunes of Christianity was the ultimately unsuccessful attempt of Julian, the Apostate, to put back (or forward?) the clock by disestablishing Christianity. This notable attempt which, as far as one can see, might very well have succeeded but for the young Emperor's untimely death in battle on Rome's eastern front, really deserves fuller treatment than is possible here. (cf. my book, *Julian the Apostate and the Rise of Christianity*.) Suffice it here to say that, in my opinion, there was nothing inevitable in the eventual victory of Christianity, and that actually the language used by the leaders of Christianity on the news of the Emperor's death was not at all the sort of language which one would have expected from people who regarded their own victory as absolutely inevitable. It is really rather surprising that no definitive work has yet been written from the Rationalist angle on this extremely important period in religious and cultural evolution.

### The First Christian Emperor—Theodosius, 379-95

The essential fact about the era of religious transition between 312 (Constantine's Edict of Toleration) and 379 was the uneasy co-existence which continued between the old and new religions during this same period. The cult of the jealous God was not yet strong enough to attempt the complete obliteration of the Pagan and heretical competitors—for by this time the inexorable logic of Catholicism had driven it to its obvious conclusion: *viz.*, the Christian heretic is worse than the infidel, for he sins against the Light. In the year 379 the Catholic Church finally came out into the open and thereafter never looked back. For this was the year of the accession of the fierce Spanish bigot, Theodosius, who, far more than Constantine, deserves the appellation of the *first* Christian Emperor. That is, Christian in the sense defined by Minucius Felix two centuries earlier—one who regards thoughts as equally criminal with actions, which Constantine did not, or at least did not act as if he did. In a series of Draconian Laws between 379 and 395, Theodosius made all religious cults—both Pagan and heretical (Christian)—illegal. He burnt their temples, destroyed their sacred books and, for the very first time in recorded history, made the rejection of a specific belief (*i.e.* Trinitarian Catholicism as defined at the Council of Nicea in 325) a capital crime. He threw down the Pagan Statue of Victory, the symbol of the Pagan gods in the Roman Senate. And, perhaps most significantly of all, he banned the

immemorial athletic festival of Greek Paganism, the Olympic Games (traditionally held since the times of Homer, in honour of the Greek Olympic gods) after 391—when the last classical Olympic Games were held. By 395, when Theodosius died, after suppressing a final pro-Pagan rising (during which the temples of the Pagan gods were briefly reopened), Catholicism had reached its goal; henceforth, thoughts were to be as criminal as actions; the jealous God had come into his own. In 441 an Imperial Order decreed the destruction of all existing Pagan books against Christianity on the significant ground that they "invited God's anger." Rather curiously, Celsus is not mentioned by name in the list of proscribed authors.

### The Greatest Setback in Human History

Such, in the barest of outlines, was the Christian Revolution of the fourth century, the most important century in the annals of Christianity and perhaps the greatest setback that human progress has ever experienced, under the ægis of Catholicism. Mankind, so to speak, leaped backwards over the head of the Rationalist culture of Greece and Rome into the dawn of human culture: the age of the priest-kings; of the Pharaohs and their kind. In 427, St. Augustine's *magnum opus*, *The City of God*, was to put the seal upon the dawning Age of Faith. Night fell upon the ancient world and subsisted almost to within living memory; it represented, we repeat, the greatest setback that human evolution and human reason have ever experienced.

## Law for the Layman

By COLIN McCALL

I CANNOT THINK of a more useful half-crown's worth than Robert S. W. Pollard's *Family Problems and the Law* (Delisle Ltd., London), which has just been published. Mr. Pollard modestly describes his 100-page book as a "short popular account of some of the laws which most families are likely to meet at some time . . . no more than a guide to some of the legal problems which arise . . . not a legal text book." To a layman (and it is essentially written for the layman) it seems remarkably comprehensive, clear and up to date. It is also splendidly concise. The only faults I can find are a few typographical errors.

A glance at the contents shows how comprehensive it is. Under five headings, Marriage, Birth, Divorce and Separation, Magistrates' Orders, and Death, Mr. Pollard includes an enormous amount of information. Let us look a little closer at the first of them, Marriage. It tells us of engagements, breach of promise, who may marry, the ways in which marriages are solemnised, and when consent is required; it deals with the married woman's legal position, marriage settlements, contracts by the wife and insurance contracts, the husband's liabilities; with persons living apart, funeral expenses, contracts and actions between husband and wife; wife's property, evidence in court by a wife, husband's rights, enticement, change of name, unmarried couples, passports and income tax. That, I think you will agree, covers most legal aspects of marriage that we ordinary people are likely to come up against. And Mr. Pollard is similarly informative on his other four subjects.

As an example of his clarity and succinctness, here is what he has to say about suicide:

As the law stands, any person who in England (but not in Scotland) deliberately terminates his own life, no matter how great his sufferings, or how hopeless the outlook for him, is guilty of the criminal offence of suicide.

The offence is a felony, but the only punishment which can follow is that the rites of Christian burial are denied to the

body of a sane person who deliberately takes his life. Suicide while of sound mind generally makes a life insurance policy void and the insurance moneys due under it are not, therefore, payable in the event of deliberate suicide.

To attempt to commit suicide is a common law misdemeanour punishable with fine or imprisonment, and there is no definite maximum penalty.

A person who, however merciful his motive, assists, procures, counsels or incites any other person to commit suicide is guilty (as an accessory) of the criminal offence of murder. England is one of the few countries where suicide is a crime, but even if it were legalised, assisting or promoting it might well still continue to be murder in a third party.

That *Family Problems and the Law* is up to date will be obvious when I say that it includes changes in the law made by seven Acts of Parliament passed in 1958.

Of course, Mr. Pollard is not being *falsely* modest when he points out his book's limitations. "If there is a problem to be solved," he says, "it is better to get legal advice at the beginning. Too many people wait until they have got into trouble, and are then pained when told by their solicitor that there is no easy way out for them." But he hopes—surely rightly—that *Family Problems and the Law* "may prevent many problems arising." And in appendices he lists further sources of information—organisations and books.

I have not the slightest hesitation in recommending this half-crown book to everybody. Mr. Pollard was a magistrate and chairman of a magistrates' matrimonial court until this year; he was, for ten years, Chairman of the Marriage Law Reform Society; he is author of a number of other useful legal guides as well as that excellent book, *The Problem of Divorce*, published last year by Watts, and the pamphlet, *Abolish the Blasphemy Laws*, which will be known to quite a few of our readers. On legal technicalities I cannot, of course, judge *Family Problems and the Law*, but, knowing Mr. Pollard and his work, I can be sure it is reliable, and I intend to keep it close at hand. I advise you to do the same.

# Clerical Errors

By DR. J. V. DUHIG

LATELY, as a result of some projected changes at the Vatican by Pope John, Papal Infallibility and the Inerrancy of the Bible have become fashionable topics of discussion. I do not think it matters two hoots whether the Pope is infallible or the Bible is "inspired"; the world is indifferent, indeed contemptuous. When the Assumption was declared compulsory belief, who cared? My reaction was a natural curiosity to know what they did with the body and how it fared for food; the whole idea was too silly for anything but amused contempt. But what does matter is the risk the Roman Catholic Church takes of loss of prestige and of the faint tags of respect it still holds when it so constantly has to put up with howling blunders by "infallible" Popes. The dancing sun of Pius XII was just ludicrous. This nonsense is not an article of faith but an infallible Pope should be careful in his off moments from Infallibility. An infallible Pope should not be allowed to make a fool of himself at any time.

As one of the self-appointed bloodhounds of Truth, I would like to show how disastrous Infallibility and Inspiration have been to Catholicism, morally, materially and intellectually. Of course, the whole history of this wicked system is a record of stupidity and necessarily of the blind cruelty stupid people in a panic always indulge in, but there is in it a certain grim humour.

Now one would assume, in rational terms, that an infallible Pope, the accredited terrestrial agent of an omnipotent god, working to an infallible book inspired by the infallible omnipotent god, would have such a fistful of trumps that nobody else could ever take a trick. But see what actually happened in crisis times. The Catholic Church kept on missing Grand Slams. Here are a few.

## *Inerrancy of the Bible*

We won't waste much time on this, as the theory is so obviously silly. One example: The treatment of leprosy advocated in the O.T. is not only useless but as is always the case with charlatany, it is misleading and cruel to the patient. Bishops Burgman, of Goulburn-Canberra and De Witt-Batty of Newcastle, Australian Anglicans, have advised their flocks that much O.T. morality is bad and they are not bound to believe in the truth of this book.

In the N.T. right at the start Matthew says Jesus was born in a house in Bethlehem, Luke suggests it was in a stable in Nazareth. This kind of "inspiration" is obviously phony. As one famous English cabinet minister once said, "If we are going to tell a lie, let's all tell the same lie and stick to it." A god who goes around handing out this poor inspirational stuff ought not to be in business. Then the N.T. as much as says that the earth is flat and God ought to know better than that. And bound up with this foolishness is the idea of a geocentric universe which brings us to one of the greatest blunders the "infallible" Popes ever made.

## *Galileo*

This scientist was one of the greatest of all time: I think he and Newton and Darwin, Freud and Einstein, Pasteur and Harvey have meant more in history and have done more for mankind than all the Kings, Popes, generals, politicians, millionaires or dictators rolled together into one big religious war.

But the Vatican agents, the usual powerful ignoramuses and fanatical fools said that Galileo's message to the world was "contrary to Holy Writ" and that if he went on with it he would be tortured: he was humiliated and silenced. The treatment of Galileo by the Church and an infallible

Pope was one of the foulest blots in all history. If the Pope concerned was infallible he would have known that what Galileo said was true. How can anyone believe in Infallibility after that? If what Galileo said was contrary to Holy Writ then, it still is but what he said then is now taught in Catholic schools as true. The duplicity and chicanery of the Catholic Church is beyond all computation and leaves me dazed with disgust and anger. Imagine the prestige the Church would have had today amongst scientists if it had accepted the great truths of Galileo's science. The infallible Pope flung it away and with it all chance his Church ever had of appealing to Science.

## *Darwin*

Here exactly the same thing happened. If Darwin was right Genesis could not be true. But according to the infallible Pope, the human race had to start with two people and the third generation had to be born through incest and the fourth by close inbreeding well within the forbidden degrees of kindred in the laws of the Church.

What a gloriously smashing sweeping victory the Church would have had amongst scientists in, say, 1858 if it had been "inspired" to recognise the truth of Evolution. Now intelligent Catholics, in the usual Catholic style, are trying to ooze into the evolution school which their church 50 years ago rejected as wicked and heretical. What a chance in 10 centuries the infallible Pope missed of sweeping the whole world of Science into the fishing net of St. Peter.

## *Marie Stopes and Contraception*

Marie Stopes did for womankind something which had never been thought of before. She made it clear that women were healthier and better for the fulfilment of their right to the exquisite happiness of physical enjoyment of their husband's love. But she went on that that happiness could be spoilt by the fear of an unwanted pregnancy. So she was the first woman who really rationally advocated family planning so that her total achievement was to give women happiness in marriage and in spaced and planned motherhood. But the celibate priests in England harried her and cost her a lot of money in lawsuits and a lot of anguish. But in the end she won. Her message has gone out to millions of women all over the world. They know they are no longer the slaves of the blind passion of thoughtless husbands and no longer the unwilling mothers of unwanted babies who die in millions in infancy from poverty, ignorance and neglect. I do not know one Catholic woman in my immediate environment who does not practise contraception; in about twenty Catholic families the average child count is about 2.6 The argument of the Church that contraception is unnatural is about as good as deliberately choosing to die because surgical treatment of appendicitis is also unnatural. Shaving and false teeth are unnatural. Anyhow my survey of Catholic mothers around me convinces me that Marie Stopes has won and the priests have lost the battle.

I cannot see just what comfort Catholics get out of their infallible Popes since history shows unmistakably that these fellows are always on the wrong tram and their poor dupes have for centuries been walking back to the terminus to get on the right one with a destination sign: Truth.

—NEXT WEEK—

OMAR KHAYYAM

By H. CUTNER

## This Believing World

Our national newspapers never, if they can help it, refer to our archaic "Blasphemy" Laws, so it was quite refreshing to see in the *News Chronicle* for April 25th a letter of a correspondent who pointed out the implications of laughing at the Man-God or the God-Man, the Dalai Lama, because so many people really believed he was one or the other. The *News Chronicle* writer, James Cameron, had done just this, and the correspondent, Mr. J. Davis, pointed out: "If Cameron's pungent wit had been directed at the Christian God Incarnate or at certain of His earthly representatives, it would have come dangerously close to the English law of blasphemy."

★

This is quite true. Anyone can "blaspheme" at other religions—for example, at Jupiter's amorous exploits as a swan with Leda—but any attempt to poke fun at the Christian deities in "pungent" language can still be dealt with as blasphemy—though it would be most unlikely that any judge these days would emulate the Roman Catholic Judge North who sentenced G. W. Foote to twelve months' hard for poking a little fun at Bible imbecilities. But the laws are still there and should be abolished forthwith. They are a disgrace to our legislature.

★

In the "Sunday Pictorial" the other week was published what was described as a "genuine" photograph of a man in a car taken by his wife, which showed a faint "extra" (supposed to be sitting in the back) of her mother who had died a week previously. Naturally, the President of the Union of Spiritual Mediums said, "In my opinion there is not the least doubt that the figure on the rear seat is a psychic extra"—that is, a ghost.

★

But the "extra" or spook does not appear to be sitting in the back seat at all, in spite of a photographic "expert," who said that the photo was "genuine." The spook may well have been the reflection in the car window of somebody stopping to look while the snap was being taken. It does not at all look like the portrait of the dead lady (which was reproduced) except that they both wore glasses. In any case, nobody who believes in "spirits" has ever given an explanation why spooks should wear glasses. Are they also "spirit" glasses?

★

But still talking about spooks, the reviewer of a book by Mrs. Heywood, *The Sixth Sense*, in the *London Evening News*, says that her explanation is, "that ghosts may be subjective impressions from 'brainwaves' adrift in the psychic field which carry an idea to a sensitive mind in much the same way as radio waves carry a human image to the fireside television receiver." Now isn't that just a little too cute? To get the TV image there *must* be first the real person before *real* TV cameras; and this is quite a different thing from *assuming first* that there *are* spooks to send radio waves to "psychic" people. Of course, it is a fact that some people do see spooks just as some see pink elephants. But no evidence has ever been produced that spooks or pink elephants are real, definite objects which actually exist.

★

The question of what constitutes a Christian is still hotly debated by believers—some of whom, like Mr. Godfrey Winn, appear ever ready to sentimentalise anything which can get into print. At all events, he thinks that any man who can forgive the murderer of his young daughter, and thoroughly believe in "Blessed are the meek, for they shall

inherit the earth," is an almost perfect specimen of a Christian. Dr. Donald Soper thinks that it "is perfectly compatible with Christianity for a man to make £4,000 or £5,000 a year." But, alas, Dr. Soper does not think a millionaire can be a Christian. Perhaps this is because he himself is not a millionaire, or perhaps because Jesus, his Master, hadn't a bean to bless himself with.

★

However, it can be said that a good many millionaires, like Lord Nuffield or Rockefeller or Carnegie or Wolfson, must have given away in good causes millions of pounds, helping many peoples all over the world. If it is true that they are not Christians, a prayer should be wafted up to heaven to thank the powers that be that they are not. As Mr. Billy Butlin has so wisely said: "A rich man is in a position to do far more good for the community than most professed Christians."

## Irenaeus

THE DIFFICULTY in dealing with Mr. A. D. Howell Smith is that he mostly ignores what an opponent writes, puts up an Aunt Sally of his own, and then thinks he has won all along the line.

I quoted Irenaeus verbatim. Here are the relevant parts again:

He [Jesus] passed through every age... a youth for youths... so likewise he was an old man for old men... Then at last he came on to death itself... (*My italics.*)

In the passage from which this is taken, there is not a line about any crucifixion under Pontius Pilate; and nothing is clearer than that Jesus died "an old man" and I was quite right in adding "presumably" he died in bed. Moreover—in case anybody sees some "mysticism" in all this, Irenaeus gives full authority for his statements. He says:

Those who were conversant in Asia with John the disciple of the Lord [testify] that John conveyed to them that information... some of them, moreover, saw not only John, but the other apostles also, and heard the same account from them, and bear testimony to the statement.

And lest any readers thinks that it is only I who have pointed out that Jesus died an old man (presumably in bed), let me quote Godfrey Higgins, the famous author of *Anacalipsis*. He says:

One of the earliest, most respected, and most quoted of its [the Church's] bishops tells us in *distinct words* that Jesus was not crucified under Herod and Pontius Pilate but lived to be turned fifty years of age. This he tells us on the authority of his master, St. Polycarp, who had it from St. John himself... (*My italics.*)

In the face of all this, Mr. Howell Smith has the temerity not only to tell me in three private letters, but in the columns of this journal, that it is I, "not Irenaeus, who says that Jesus died in his bed," that "Irenaeus believed that Jesus was nearly fifty when he died; but fifty is not the age of an old man"—though Irenaeus distinctly says "he was an old man for old men." How in the world can I be expected to deal with Mr. Howell Smith's naïve nonsense? I certainly am not following this up with a discussion as to when Jesus *might* have been born. I take the definite date or dates admitted by the Church.

Needless to add, of course, Mr. Howell Smith's beautiful picture of Irenaeus administering "the Eucharist" and other items of his career comes from Church sources. There is not a particle of evidence for any of them. As the pious *Schaff-Herzog Religious Encyclopedia* says: "All the facts of his life are drawn, to a large extent, from his own writings"; and as Mr. Howell Smith appears to be obsessed with Catholic theology these days, it is not surprising that he swallows anything from the same kind of sources.

H. CUTNER.

# THE FREETHINKER

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

## TO CORRESPONDENTS

F. BROWELL.—Anthropologists now tend to unite in thinking the cradle of mankind was in S. Africa rather than in Asia.

G.F.W.—The best pamphlets to "do the talking for you" are *Pamphlets for the People* (see advertisement on back page).

JOHN REID.—The compilation of the amounts of money left by Bishops in their wills makes interesting reading. It should be especially enlightening to the followers of "Him who had not where to lay his head."

I. K. MCCLELLAND.—Christians like Billy Graham do not create stupidity; they merely tap what is already there. Their dupes need the protection of an enlightened society.

W. POND.—Christian charities exist, but the need for them has arisen in a Christian-controlled social structure.

(Mrs.) L. WARING.—You have had "many spirit visitors." That is because the spirits are respecters of persons. They always fight shy of coming to this office.

W. SALT.—As Bernard Shaw was a stranger to laboratory experiment at the scientific level, his "Life Force" carries no authority whatever.

## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### OUTDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (rear of Morley Street Car Park).—Sunday, May 10th, 7 p.m.: Messrs. CORINA and DAY.

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

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Midland Institute Cinema, Paradise Street).—Sunday, May 10th, 6.45 p.m.: T. D. SMITH, "Millions for Murder."

Orpington Humanist Group (Sherry's Restaurant).—Sunday, May 10th, 5.30 p.m.: J. RADFORD, "Is Spiritualism True?"

Oxford University Humanist Group (Worcester Memorial Room).—Wednesday, May 13th, 8.15 p.m.: Prof. C. D. DARLINGTON, F.R.S., "Divine Guidance in Evolution?"

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, May 10th, 11 a.m.: Dr. C. BIBBY, M.A., "The Individual in a Conformist World."

## Notes and News

THE Annual Conference of the National Secular Society will be held on Whit Sunday, May 17th, in the Co-operative Hall, Prewett Street, Bristol, 1. It will be preceded by a social evening in the same hall on the Saturday and followed by an outdoor demonstration on the Downs on Sunday evening. Those members who intend to be present are again asked to inform the General Secretary of the

## The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £192 18s. 3d.; A. Coleman, £2; Anon, 1s. 3d.; W.H.D., 2s. 6d.; Ms. A. Vallance, 10s.—Total to date, May 1st, 1959, £195 12s.

N.S.S., giving details of accommodation required. The address is: 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

★

ON June 24th, 1859, Jean Henri Dunant, a Freethinker, was appalled by the sufferings of the wounded at the Battle of Solferino. Three years later he published *Un Souvenir de Solferino*, containing his plea for an organisation to care for the wounded in war. So was born the Red Cross, whose emblem is the reverse of the flag of Switzerland, Dunant's native country. Nearer the centenary of the Battle and of Dunant's conception of the Red Cross, we shall be publishing a commemorative article.

★

ONE of our travelling readers, Mr. K. Lidaks, a merchant seaman, tells us that, from his experience, in Islamic countries, religion is fading away. In the Middle East, he says, the people consider that the Koran is only for the rich, not the poor. And, adds, Mr. Lidaks, "they are right." We think he has a point.

★

"HER response to this tragedy is in the highest possible traditions of Christianity," said Mr. Justice Elwes, at the Old Bailey, London, on April 17th. He was complimenting Mrs. Josephine Soan, who forgave the man who had strangled her 17-year-old daughter, Carol, and sent him what the Judge called a "wonderful letter." It was indeed a wonderful letter, but as for Christianity, well, see what Mrs. Soan herself said: "I'm not religious, I never set foot in a church. But you could say that I have a certain code of life which I live by." (*Daily Mail*, 18/4/59.) We wonder if Roman Catholic Mr. Justice Elwes will understand this? We could name an M.P. who certainly wouldn't!

★

JOHN FITZGERALD KENNEDY, Senator from Massachusetts, proceeds fairly steadily towards his goal—U.S. Democratic Presidential candidate in 1960. Aware as well as anybody of the suspicions his religion arouses, Kennedy strives to reassure the Protestants whose votes he will need. "I am a strong Catholic and I come from a strong Catholic family," he told a Council of Methodist Bishops. "But I regret the fact that some people get the idea that the Catholic Church favours a church-state tie." And, he added, "I am opposed to forced conversions." (*Time*, 27/4/50.) The Bishops applauded.

★

DOES it refresh you, when you drink a pint of beer in "quite a few London pubs" to know that you are indirectly helping to pay the salaries of Bishops of the Church of England? For centuries, said the *Evening Standard* (April 17th, 1959) the Church has accumulated property until it owns "probably about 3,500 acres" in London, with a value "at a conservative estimate" of "about £44 million." "It owns pubs and palaces, flashy new office blocks and squalid back streets, factories, houses and flats," and is, in fact, the "biggest landlord of all." This is the *Standard's* idea of "a refreshingly human thought."

### CAUGHT IN THE ACT(S)

In Bognor Regis, England, E. T. Ghitty was tried for stealing, won an acquittal, was caught walking out with the courtroom Bible.—*Time*, 27/4/59.

# Religious Trends in France

By D. JOSEPH

THE INCREASE in the power and prestige of the Roman Catholic Church in France since the end of World War II has not been due to any revival of religious belief, but to the fact that many non-religious people accept its claim to be a "bulwark against Atheistic Communism." In fact, this increase in political influence has been accompanied by a steady decline in the number of its adherents, and in the strength of their belief. Recent articles in *La Calotte*—the Voltairean anti-clerical journal of M. André Lorulot—drawing on official Catholic sources, have shown that the French Church is faced by two major crises: the defection of the adolescents, and the scarcity of "vocations" for the priesthood.

## Defection of the Adolescents

In March, 1956, the Jesuit journal, *La Croix*, reported on an enquiry which had been made throughout all the dioceses of France on the religious perseverance of the pre-adolescents of 12 to 15 years. The enquiry revealed a situation which *La Croix* described as "tragic."

"While 95 per cent. of French children are baptised; while about 75 per cent. follow the three years of catechism in preparation for their Solemn Communion [at about 12 years of age], the very large mass of young people escape all religious formation after the Solemn Communion."

In July, 1956, *La Croix*, on the same topic, stated: "If we may be permitted to attempt a numerical estimation, we would say that in the public primary schools—attended by four-fifths of the children of France—that the Church retains educational contact with 25 to 30 per cent. of the 12 to 13 age-group and with 10 per cent. of the 13 to 14 age-group."

This fact, of course, is disastrous, and explains the ferocious campaign perpetually waged against the state schools, which are guilty of the crime of religious neutrality.

Commenting on the "Cours Complémentaires" for which the brighter primary schoolchildren are chosen, *La Croix* laments that "quite frequently the scientific teaching which they receive gives them the impression of being opposed to the Christian faith. The rudiments of catechism which they have learned do not allow them to harmonise the pretensions of science with Christian dogma. Very soon, they become disorientated, and this is produced in an environment which is very secular, which favours a regard for human opinion, and favours defection . . ."

"In conclusion, it is humanly impossible that young people of 12 to 15 years should remain Christians, living as they do for the most part in a dechristianised climate, if, after the Solemn Communion, nothing is done—or nothing of any value—to support and strengthen their faith.

"And if the Church loses the pre-adolescents it means that she will have lost the adolescents. And the religious quality of the adolescents determines the Christian possibilities of the families of tomorrow.

"The problem of the religious formation of the 12 to 15 age group holds the key to the Christian future of the country."

All is not well even among the pupils of the Jesuit schools. The result of an enquiry carried out in 15 of their colleges was reported in their review, *Etudes* (April, 1957). About 400 answers were received to such questions as: "Can you say what your school fellows think

of Christ?" About one third declined to answer this question, but of the remainder, some typical answers were:—

"Some appear to mock Christ."

"Some don't give him much attention, some are indifferent, but some are very fervent."

"For some, he is a God alien to our day-to-day existence, for others he is a living God."

"More than a quarter regard religion as a farce."

"Frankly the majority never think of him at all, some think of him, some even frequently."

In all, 350 of the 400 replies make gratifying reading—to Freethinkers—according to *La Calotte*.

The trends shown in this enquiry are all the more remarkable, since the young people involved are from middle-class backgrounds, from the traditionalist and conservative families which have hitherto been the backbone of the Church.

## The Dwindling Priesthood

The years since 1945 have shown no change in that steady decline in the number of French priests, which has been noticeable for the last 100 years. In March, 1946, *La Croix* wrote that "as long as the climate of opinion in which young people are reared is pagan and materialist, and as long as there are not large families which are profoundly Christian, recruitment to the priesthood will remain one of the gravest problems, and one that is most difficult to solve. Every year in France, the number of priests diminishes by 400."

*L'Epoque* (September 27th, 1948) reporting on a survey on "The Distressful Condition of the Priests of the Country," quoted the parish priest of Bourgogne as saying of his diocese, Dijon, "There are 355,000 souls; of 727 parishes, 503 are without a priest. There are only 250 of us priests in the parochial ministry. The diminution is progressive, and has been unmistakable for 70 years. There were in 1869 exactly 502 priests. There were only 454 in 1894 and 413 on the eve of 1914. Five years later, in 1918, the number fell to 367, and to 305 in 1934. We are now, as I told you, 250. Do those figures not speak for themselves?"

In November, 1957, *L'Echo de Suquet* of Marseilles quoted the Bishop of Nice, Mgr. Paul Rémond as follows: "The great preoccupation of all the bishops, and my own, is recruitment to the priesthood. The population increases steadily, while at the same time, the number of priests diminishes. When I arrived in the diocese of Nice 25 years ago, the number of annual ordinations was about 50 new priests. At the present time it has fallen to 4 or 5. At the same time, the number of priests dying every year is about 15."

The bishop goes on to describe the usual state of affairs, of the increasing number of parishes which formerly had a resident priest, but must now be satisfied with part-time ministrations. Motorised transport has helped partially, but the number of accidents involving clergy is alarming, and the financial burden strains the already strained diocesan funds.

Exhortations to the faithful to support their priests, and to give a son or daughter to the service of God, have fallen on deaf ears.

Cardinal Gerlier, Archbishop of Lyons, said in January, 1958, "During the last 50 years, the effective number of

the clergy has dropped by 30 per cent., while the population has increased by 260,000."

So the outlook for the French Church is anything but bright. It is now admitted that contact has been lost completely with the working class, the only dispute being whether the number of practising Catholics among them is one or two per cent. The post-war experiment of the worker-priests, which was a desperate attempt to re-establish contact with the workers, so the working class must be given up as lost. But sceptics, socialists, and even communists continue to allow their children to be baptised and sent to catechism, which tends to allow the endless cycle to continue. Nevertheless, in France as in so many other countries, the religious treadmill is slowly, but surely, grinding to a halt.

## Review

T. H. Huxley: *Scientist, Humanist and Educator*; by Cyril Bibby; Watts, 40 Drury Lane, W.C.2. 330 pages; 25/-; illustrated.

THIS IMMEDIATELY becomes the standard life of "Darwin's bulldog." That is a reward for seven years' diligent research by its author. He has made brilliant use of access to unpublished letters, diaries and notebooks, and the result is a mass of information presented in a readable way and with references made easy to get at. But the man behind the facts is never lost.

There are thirteen plates and other illustrations and a quite phenomenal *Conspectus of T. H. Huxley's Life and Times*. For example, in 1883, the year Foote went to prison for blasphemy, a Liberal government was returned, Maxim invented his famous gun, Karl Marx died, Huxley became President of the Royal Society and a Trustee of the British Museum, he published *Pearly Nautilus*, he spoke to the London Working Men six times, his health was beginning to fail, and he became an Honorary Member of three different scientific associations in U.S.A. That is just a small sample from one year, but this kind of thing is tabulated for every year of Huxley's life (1825-95), a noteworthy piece of condensation and arrangement.

The work is copiously documented without interfering with the text, the Index is systematic and thorough, and the physical presentation by Watts is, as usual, first class. There is a Foreword by Sir Julian Huxley and one by Aldous Huxley, both of whom express extreme pleasure with Dr. Bibby's biography. The former says it makes him "more proud than ever of being the grandson of T. H. Huxley and I commend (the) book as a valuable study of a great human figure," while Aldous finds the occasion for an entertaining little essay of his own on Pill Morality, Chemical Christianity and "nearly harmless vision inducers."

It may appear niggardly to pick any flaws in such an heroic effort as Dr. Bibby's, yet one feels that Huxley's work for schools and other scholastic establishments and experiments is given somewhat more treatment proportionally to his purely scientific work and to his status as a philosopher. Laird's *Recent Philosophy*, a comprehensive survey of a period covering Huxley's, regards him as a philosopher in his own right. Huxley rejected the *name* materialism rather than materialism itself, as could easily have been shown. This was probably because he was confronted with the stricter mechanistic materialism which then prevailed.

But one must not end on a note of disparagement, however slight. A mine of information on the various directions in which Huxley's energies were so profitably used, this book could well be of such stature that no better life of him will ever be written.

G. H. TAYLOR.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### RELIGION IN SCHOOLS

If anyone expresses surprise at the persistence of Christian arrogance in maintaining religious classes in the ordinary day schools, I have only to show them the letters from so-called "Freethinkers" Penketh and Potheary to indicate that it is their kind of weakness which makes such a thing possible.

I have put four children through the primary school and have insisted on each occasion that the right of withdrawal from religious instruction should be granted. Also, as a teacher myself, I have insisted that I myself should have the right to be excused partaking in religious services and religious instruction. No harm has come to any of us as a result of this—on the contrary, many people have expressed envy of our position and our action has caused many people to realise that such a right exists and will be granted in practice if only people have the guts to demand it.

In my view, it is gutlessness which is keeping things the way they are—and I would as soon have respect for witch-doctors and their mumbo-jumbo taught in our schools as so-called religious instruction. When are we to realise, I would ask, that we cannot possibly combine religion and science. And if, as we hear so often, our education is to be brought into line with modern needs, we simply must choose the philosophic basis of scientific thinking rather than tolerate any further the rubbish of religious opinions as the basis of our society.

Make no mistake: it is the ineffectiveness of the witness of agnostics and atheists which is making the persistence of school prayers and hymn-singing a continuing fact. I therefore call on all who are agnostics or atheists to assert themselves on their own behalf and on behalf of their children. If we care we can increase our witness to the point when it will be just as unfashionable and non-conformist to be religious as it now is to be agnostic or atheist. Then, perhaps, like Shaw's "Little Black Girl," we will find that the terrifying aspect of religious solidarity will be proved a hollow sham which will crumple at the first wave of our knobkerry.

In my view, the idea that this is a "Christian" society should be opposed at every turn. Christianity cannot possibly provide a true basis for social freedom for all interested in scientific advance.

E. G. MACFARLANE.

### GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE

In his articles in THE FREETHINKER on March 20th and 27th, Dr. Vitali Negri advances the thesis that Judaism preaches hatred. He asserts that Moses declared "Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy." Although this statement is attributed to him by Jesus of Nazareth in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew, Chapter 5, verse 43), in point of fact nowhere in the Old Testament is it to be found.

"A foreigner thou shalt not wrong."—Exodus XXII, verse 20.

"Thou shalt not hate an Egyptian."—Deuteronomy XXIII, verse 8.

"The foreigner that sojourneth with you thou shalt love as thyself."—Leviticus XIX, verse 35.

"If thou meet thine enemy's ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again."—Exodus XXIII, verse 4.

These were the teachings of the man described by Thomas Paine, with Dr. Negri's apparent approval, as a "monster and impostor." Would that the world were full of such monsters!

It is true that to preserve his religion the Jew has sought to preserve his separate identity by the observance of dietary and numerous other laws. The blessing pronounced by the orthodox Jew thanking God for having chosen the Jews expresses his joy at being able to serve God by performing his Commandments. Similarly, the blessing pronounced by the Jewish male at not being made a woman is recited because the man has many more religious duties to perform than the woman. Neither blessing is motivated by hatred.

Indeed, the attitude of the Jew to the gentile has been a model of tolerance. "Have we not all one father. Has not one God created us," proclaims the prophet Malachi (Malachi, Chapter 1).

And, so far from preaching hatred, as alleged by Dr. Negri, Moses Maimonides wrote in his *Hilchot Teshuvah* (Chapter 3), "The Righteous of all nations have a place in the world to come."

If Dr. Negri does not accept that Jewish laws and teachings are divinely inspired, he must surely accept that they are the product of a people with exceptional ethical and social values.

SPENCER WEISBAND.

### DETERMINISM

Mr. C. E. Ratcliffe's statement that we are merely thinking robots is just that writer's usual interpretation of Determinism as Fatalism. After over half a century of reading and thinking on this *par excellence* of philosophy, as it has been called! the best statement in my opinion is in F. Engel's *Anti-Dühring*: "Free-

dom does not consist in the dream of independence of natural laws, but in the knowledge of these laws. And in the possibility this gives of systematically making them work towards definite ends. This holds good in relation both to the laws of external nature and to those which govern the bodily and mental life of men themselves—two classes of laws which we can separate from each other at most only in thought and not in reality. Freedom of the will therefore means nothing but the capacity to make decisions with real knowledge of the subject. Freedom therefore consists of control over ourselves and over external nature which is founded on the knowledge of natural causation."

This is the most meaningful statement of the subject the writer has read. T. M. MOSLEY.

#### SPIRITUALISM

A Spiritualist correspondent writes: "I was the leader of a development circle some years ago, as I rose to my feet I was entranced as a Zulu, uttering war-cries and apparently brandishing a spear. I was even told my face was the face of a Negro and my skin darkened. *This in broad daylight.* Who hypnotised me, my friend?"

I suggest that he was self-hypnotised, and the dominant contributory factor in causation was auto-suggestion. C. E. RATCLIFFE.

#### ROYAL VISIT TO THE POPE

In your issue of April 17th, under "This Believing World," you have an item about royalty visiting the Pope. But, despite your remarks, the Protestant Truth Society are justified in their protest against the visit. If the Royal Family were pledged to defend the Catholic faith, yes, a visit would be in accordance with their pledge, but they are not. Freethinkers, you say, "stand for tolerance in these matters." Tolerance, where the Vatican is concerned. What tolerance of Freethought would there be if the Vatican got its hold on England again? Perhaps the Editorial Committee will let me know if I am right in opposing the Roman Catholic Church in speech and writing or whether I should plead for toleration of it. G. RICHARDSON.

[See reference to the Royal Visit in the article, "Catholics Chase the Churchless," May 1st.—Ed.]

#### HEAVENLY AID

In reply to Mr. Bepen's letter of February 24th, in which he says that Heaven helps those who help themselves, I should like to point out that those who can help themselves are obviously in no need of divine assistance, while those who really need help, as in disasters such as earthquakes, floods, pit disasters, death by disease, etc., find their prayers quite unavailing.

It seems strange that when the help of Heaven is so limited that it should be given to those who need it least. MAY A. WATSON.

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OUTDOOR DEMONSTRATION  
SUNDAY EVENING, 6.15 p.m.  
THE DOWNS, BRISTOL

#### N.S.S. BRANCH NEWS

ABOUT THIS TIME OF YEAR most Branches of the National Secular Society, which have been holding indoor meetings, turn to the outdoor platform. There are exceptions, of course, like North London (which is responsible for weekly meetings at Hyde Park, Hampstead and Tower Hill) and our Branch in the Scottish capital, Edinburgh. And, by contrast, Birmingham Branch, which continues its fortnightly indoor meetings throughout the summer as well as the winter.

A gratifying feature about each of these three Branches (and of some others) is the way they make use of local speakers. Birmingham, for example, held a most interesting meeting earlier this year, when one member, Mr. James Whitburn, spoke on palaeontology, and another—the ever-young Mr. C. H. Smith—illustrated Mr. Whitburn's talk with fossil specimens.

In Yorkshire, Bradford Branch wound up its indoor season with a documentary tape recording on Charles Bradlaugh's parliamentary struggle, six members (Mr. and Mrs. Corina, Mr. H. Day, Mr. T. W. Figgess and Mrs. Webster) speaking a script adapted from Hypatia Bradlaugh Bonner's life of her father.

In Nottingham Mr. Tom Mosley has again been the mainstay of the Branch meetings which, like Edinburgh and North London, are exclusively open-air. The equally important literature selling has suffered, however, due to the illness of Mr. S. Hough, who will, we hope, soon be well again.

Returning to London: our two East London Branches, West Ham and District, and Dagenham, have experimented with the informal meeting in members' homes. We have referred to those of the former Branch before and mentioned the interesting discussions they have produced. Dagenham Branch invited the General Secretary to speak on April 17th, and the friendly group included four students, one of whom became a member. The others may well do so at a later meeting, Mr. D. Tribe and Mr. L. Ebury being among the future speakers. C.M.C.

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