

The Freethinker

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Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

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IN A RECENT ISSUE of a paper which is regularly received at the office of THE FREETHINKER, an instructive article appeared on the (self-styled) Ecumenical Council shortly to be convened by Pope John XXIII. The paper in question is our Roman Catholic contemporary *The Faith*, a Maltese publication devoted exclusively to Roman Catholic apologetics and edited by a Dominican cleric, Fr. Paris, O.P. who, at least if we are to judge from the frequency of the letters which he contributes to THE FREETHINKER, appears to take an intense interest either in its literary contents, or in the spiritual well-being of its contributors. Speaking personally as one of the latter, I am sure that we are all very much obliged to the Reverend Father Paris.

What is an Ecumenical Council?

In the course of the aforementioned article, the writer indicates what precisely it is that separates an Ecumenical Council of the Church from councils of a less exalted kind. Actually he skims rather lightly over this question which—as students of what I may perhaps term the finer points of Church History and Catholic theology will know, is a delicate and formerly hotly-controverted question in the chequered evolution of theology and ecclesiastical policy. For time was, and not so very long ago either, when a General or Ecumenical Council of the kind which the Pope now apparently proposes to call, was regarded by the Roman Catholic Church itself as superior in authority to the Pope who called it. As a learned theologian, Fr. Paris must know that one Council (Constance in the 15th century,) even deposed a Pope who then, of course, automatically became an “anti” Pope. Not only we are sure, does Fr. Paris know this, but his infallible Master in the Vatican knows this particular fact also, and shows that he knows it by the actual title he adopted when as Cardinal Roncalli he was elected to the Papacy last October. For the Pope deposed (in 1415) by the Council of Constance was none other than Pope John XXIII and had not the present Pope of that name and number accepted as valid the right of that Ecumenical Council to depose the Pope, he would presumably now style himself John XXIV. In point of fact, right to the Declaration of Papal Infallibility in 1870, there was a party in the Catholic Church which held it as self-evident that the decisions of a General Council consisting of all, or most of all the bishops of the Church and therefore expressing the collective will of the Catholic Church, was *ipso facto* superior to any decisions made by the individual Pope. I have quoted before in this column—apparently not with the approval of Fr. Paris to judge from a letter which he subsequently sent to this paper—the *dictum* of the Bavarian Catholic theologian, Adam Mohler (one of the most honest and learned of modern Catholic Scholars), that the (then not yet official) dogma of the individual Infallibility of the Pope, was actually and essentially a Protestant dogma since it effectively subordinated the collective judgment of the Church to the individual private judgment of the Pope. I must also repeat that in

my opinion, Mohler’s logic is actually unanswerable; that is of course, granting the premises of Catholicism that were common to all parties in this dispute.

The Pope and the Council

However, that is a bygone phase of this particular controversy. For since 1870 when a packed and intimidated Vatican Council, in which the all-powerful Jesuits pulled innumerable strings, took the irrevocable decision to resign its own collective infallibility in favour of the personal infallibility of the Pope, that issue has been closed—for Roman Catholics at any rate. The Papacy has now infallibly pronounced its own infallibility—a vicious circle in logic if ever there was one! Nowadays, the

sole function of any Church Council, ecumenical or otherwise, is simply to put its rubber stamp upon the personal wishes of His Holiness, Pope John XXIII. For it is now the official doctrine of the largest and most powerful of the Christian Churches that, if the Pope says one thing and the whole Church (including Fr. Paris!) another, Roncalli is in step while the Church is out of it. Coming down to present realities, this means that the actual business of the forthcoming Council will be to implement the current world-strategy of the Vatican or whatever aspect of it the Pope decides to tackle first.

Rome and Christian Reunion

According to the writer in *The Faith*, the primary purpose of the forthcoming General Council is likely to be the vexed problem of Christian “reunion”, particularly with the Eastern (Orthodox) Churches, now mostly situated in Communist lands—presumably, though the point is not actually made in *The Faith* article, this would imply some attempt on the part of the Vatican to reach some kind of an agreement with the Kremlin. The more so since the current evolution of nuclear science for military purposes, has made Rome’s traditional remedy of a crusade against the modern infidels look somewhat old fashioned. In the case of the Vatican actually making any approaches towards reunion with the Orthodox Churches as envisaged by *The Faith’s* scribe, the current—and probably insoluble—obstacle would be Papal Infallibility. For the Orthodox Churches still adhere to what was formerly the universal Catholic position that the prerogative of Infallibility is collective and not an individual prerogative of the Pope or anyone else. They would probably agree with the view of Adam Mohler I cited above, (otherwise the doctrinal differences between the Roman and Eastern varieties of Catholicism are not very great and could perhaps be surmounted). What may be more difficult as well as important is the current political fact that most of the present-day Orthodox Churches have come to some kind of terms with their local Communist regimes. If accordingly, Rome were to succeed—actually, it does not at present seem very likely—in patching up her traditional differences with the Eastern Churches, she would presumably have to change her present intransigently hostile line towards Communism. Are we heading for an ultimate *Concordat* between the

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

Rome and Reunion

—By F. A. RIDLEY—

Vatican and the Kremlin—between John XXIII who is infallible and Mr. Krushchev who is always right? It certainly represents an intriguing speculation. (Prior to 1917, the Russian Tsars were also rival Popes as heads of the Russian Orthodox Church!)

Rome and Canterbury

There is however, one Christian Church which—or so we imagine—may regard the next Council at the Vatican with considerable alarm and despondency as a possible source of future disruption. This is the Church of England at present ruled from Canterbury. For it is a matter of common knowledge that the theological standards in present day Anglicanism are more than somewhat loose; and also that there is, and has been for quite a while, a powerful and fanatical Anglo-Catholic group inside the Anglican Church, but with theology and ritual often much nearer to Rome than to English Protestantism. Periodically, since Newman “went over”, High Anglo-Catholics secede to Rome. So far however, the Anglo-Catholic movement has remained uneasily in the Church of England. The reasons for this have actually not got much to do with theology; what prevents a mass-exodus of Anglo-Catholics to Rome is a severely practical matter: most Anglo-

Catholic clergy are married while Rome, of course, insists on celibacy for its clergy; and the Labour Exchange is not a very alluring alternative to the Anglican “living” which upon “going over” they would have to abandon. Further, most Anglo-Catholics do not understand Latin, in which most of the services of the Roman Church are conducted. (The above, we repeat, represent rather than theological difficulties the material reasons why most Anglo-Catholic clergy remain in the theologically very mixed Church of England). However, it is not only possible but probable that Rome, as a result of the next Council will relax her present unintelligently rigorous line and, following the hitherto neglected advice given it long ago by the late Cardinal Mercier, offer the Church of England the status of a “Uniate” Church, that is, of a Church as exists already in the East, whose liturgy can henceforth, be celebrated in English and in which its married clergy can keep their wives and their profession. If this happens—and there are already signs that it may—there would probably be a mass exit of Anglo-Catholics to Rome and it is in fact doubtful if Anglicanism could now survive such a wholesale defection. The re-assembly of the Vatican Council will be a matter of world wide interest; but for the reasons briefly indicated above, nowhere more so than in England.

REVIEW

Children of the Sun

By DAVE SHIPPER

Children of the Sun. By Morris West
Published by Pan Books 2/6d.

This fascinating book is mainly concerned with the slum-life of Naples and pays special attention to the “scugnizzi” . . . the homeless urchins of the Neapolitan streets. The author, Australian writer Morris West, paints an appalling picture of the graft, corruption, perversion, ineptitude and misery prevalent in Italy’s Mezzogiorno and pokes into every nook and cranny, sparing the squeamish nothing.

Indeed, the reader expecting a conventional “travel-book,” which in the case of Naples customarily entails rapturous descriptions of the scenic beauties of the famous bay, hearty appreciation of the musical feasts provided by the San Carlo Opera Company and Orchestra, and discussion of the relative merits of the gastronomic specialties provided by the leading hotels, will be sadly disappointed, for this is not the chromium cocktail-bar and picture-postcard Naples of Italian Tourist Board propaganda, but a frank and harsh unscreening of the open sewer which is Naples to so many Neapolitans. The reader with a delicate stomach can hardly be recommended to read this book. However, as Mr. West did not write from the more usual hotel window overlooking the Bay of Naples, but from the slums where he lived to gather his facts, he must obviously be forgiven.

In such a work as this one would naturally expect the Roman Catholic Church to receive some mention and the author deals with their position at some length. He is often severe in his condemnation of “the Church of the South” and gives numerous examples of an illiberal, mediaeval mentality which often refuses to accept even small concessions to progress “officially” accepted by Vatican headquarters.

At this stage, Mr. West’s religious readers, certainly his Catholic ones, may be suspicious of his intentions and

prepared to dismiss his searching studies as thinly-veiled anti-Catholic propaganda. However, as Mr. West freely admits to being a practising Catholic, they can hardly throw out the familiar old smoke-screen of alleging bias on the part of this writer! No, his book must be accepted for what it is, a sincere and serious study of the utter poverty, immorality and ill-health prevalent, and an honest attempt to examine the environmental and other factors which have shaped the present position. In freethought eyes Mr. West is mistaken in condemning only “the Church of the South” . . . he speaks sometimes as though this were an independent body . . . and ignoring the fact that a word from Vatican headquarters could easily alter the course of action followed by the Southern hierarchy (and we do not believe the Vatican suffers from a shortage of financial resources which precludes them from displaying a little of the “Christian charity” so often figuring in their sermons and press-releases).

However, we could hardly expect that from a Catholic writer, and in this hard-hitting book we certainly get more than could reasonably be expected from 99.99 per cent of Roman Catholic writers, so perhaps it would be uncharitable to offer more than this minor criticism here.

The author commends the work of charity done by the now internationally-famous Fr. Borrelli (of “House of Urchins” fame), but makes it clear that he does not consider the work done by humane individuals (and it seems only fair to say that Mario Borrelli sounds outstanding in this respect) belonging to the Church reflects credit on the Church itself.

We recommend all readers to obtain this book, very cheap in paperback form, and particularly suitable for lending to those who would not read *normal* freethought propaganda. Works such as this are the finest propaganda freethought could obtain . . . whether written by a Roman Catholic or anyone else.

Christian Peace

By HALLEN M. BELL (U.S.A.)

CHRISTIANS COMMONLY CLAIM—or simply assume as if there were no argument about it—that their religion is a mighty influence for peace and good will among men. In this Atomic Age, the attainment of peace and harmony in the human family has become highly desirable if not absolutely essential to human existence, and those who claim to have a formula by which peace may be secured and maintained should have their claims seriously considered. At present, the claims being made for the pacificatory potential of Christianity are being rather more than adequately publicised; but they are seldom subjected to critical examination. So it might be well to review the evidence which leads many thoughtful people to question the effectiveness of Christianity as an instrument for the attainment of peace and harmony in the world.

One who reads the history of Christianity might reasonably expect to find that there was a noticeable decrease in the fighting and general social discord in the far-flung Roman empire after the gospel of the "Prince of Peace" became the state religion. Such was not the case. Wars did not cease; if anything, they seem to have become more frequent; for to the list of wars there was added a new and more terrible variety, the Christian crusade, and to the causes of dissension there were added scores of acrimonious disputes on points of Christian doctrine. Not only did war continue in this truly Christian era, it became infinitely more terrible. When the influence of Christianity was at its height and fell compulsively on everybody from peasant to king, man's inhumanity to man also reached its highest point. Wars, massacres, witch hunts and casual homicides continually disturbed the public peace, and harmonious human relations were made impossible by the prejudices and hatred engendered by ignorance and superstition.

Modern Christians excuse the contentious record of their religion in its earlier centuries by saying that Christians cannot be much better than the times in which they live, and that anyway, the anti-social practices were the acts of individual Christians who were not living up to the high ideals of their religion. But the time in which they lived was often several centuries after Christianity had become the dominant cultural influence in their part of the world, and it seems safer to judge their religion by their behaviour under its influence than by the verbal claims made for it. The sad fact is that much of the violence, the crusades and persecutions, and the superstitious fears and hatreds seem to have been quite Christian; they were often expressly approved by the Church and were justified by accurate quotations from the Bible. The behavioural pattern of the medieval Christians and the social conditions under which they lived, they undoubtedly created for themselves under the authority and inspiration of the faith in which they devoutly believed.

Perhaps a religion should not be judged solely by its past record, but there are many indications that Christianity is still lacking in harmonising potential. That all is not peace and good will today, even within the Christian ranks, is apparent to anyone who reads the publications of the numerous Christian sects, or is able to get the reports that slip through the religious censorship of churchly doings in Spain, Colombia, Italy, and some other Christian countries. The book, *Apostles of Discord*, by Rev. Ralph Lord Roy, reveals some of the dissension among the faithful in this country. In spite of these internal dis-

sensions, Christians are usually able to unite in exhibiting even more combativeness against those outside the fold. Most non-Christians know from experience how easily the ire of a really active Christian is aroused and how far he will go in venting his indignation, and in any social gathering in which there is expected to be one or more active Christians, the warning, "You'll have to be careful what you say," is often quietly circulated among the other guests. Every publisher and radio station manager knows that any public comment that can possibly be construed as uncomplimentary either to Christianity or to religion is likely to bring forth a deluge of abusive, often threatening letters from embattled Christians, and many radio commentators, writers, artists, actors and educators have lost their jobs, or have been otherwise penalised by the practical application of Christian intolerance.

The seemingly normal tendency of Christians to harass those outside the Christian fold has been demonstrated frequently in the last few years. They have attempted, with some success, to compel non-Christians to help support their Churches by diverting tax money to religious uses. They have tried to compel everybody to observe Christian holidays and religious practices and to take an oath of allegiance to the Christian god. In many cases they have forced their religious propaganda upon non-Christian children in the public schools. With what seems to be a deliberate intention to cause international as well as domestic discord, they have tried to force the observance of a Christian religious rite upon the assembly of the United Nations, and, of course, they still send missionaries to all parts of the world, not on good will tours, but with the deliberate intention of subverting other religions. The part played by the Roman Church—helped by many "fundamentalist" Protestants—in starting and keeping warm the Cold War with Russia is fairly well documented, and some of the denunciations of that country by Christian priests and preachers fall little short of a call for all-out war.

Of course, the Christian Churches, except for a few minor sects, have always approved of war and still do, their approval being based firmly on the spirit and words of their holy book. Within fairly recent times, Christian ministers have been dismissed from their pulpits—quite properly it seems—for opposing a war approved by their Church and for preaching the obviously heretical doctrine that war is unchristian. The pacific ideals voiced so often by Christians are seldom found suitable for practical application; practical pacifism is mostly confined to small sects of doubtful orthodoxy and to scattered individuals who are usually treated with scant courtesy by the majority of the faithful. We have in Washington today probably the most Christian government in our history, a President exceptionally free with pious platitudes and calls for prayer, and a Congress eagerly spending public money for chapels and prayer rooms. It is not too surprising that this most Christian government is also the most militaristic government we have ever had, with a foreign policy based so completely on military pressure and threats of war that it has been aptly called the "brink of war" policy.

In fairness, it must be said that many individual Christians and a few small, nominally Christian sects, such as the Quakers, seem to be sincerely devoted to the ideal of world peace.

[From *Progressive World*]

(To be concluded)

This Believing World

The BBC is being scathingly attacked by Methodists for staging a television show of a boxing fight on a Sunday. What they would say if we got pictures of people playing cards or drinking whisky would be perhaps unprintable. But it was the "timing" of the fight which even shocked people, according to the Rev. J. K. Lawton, who "were not churchgoers." We had no idea that non-churchgoers could possibly be shocked at anything put out on TV on Sunday by such a Christian body as the directors of the BBC. But one lives and learns.

★

That great immaculate medium Daniel Dunglass Home once tried to filch £30,000 from a widow by pretending to get into touch with her late husband in the spirit world. He got the money, but a hard unsympathetic judge ordered him to pay it all back—which he did. Home's reputation was then world wide, but we can't say the same for that convinced Spiritualist and Medium, Mr. Jesse Hunt of Luton who recently tried to emulate Home with an old widow and her cash. She left her estate of about £20,000 to him on the orders of her late husband (still alive in "Summerland"), but here again a stony-hearted judge didn't believe him; and in spite of the orders from the spirit world, Mr. Hunt, amid the wailing and whining of Luton's believers in him won't get a bean. Think of it, the judge actually called Mr. Hunt "a fraud"!

★

Dr. Billy Graham had an uplifting message for the British people when visiting us again after five years. Of course, he still "sensed that materialism and secularism were continuing their penetration of British life", but he also felt that "one of the things that made Britain great was her moral and spiritual power", for "each individual has a responsibility to trust in Christ and go to church regularly." This seems to us about as original as his "God bless you all", and quite as meaningless. Most people in this country are just apathetic to religion—and for that matter to "materialism and secularism" as well. But the reverend gentleman may mean that England hasn't fallen for Christ in the Billy Graham way. And he is right.

★

More and more are Sunday schools, once a grand old bulwark of Christianity, dropping out of favour; so St. Barnabas Church in Sutton has hit upon a grand idea to stop the drift of older children (who cannot be forced to go like the yonger ones) leaving them. There is no need to call it a "Sunday School" but the "Sunday Fellowship", and the deed is done. This seems to us to reintroduce the old "Pleasant Sunday Afternoons", familiarly known as "PSA", when all passers-by were invited into a hall by enthusiastic young evangelists ready to bring you to Christ with a dreary mixture of pious amiability, a reverent reading from the Bible, a few horrid hymns, and sometimes a stale bun and ginger beer thrown in as a gift. We rarely hear about these PSA's these days, and no wonder. Still, anything is better than the dreadful apathy towards religion shown by our teenagers, so the idea is worth trying again.

★

Even a vicar raised to an archdeacon does not guarantee words of wisdom, and we cannot help wondering what the Archdeacon of Sheffield, the Ven. R. W. Woods, meant when, addressing the Leicester Christian Industrial Council, he said, "Man's hopes are God's resources". One of our hopes is to win the major prize in a Premium Bond draw, but how that can be "a resource" for God baffles us. What Mr. Woods really wants (we think) is more Christianity in

industry, meaning more chaplains in workshops and factories badgering the workers to go all out for Christ—that is if it means anything at all. Unfortunately—or fortunately—the number of chaplains doing this kind of work has steadily decreased and he wanted this rot to stop. It won't.

THEATRE

Irish Irreverence

BRENDAN BEHAN has come a long way in the three years since I recorded the "memorable evening" provided by his first play, *The Quare Fellow* (THE FREETHINKER, 8/6/56). He has owed something, of course, to a notorious television appearance, but there is much more to it than that, as his second play, *The Hostage* (Wyndhams Theatre, London) clearly shows.

He owes a lot to being Irish, for it is hard to think of such a play being written by one of any other nationality, and comparisons with O'Casey, Shaw and Synge come to mind. But finally it has to be admitted that Mr. Behan is unique. As in *The Quare Fellow*, though not to the same extent, *The Hostage* deals with an essentially tragic situation: the nineteen-year-old English conscript about to be shot in reprisal for the hanging of an I.R.A. murderer in Belfast. Mr. Behan again succeeds in turning such a situation into a riotously funny evening, but at the same time touching our hearts. Behind the gloriously bawdy humour is the humanity that moved us in the earlier play, and the programme significantly quotes the author as saying:

I respect kindness to human beings first of all, and kindness to animals. I don't respect the law; I have a total irreverence for anything connected with society except that which makes the roads safer, the beer stronger, the food cheaper, and old men and old women warmer in the winter, and happier in the summer.

The Hostage is packed with Mr. Behan's rollicking irreverence, much of it at the expense of the Irish themselves—and especially their religion. The last time Teresa laughed was when the holy picture fell on her grandmother. The whore considers it against her religion to go to bed with a communist—until he shows his money, when all agree that "Sure pound notes is the best religion in the world." There is general horror when it is heard that a bishop has had a son, but general relief on learning he is a Protestant bishop ("Oh they're different aren't they?"). As for the Cockney soldier, he is a Protestant but never gives it a thought. And a kindly lady informs him that His Queen "emerged with dignity" from an Indian tribal squabble—according to the *Daily Express*. One song begins "Read the Bible".

But it is impossible to give any idea of the enormous vitality of this truly fantastic play. It must be seen—and then can't really be believed! It is another product of the most fertile combination in the British theatre: Mr. Behan himself, Miss Joan Littlewood, our most imaginative producer, and the team of players she assembled in the East End, which has now enlivened the West End. C.McC.

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By AVRO MANHATTAN

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Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (rear of Morley Street Car Park).—Sunday, 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 (Finsbury Square, E.C.2).—Every Wednesday, 1 p.m.: Messrs. L. EBURY and C. MCCALL.

London (Marble Arch).—Meetings every Saturday from 6 p.m. and every Sunday from 5 p.m.: Messrs. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER, C. E. WOOD and D. TRIBE.

London (Tower Hill).—Every Thursday, 12—2 p.m.: Messrs. J. W. BARKER and L. EBURY.

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Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Pierhead).—Wednesdays, 1 p.m.; Sundays, 7.30 p.m.: Various speakers.

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.

Orpington Humanist Group. Sunday, June 28th. Ramble through Whitley Forest. Assemble at Sevenoaks Station at 10.50 a.m.

Trains—Charing Cross, 9.37 a.m.; Victoria, 9.47 a.m.; Orpington, 10.34 a.m. Bring packed lunch, Tea at Sevenoaks.

INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Midland Institute Cinema, Paradise Street).—Sunday, July 5th, 6.45 p.m.: COLIN MCCALL, "The Evolutionary Outlook."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1). Sunday, July 5th, 7 p.m.: R. CLEMENTS, O.B.E., "The Mind of Japan."

Notes and News

MR. T. H. R. JAMES has sent us a comprehensive and interesting report of the Midlands Conference for Peace held in the Birmingham and Midland Institute on Saturday, June 6th, at which he was a National Secular Society delegate. The Institute theatre was filled to capacity, and Dr. Roscoe Clark was in the chair. Professor J. D. Bernal, one of the main speakers, emphasised the concern of many eminent scientists over the mortal danger already caused by nuclear tests. His address—says Mr. James—was pungent and "packed with scientific facts," while his "grave warnings made us think and think again." Mr. E. Roberts, a trade unionist, was another prominent speaker. But, Mr. James continues, "I searched in vain for a clerical collar in the audience, though one gentleman pledged the support of the Baptist Union."

★

FILLED, as we are, with charity, we can forgive Mrs. Cynthia Appleton, of Birmingham, for believing that her child is a "space baby" and we hope that Mr. Appleton—

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £231 8s. 5d.; R. Reader, 5s.; R. DeSalle, £1 1s. 0d.; A. Ineson, 5s.; W.H.D., 5s.; J. Barlow (Canada), 10s.—Total to date, June 26th, 1959, £233 14s. 5d.

who, alas, has always been out at work when the Venusian called in his flying saucer—will be equally charitable towards his wife. (St. Joseph's simple, trusting faith may be a good example to follow in this instance.) But charity has limits, and ours does not extend to *The People* (14/6/59), which publicised this rubbish.

★

FOR once, at least, we can agree with Mr. Gilbert Harding (BBC TV, 14/6/59) that Dr. Billy Graham should mind his own business instead of passing moral judgment on young couples in the London parks. But after Dr. Graham had departed to peruse and pronounce on morality in Moscow, the *Evening Standard* (15/6/59) devoted an article to the "nightmare scene" that its reporter "saw repeated between 11 and midnight" in Hyde Park. Without in any way wishing to defend nightmares of this or any other variety, we do want to point out that this is no special indication of modern decadence. A glance at Mr. Cyril Pearl's *The Girl with the Swansdown Seat* (Muller, 1955) will show that Hyde Park was notorious for prostitution a hundred years ago. The "horsebreakers" (to use the current euphemism) dominated Rotten Row by day and received the salutations of the great; the battered and humiliated lurked there (and more particularly in Green Park) by night.

★

IN spite of general apathy and disconcerting effusions of the most primitive fundamentalism, the plain fact is that Freethought is gaining ground at the expense of religion in this and, so far as can be ascertained, in many other countries. This is exemplified in the universities and among the public as a whole. And in recent months new groups have been formed in Yorkshire, Kent and Northern Ireland. They are, with their secretaries, the Leeds and District Humanist Group (Mr. Norman Pennington, 33 Primley Park Crescent, Leeds, 17), Maidstone Humanist Group (Mrs. Mary Baker, 22 Harple Lane, Detling, Maidstone), and the Belfast Secular Society (Mr. Sean McConville, 198 Hillman Street, Antrim Road, Belfast). We hope that, wherever possible, readers in these various districts will give what support they can.

Thomas Paine, the Idol Smasher

(Died June 8th, 150 years ago)

Three nations now unite in praise of Paine,
Who first in England saw the light of day,
Then next he showed America the way
To fight a tyrant king and freedom gain.
Nor did this satisfy his active brain;
Some part in the Convention he would play,
What time the young Republic stood at bay
Against the Kings of Europe and their train.

Thus England, the United States, and France,
Three lands that boast their true democracy,
Pay homage to this wise and valiant man;
But still religion holds men in a trance;
Our age must finish what Paine well began,
And all mankind from superstition free.

BAYARD SIMMONS.

The Sputnik God

By DR. J. V. DUHIG

ON MAY 7TH, we celebrated Ascension Thursday, the idea being that Jesus, having died once, decided he did not care to do it again and took off like a Sputnik into outer space via the stratosphere, being the first space traveller in literature. What happened to his physiology—his nutrition, breathing, circulation, excretion etc. and how far and how many light years he travelled and what eventually happened to the body, whether it dissolved into god or angel-stuff, or whether the human heavenly body model persisted—the Holy Book does not say. We are told Jesus died on the Cross and was put into a cave-like tomb and then resurrected himself. I might speculate as to what he would have done had he been, in modern style, cremated and his ashes scattered over, say, the Sea of Galilee, a resurrection job of considerable magnitude. But up he got and like Billy Graham (Jesus was, in actual fact, the first Billy Graham, just as silly and reckless) and resumed his runaround in the countryside, breathing heavily down people's necks with dire threats of ruin, destruction and eternal torture. A sweet lad, forsooth.

Now this day, all this poisonous and dreary rubbish will get its annual airing and the plain man asks himself to what purpose? What is the good of all this twaddle? My answer, of course, is that not only is it no good; it is a menace to truth and rational thought. The parson says it helps to strengthen faith; in effect, the more ridiculous the alleged event, the more stupendous the credulity of the "faithful" and, naturally, the fatter the parsonic revenues—the main thing.

Now what was the propulsive force in this divine Sputnik act? There were no Canaveral launching platforms in those days. But the whole thing is so preposterously silly that only morons, that is devoted religious people, could have anything whatsoever to do with it. And yet the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Cardinal of Westminster tell people this thing actually happened; that, in effect, the story is completely true. And Cantuar gets £20,000 per annum or whatever it is, to say so; nice work if you can get it, so few can. And all the evidence they produce is a few lines in a notoriously unreliable and self-contradictory book which is a collection of folklore, admittedly interesting, but as a guide to truth and conduct quite hopeless and, indeed, contemptible. As Gibbon has pointed out in another connection, surely an event so terrifically extraordinary and so utterly stupendous, would have made such a noise in the contemporary world as to rate numerous comments by annalists and commentators and later by responsible historians; but we look in vain for any outside independent confirmation: the only authority is the Gospels. Who on earth can trust writers one of whom says their hero was born in a stable in Nazareth and other that that occurred in a house in Bethlehem? One or other (in fact both) is a liar. Another writer, John 1, 18, says no man hath seen God, another, in Exodus XXIV, 9, that Moses and 70 others did see God. Evidence of this quality would not stand up three minutes in a modern Court of Law, even if, as so often happens, the judges are devout believers. They do draw the line at a reasonable thing somewhere. And yet clerics all over the world are paid millions to teach this rubbish as true to the gullible on "pay as you learn" terms of doubtful morality. But poor deluded people do not see the sheer impudent hypocrisy of such teachers who, when

cornered, babble of gospel symbolism and allegory. Where on earth is the symbolism of the above contradiction between Matthew and Luke, except as a symbol of falsehood?

While all this sordid drivel is flowing from the pulpits, what priest or parson ever stops to think of what Science has done for him and Humanity or even to mention one word of thanks from his pulpit? When we think over the appalling squalor of life in the middle ages, the great "age of faith" when the priest ran all life and over the endless crime associated with famine, disease and filth; and compare it with conditions of today, we can only stand in amazement and disgust at the complacency of the clergy. They still babble about the old lying folklore; and in what they consider their specialised work, the teaching of morals, they signally fail. Religion has no preventive effect on Crime, Delinquency and Prostitution; indeed, the Roman Catholic religion, through the confessional, forgives these evils. Religious persons contribute practically all the crime to Society; scientists and the non-religious form less than one per cent of the prison population, according to Professor Schlapp's *The New Criminology*.

Man's salvation is here on earth, and the only people who can achieve it are trained scientists, physical and medical. In my own case, my campaign against Diphtheria which made Brisbane the first Diphtheria-free city in Australia must have saved hundreds of children from disease and death which the old treatment with prayer and holy water failed to prevent. Folklore, prayers and religious lies are useless to man: the Sputnik god is only a menace to Truth and Happiness; he is contemptible rubbish. Just as many a good man becomes a larrikin when put behind the wheel of a car, so otherwise decent men put into a pulpit become devoted liars.

Adapt and Adopt

BEFORE THE ROMAN (no longer "Catholic," i.e. *Universal*) Church became obsessed with Communism—"Atheistic Communism," as they call it, their great fear was Socialism—"Atheistic Socialism."

But their supporters in this country were mostly Irish, by birth or descent. These were the lowest paid, worst clad, worst housed, worst fed and worst educated in the community. For their economic salvation they turned towards the Labour-Socialist Party.

Now the Roman Church has tackled this problem not by denunciation and fulmination, but by their age-long policy of "adapt and adopt."

They adapted and adopted the Winster Solstice and turned it into Christmas Day; they did the same with the Spring Equinox and called it Easter; they did the same with the feast of Beltane—Midsummer's Day—and called it St. John's Day.

Now—shades of Marx, Lenin and Stalin—they have adapted and adopted "May Day," and their policy of adoption, adaption and sanctification has transformed it into St. Joseph the Worker's Day. After Josef Stalin? Not at all, but Joseph the Carpenter!

It was instituted by Pope Pius XII in 1956.

SCOT.

Roman Catholic Reaction Growing

By FRANK MAITLAND

EVER SINCE HUNGARY the Roman Catholic Church has been stepping up its political activities. The sudden news of a demonstration of 300,000 Sudetenese, complete with a festival high mass (televised flash in Britain), strikes a note of alarm. It gives a glimpse of the hidden strength of the Roman Catholic movement in Europe. It shows the confidence of Papal leaders in thus openly showing their strength—and their political intentions. It shows that they feel no need to hide the roots of their plots, which follow those of Hitler and Mussolini. They feel sufficiently disguised under the watchwords "Religion" and "Freedom" and are riding high on the general opposition to Communism, which nowadays covers a multitude of sins.

They are making full use of the cold war. Witness Hungary, an event which the Roman Catholics exploited to the full. It can be justly said that Hungary has given Roman Catholicism a new lease of life in our time. The Sudeten festival mass in Vienna is a display of the Vatican's open contempt for modern political opinion. It also announces the Vatican's political aim—the "reconquest" of the countries in Eastern Europe which they consider to be Catholic. They unashamedly stand with the war-mongers and atom-bombers—while the Pope exhorts the world to peace!

The British Press increasingly becomes subservient to Vatican politics. The Sudeten demonstration was preceded by the *Observer's* declaration of "a mounting campaign against Austria which is being conducted by all East European countries." The *News Chronicle* enthusiastically allies itself with the Catholics in the trades unions in a "united front" against Communism. It "exposes" the Trotskyist Club while saying not a word about the Roman Catholic infiltration. The universal newspaper adulation of the old and new Popes and the headlines about new cathedrals and other Catholic heroics are not so dangerous, perhaps, as the infiltration of papers such as the *Observer*, *News Chronicle* and *The Times* by Catholic propaganda. (There may be other papers also affected, but I do not read them.) Even the left-wing Press is not immune. Not even *Sennaciulo*, organ of the Esperanto International, which prints news of an Italian Esperanto Club's greeting to the Pope and his gracious reply without comment, thereby implying approval.

In Europe, Christian Democrat in politics generally means Roman Catholic. In Italy, Germany and France, not to speak of Austria and Belgium, the Roman Catholic parties play leading roles. The preparations of Charles de Gaulle for a dictatorship, when the favourable moment strikes, are preparations for a new victory for Roman Catholicism.

In Spain, the Roman Catholics are busy preparing for a new turn in events. Following the news of a great rally of Royalists, complete with the inevitable festival high mass, and well attended by priests, comes this comment from the *Observer* on the appointment of the Pope's nominee—not Franco's—to the See of Cordova:

"It is possible that John XXIII is trying gradually to disengage the Church from a regime with which it has been excessively identified and which may not last much longer."

In plainer terms, the Church, which is inseparably associated with Franco, but has always chafed under the need for the Chief of State to be chief, presses for the return of the Monarchy, through which it believes it will have

greater power to rule Spain. This most reactionary of all policies—the return to medieval monarchism—is going to be dressed up with the usual jesuitism, in which the *Observer* participates. Surely the word "excessively" excuses the Catholic identification with Franco. And the *Observer* blandly remarks of the new Bishop of Cordova that he "is reputed to be liberal in sympathy." The Church is simply engaged in the old intrigues. Thus the Church in Spain, that classic land of clerical terrorism, from the campaigns of El Cid to the concordat of Generalissimo Franco, believes that Franco is on the way out, or simply that in the course of nature he is likely to die soon. Then, all talk about "excessive identification" with their inseparable partner will be eased off by the Great Reaper himself.

An authoritarian Church in politics is nothing but fascism carrying the cross instead of the swastika. It is necessary for all who believe in freedom of thought to expose constantly clerical fascism.

Next Week

ON THE FRONT PAGE of next week's issue will appear the thousandth signed contribution to THE FREETHINKER by our veteran contributor, Mr. Herbert Cutner. It is an occasion which should not pass without notice, as we are sure readers will agree—not excluding those who have at times been at the rough end of his pen! It is quite safe to say that Mr. Cutner, in his articles as well as in his extensive unsigned matter in "This Believing World," has caused more controversy than any other contributor, and frequently more than our correspondence column will hold. Everyone, it would seem, has some bone to pick with him on some issue or other, and the result has been a livelier FREETHINKER. Perhaps he has not always been over-generous to his opponents—and in the case of the extreme fundamentalist type of Christian Mr. Cutner has never been one to "suffer fools gladly"—but there is a heavy balance of credit when one considers his work for this paper stretching over the last forty years.

After the death of the regular contributor W. Mann in 1935 Mr. Cutner's articles began to appear pretty regularly and constituted a sustained and forthright attack on the Christian religion, pulling no punches.

I must be one of very many who are indebted. Making my first acquaintance of THE FREETHINKER as a teenager, I never missed an article from what I considered a most excellent company—Chapman Cohen, Mimmermus, Mann and Cutner.

The many subjects on which Mr. Cutner has written include Malthusianism; English and French literature; Spiritualism; the historicity problem, chiefly in respect of Jesus Christ but also of other figures; reviews of books and replies to contemporary Christian apologetics; the Christian Bible and various other holy scriptures; the history of Freethought; Materialism; the Shakespeare problem; the history of sex worship; and the restoration of Robert Taylor as a Bible critic. The latter would have sunk into complete oblivion had it not been for Mr. Cutner's researches, and it is possible that even the work of that great freethought scholar J. M. Robertson could become obscured in too short a time. Here again Mr. Cutner does his best to keep alive the name and fame.

One could spend a long time reminiscing but I must make reference to Mr. Cutner's examination of the famous R101 disaster. Much was made of it for the purposes of Spiritualism, but through Mr. Cutner this paper com-

pletely debunked such claims.

It was also through Mr. Cutner that FREETHINKER readers were introduced to an important contemporary line of research on the Shakespearean authorship which has established definable links with Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford.

For the record, it may also interest readers to learn that, as a member of the Society of Graphic Artists, Mr. Cutner has exhibited etchings all over the world; and has written two books, *Teach Yourself Etching*, and *Teach Yourself Commercial Art*.

In his thousandth contribution Mr. Cutner will be looking back, not altogether in anger, but with his ever critical eye. And for the future, let us join in wishing for many more years of writing activity from our esteemed colleague.

G. H. TAYLOR.

CORRESPONDENCE

VIRGIN MARY No. 2

Re the article in *The People* about the second "Virgin Mary," I have written the Editor as follows:

"Is the story, in today's issue, of Mrs. Cynthia Appleton expecting a space child after being told by a man from Venus, any more fantastic than the (different) stories told in Matthew I, verses 18 to 25, or Luke I, verses 26 to 38?

"The only difference is that in the days of Matthew and Luke the kind of births as described by them were of common occurrence and this is where the unknown writers or forgers obtained their ideas.

"In fact, Mrs. Appleton's story is the much more likely one because, although we now know that there was no place from whence Gabriel (or the angel of the Lord) could come, we do not know whether or not there may be life on Venus."

C. STANLEY.

[This item is also referred to in Notes and News.—Ed.]

IRENÆUS

My "Aunt Sally" is Mr. Cutner's lack of logic and muddled thinking. Irenæus wrote that "after the fortieth and fiftieth [year] it [a man's ability] begins to verge towards elder age, which was our Lord's when he taught, as the Gospel and all the Elders witness." Turning to the Gospel here cited as authoritative (John viii, 57) we learn that the Jews said to Jesus: "Thou art not yet fifty years of age, and has thou seen Abraham?" Irenæus then accepted the Fourth Gospel, which narrates the trial before Pontius Pilate and the Crucifixion, as do the Three Synoptic Gospels, all of which were to Irenæus documents of authority. He also accepted the Epistles of Paul (Irenæus quote accurately a lengthy passage from the Epistle to the Galatians), where the shedding of Christ's blood on the cross is frequently referred to. Irenæus discussed the Eucharist, which is a mystical eating and drinking of Christ's body and blood, and, if he was a bishop, he must have celebrated it. He saw in the death of Jesus a ransom paid to the Devil to rescue mankind. And yet, according to Mr. Cutner, Jesus died an old man, so that his death could have no theological significance nor have been commemorated in a theophagus sacrament.

If we should not credit what Irenæus wrote about himself, why should we believe him when he professed to report an apostolic tradition about the age of Jesus when he died? If nine-tenths of the theological sections in his treatise have been interpolated, why should we accept the rest as authentic? I do not suspect interpolations just because I have a thesis to support. But Mr. Cutner's argument commits him to this arbitrary critical procedure. I am mildly amused to learn that Godfrey Higgins fell into the same absurdities as Mr. Cutner. J. M. Robertson wrote that Higgins's *Anacalypsis* needed checking (cited in B. W. Bacon's *The Fourth Gospel in Research and Debate*, page 405). Doane, in his *Bible Myths*, was misled by Higgins into investing Socrates with a myth supposed to have come from Plato. Years ago I consulted Higgins's book in the British Museum Library and made the astonishing discovery that the source of this alleged myth was an unnamed clergyman who thought he had seen it in one of Plato's writings! A scrupulous critic would have discarded it. Mr. Cutner's irrelevant sneer at my fairly wide knowledge of Catholic theology reflects on him, not on me. How the fact that I have written *Thou Art Peter* and have read all the five volumes of Turmel's *Histoire des Dogmas* proves that I have an "obsession" for a theology in which I have never believed is a mystery. But there! Mr. Cutner must have his fling. So I smile.

A. D. HOWELL SMITH.

TWADDLE?

Mr. C. H. Hammersley quotes from Dr. Chesser's contribution to the *Getting Married* pamphlet that sexual experience can "unite us with the cosmos itself" if the partners have not omitted to obtain a marriage certificate.

Now, what can this twaddle mean? Does "the cosmos" care for legal enactments designed to regulate property and inheritance qualifications? Is Nature a Censorship Board or Watch Committee that smiles on "moral" acts and discountenances "immoral" ones?

That principle misconstrued by religions as "God the Supreme Judge" is love, life, energy; motivation and activation. It is not outside Nature, watching and judging; it is inside it, acting and participating. Any action, conceived and understood aright, can "unite us with the cosmos itself."

S. W. BROOKS.

OBITUARY

It is with sincere regret that the Leicester Secular Society has to announce the death of yet another valued member, Mr. Jack Illife, a well known figure at the Secular Hall for over 60 years. During the whole of his life, Jack was a fighter for the rights of the working class. A founder member of the Communist Party, he had nothing but contempt for either the Church or the Capitalist system. He died suddenly after a short illness on Monday, June 15th. His wish for a Secular Funeral was honoured by his daughter Dorothy, to whom we tender our deepest sympathy.

C.H.H.

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