

The Freethinker

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Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

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IT WAS WITH SURPRISE that I learnt from Mr. G. H. Taylor that my last article in this journal was my 999th—and I was even more surprised when I realised that, like my first, it was about Sir A. Conan Doyle. This is, of course, pure coincidence, and was not in any way planned.

Looking back on the near 40 years which have produced my 1,000 articles—to say nothing of, in addition, innumerable other smaller contributions—is in itself an experience. How has Free-thought progressed since the end of World War I?

Actually, my Free-thought began when, as a boy apprenticed to a firm of process engravers, I was given my first lessons by my employer, an American, who delighted in reading pamphlets by Ingersoll to me. I was never, even as a small boy, religious. I could see no difference between the story of Jesus carried through the air by a Devil and the story of Aladdin carried through the air by the genie of his famous Lamp. I devoured every word of *The Arabian Nights*, and the stories in the Bible seemed to me to be of exactly the same order though, naturally, I could not argue about it. The Ingersoll pamphlets were a "god-send" to me. His *About the Holy Bible* supplied all the arguments I needed at the age of 15, and I have never changed in my opinion that it is a minor masterpiece.

A Great Period

But we young Freethinkers were indeed fortunate at the beginning of the century. The Rationalist Press Association was publishing its splendid Reprints of the most famous Freethinkers of the nineteenth century for sixpence or even less. I bought every one of them as they appeared. In addition, such giants as John M. Robertson, Joseph McCabe, G. W. Foote, and Chapman Cohen were not only writing articles and books, but lecturing all over the country. Those of us who had the privilege of attending their lectures can never forget the intellectual treat they gave us; and, as far as it was possible, I never missed hearing them. Robertson in particular was my favourite, for he had an encyclopædic background of reading and a phenomenal memory which, added to his keen analyses, made him easily one of the finest lecturers we have ever had.

McCabe was lecturing all over the world, mostly dealing with the impact which modern science had on religion. His lectures on Evolution brought him packed audiences and he was unique among Free-thought lecturers not only for his lucidity, but for the way he used lantern slides to illustrate his very fine exposition of what was always a difficult subject. As for G. W. Foote, I can, I think, speak for all who heard him; dignified, a master always of his subject, equally at home on the Bible, on Shakespeare, on literature in general, and on such a subject as Socialism, his oratory and magnificent speaking voice were truly outstanding. In the writing of English as it should be written, Foote could take his place with the best of his contemporaries, and he spoke as he wrote.

Chapman Cohen was also supreme in his own way. He could be, when he wanted, almost as analytical as Robert-

son, but he preferred the lighter touch, a contemptuous disdain for religious twaddle and solemnities which he never tired of exposing. Always his lectures were punctuated with roars of laughter from his audience as he brought in his inimitable sallies of wit and humour. At his best, he could hold his audience with scintillating paradoxes, and then annihilate opponents in the same way.

We young Freethinkers were indeed lucky for, besides these masters, there were others very near them; it was the period of lectures avidly listened to by all classes. I did not confine my attendances only to Free-thought. I went to hear many eminent lecturers—and I must confess some of the best of these were clergymen with special subjects which interested me. They probably reserved their "parsonic" voices for their congregations; outside, they were often brilliant students, learned and withal modest. Not all parsons are fools.

Not only did I read *THE FREETHINKER* and *The Literary Guide* from cover to cover, but Robert Blatchford and his *Clarion* and his team of writers also dominated my reading. Blatchford's *God and My Neighbour*, a scathing analysis of the stupidities of genuine Christianity, brought a stream of replies from many disgruntled Socialists who saw in Jesus Christ the greatest of all Socialists. *The Clarion* was filled with what Jeremiah called their "lamentations," and they brought in the formidable G. K. Chesterton to give Blatchford the final blow. Chesterton was young and cocky, and certain that his verbal paradoxes could easily outwit his middle-aged opponent. He was, let us admit it, a brilliant writer, witty and incisive; but nothing he wrote could shake the case for Free-thought. In the ultimate, Chesterton went over to the Roman Church, and henceforth he could always say, "That is what my Church says," and leave it at that. (Incidentally, I once in these columns crossed swords with him, and thought my reply was a good one. I may have written rather differently had I written it today, however).

Those fourteen years before World War I were, from the Free-thought point of view, really exciting. Foote played havoc with the ignorant pretensions of Dr. Torrey, an evangelist from America, whom he denounced as an incorrigible liar. Dr. Torrey did not have the success of Billy Graham—or his cash. At the same time, the work of the R.P.A. was causing more than concern in all the Churches, who were forced to provide "replies" to rationalistic books, a task which they detested then as now. I read many of these "replies," some in volume form, and many others, pamphlets like those of the Catholic Truth Society. These were by no means negligible, for one of the great counts against the Churches is that they always managed to get brilliant defenders of their outworn creeds and assumptions. Scientists, university professors, doctors, were all roped in "for God and the Church," and very often they put up a clever case.

For years, my week-end evenings were spent in the parks arguing among little knots of people with all sorts

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

In Retrospect

By H. CUTNER

of believers, most of them crude and ignorant. Only rarely did one come along who made me "fight for my life," so to speak. I had three books which seemed to me quite unanswerable—Foote's *Bible Handbook* (literally unsurpassed in discussing with Bible believers), Paine's *Age of Reason* and Blatchford's *God and My Neighbour*—and with the optimism of youth, I thought I could convert if not exactly the world, some part of it. Readers who have tried this business of conversion will no doubt sympathise with me for I had very little success. Foote's book was a lying compilation; Paine had been answered hundreds of times, and Blatchford was just an ignoramus. The Bible was God's Word, and Hell and its followers could never prevail against it. I was "of the Devil."

All the same (and quite without my aid) religion in general and Christianity in particular were receiving some very hard knocks from Freethought in those so different days before World War I. There was some hope for our ideas; and indeed we were (as I have pointed out more than once) *civilising* the Churches. They had to interpret the words of Jesus in a way quite different from that so popular in the days of their fathers. Hell was not, as so vividly described by Father Furniss, a place of Eternal Fire in which unbaptised babies frizzled for ever, accompanied by the unending shrieks of men and women who had not "believed." Nor were Angels the ethereal feminine beings clothed in the lightest of nighties so beautifully illustrated for us in pious stories. There was, in fact, almost no end to the "rationalising" of Bible narratives, and even Jesus felt the pinch. For instance, if he said a good Christian had to *hate* his parents, he only meant that they were to be *loved less* than him, and so on. In truth, Freethought was surely gaining ground.

The two wars and the rise of the radio and TV have in no

small measure changed all that. The Churches have captured the latter, and so are able to put across a worldwide publicity at no cost to themselves which, if we think soberly about it, is staggering. And the worst thing about it is that even if they have not convinced many people, it is because they have become merely apathetic. They do not want Christianity and they do not want Freethought. They do not want, if they can help it, even to think.

In my young days, it was difficult enough to get our message across. It seems to me to be far more difficult these days. I doubt even if we had lecturers like those I have named whether the lure of the radio and TV would not prevail. I often wonder whether the days of ordinary lecturing, which has distinguished our Freethought societies for over 100 years, are not now over. We might have more success with a "social" to bring our members together.

As for myself as I look back upon just over 60 years of Freethought and nearly 40 years writing for it, I can only say I do not regret any day I devoted to it. Apart from lectures and discussions, it has introduced me to a world in literature I might never have discovered if I had remained faithful to religion—a world of fine and noble writers who sought out the truth and fought, and in many cases suffered, for it. Many of them, alas, are forgotten. Some of their books and pamphlets survive, if they do survive at all, in unique copies which may die when we are dead. But some of us like to think that we also have carried the flag of Freethought aloft, that we also have done our little bit in the struggle for truth and liberty. And I salute not only our great commanders, but the unknown, humble soldiers without whose gallant help we could never have made Freethought the great force it still is today.

Paltry Prelates

OSWELL BLAKESTON'S new novel, *Hop Thief* (Blond, 10s. 6d.), is the story of an angry old man. It is, in a way, as if Ionesco had composed a mystery tale while waiting for Godot, or as if Mr. Pooter had doodled a surrealist thriller. Anyway, the book is full of the most unlikeable priests.

To give some idea of Blakeston's humour and of the paltry prelates, here are a few extracts from the story:

"Father John's sermons are too long; and he always begins by saying, 'I'm only going to say a few words . . .' But someone should ask him how long the words are going to be. Father John ought to take lessons in preaching. Uncle Julius wouldn't have attempted to drive an automobile without being instructed. Once he asked a chauffeur how to drive. The man said, 'First you do this;' and Uncle Julius said, 'Yes;' 'And then you do this;' and Uncle Julius said, 'Yes;' 'And then you put the brakes on.' But later Uncle Julius admitted he didn't really know how to drive. He was honest. Whereas Father John says he's like the Bishop, just because the Bishop is also addicted to smarmy smiles."

"When I came downstairs, I found Father Abbot and Father John sitting side by side on the sofa. Father Abbot looks like a man who's always mowing the lawn and has a sore back; but Father John was sitting up straight and telling Ann about a fund for an organ in our church, and he looked more greedy than ever. I pointed out that we'd only just raised funds for a new harmonium. Why did we get a new harmonium if we're going to have an organ? The answer was that one wants both as an organ has to be blown. There are not often the right sort of men in

church to blow the organ!"

"Father John said the Abbot was 'offering' me two rosaries, and one was black and one was pink. They'd be eight shillings each. But I'd imagined the Abbot was going to give me a present. I was taken aback. I told Father John quickly that I'd have to consult Ann; and I mentioned that we hoped to give *him* for Christmas something that stood for a tiny bit of Devon. He seemed bewildered. I expect he was thinking of crinkly biscuits for tea. He is a glutton."

Don Giovanni II

SIGNOR SALBA, an employee of the Fiat Works in Turin, of which the Vatican is the principal shareholder, got quite a shock on his return from work, when he found his wife scantily clad, and seated on the knee of the Dominican father, Don Giovanni Rita, the spiritual director of the young women of Catholic Action!

To be a Catholic is a bad enough misfortune, but to be cuckolded by a priest into the bargain, is to have salt rubbed in the wound, and Signor Salba kicked up a fuss.

The outcome was that the amorous Dominican was removed, and sent off to Genoa.

But alas, he did not go alone. Signora Salba, unable to dispense with his spiritual counsels, abandoned her husband and child, and went after him (26th April).

And they will tell you, nevertheless, that religious principles safeguard the virtue, not only of women, but also of priests.

Taken from the French Freethought paper, *La Calotte*, June, 1959.

Paganism and Christianity

By F. A. RIDLEY

DURING THE PAST two centuries, since the rise of modern Rationalism began to free research from the dead hand of Christian dogma, a virtually new and extremely valuable science has come into existence—the science of Comparative Religion. Thanks to this entirely objective science, now more or less freed from Christian or any other presuppositions, the evolution of religion since prehistoric times can now be traced, if not with complete certainty as yet, at least with some approximation to such. Whilst Christian prejudices continued to dominate scholarship, any such scientific objectivity remained impossible. For Christianity, i.e., the 100 per cent Christianity of the Age of Faith, and not some rationalised modernism which often masquerades as such—had not the slightest inkling of any objective attitude towards the Pagan cults which preceded it. It denounced them as the work of devils, and when resemblances between the faith of the “One True Church” and the cults of demons became too obvious to be denied, these were put down to deliberate plagiarism on the part of the demons. They had, so to speak infringed the copyright of the Church.

Christianity, of course, rose to power on the ruins of Paganism, which it undermined by persistent propaganda during the first three centuries of its existence, and then, after securing the support of the “secular arm” of the Roman Empire as a result of the revolution in the fourth century, proceeded to exterminate its Pagan and monotheistic rivals by physical violence.

In a still officially Christian society like ours, we still tend to see things through Christian spectacles, and far more people have heard of the sporadic—and sometimes imaginary!—persecutions of the Christians by the Pagans before Constantine, than have heard of the more successful, severe and systematic persecution of the Pagans by the victorious Christians from the closing years of the fourth century onwards. That century was the decisive era in the evolution of what had previously been one of many oriental cults into the totalitarian dictator over the West for the next millenium.

What was the Pagan religion like? Here it must be conceded that there has been a good deal of misconception, even in circles with no inclination to take Christianity at its face value. One ought to be careful before supposing that, because the victory of Christianity was—as it undoubtedly was—profoundly reactionary in its ultimate effects, every cult which it suppressed was *ipso facto* of a humanist and progressive character. Classical Paganism was really very much of a mixed grill. It was eclectic and opportunist; rather like modern Hinduism. It was not a persecuting religion, any more than Hinduism is; for unlike Christianity (and Judaism and later on, Islam) it did not worship a jealous god; its gods interchanged their identity with the same facility that they interchanged their goddesses. Classical Paganism included within its ranks, rationalistic philosophies like those of the Stoics, Epicureans and Cynics; oriental cults like that of Isis (the Egyptian “Star of the Sea,” who later bequeathed this title, and much else, to the Virgin Mary); primitive cults like that of the Arval Brothers, which celebrated in Archaic Latin, primitive agricultural rituals which must have originated in lands and ages of savagery. Here again, modern Hinduism presents a similar and simultaneous jumble of contradictory beliefs, ranging

from the monistic metaphysics of Shankara, the Indian Thomas Aquinas, to primitive polytheism and to still more primitive phallic symbols and rituals.

In the case of ancient Roman Paganism, it was no doubt the strong hand of Rome which kept the whole thing going. No doubt also, that lucid and witty Christian master of epigrams, Tertullian (c. 200 A.D.) was correct when he observed that: “It is more dangerous to swear falsely by the genius of Caesar than by that of all the gods put together!” This statement was actually proved empirically when, in the century after that of its author, Caesar deserted to Christianity and then turned his heavy guns against his former fellow-gods, who quickly ceased to be immortal.

At the time Tertullian made his observation, the Pagan cults were still apparently oblivious of the sad fate in store for them (though far sighted Pagans like Celsus were beginning to be alarmed at the rapid growth of Christianity). For an interesting archæological discovery, recently made in Rome, has unearthed the “minutes” (as we may perhaps call them?) of a Pagan liturgy, and a very ancient one, which still continued to be used at this period. This was the curious cult of the Arval Brothers (*Fratres Arvali*), an exclusive aristocratic religious club, which every year celebrated a ritual designed to propitiate the earth goddess (and also Mars, or Marmor as the ritual terms him, the alleged divine parent of Romulus, the founder of Rome) and to procure fertility for the land. In short, a primitive fertility rite celebrated in archaic language; in Latin which must be nearly unintelligible even to a modern classical scholar and may have been already unintelligible in the third century when it was still recited. In 218 A.D., the current “minutes” describe the whole weird process in detail. Prayers were offered to primitive rustic deities and the whole thing ended in a kind of Red Indian war dance. There are detailed instructions for every word and gesture, which no doubt had to be performed without a mistake to ensure efficiency. And this mumbo-jumbo was still solemnly repeated every year in the sophisticated Rome of the third century by members of the aristocracy which included emperors like Nero and Hadrian. This cult—and there seem to have been others like it—affords surely an object lesson in the extreme conservatism of religion.

From the time it took over power at the end of the fourth century, Christianity adopted towards the Pagan cults, a policy of mingled terrorism and demagogy. Where it could make use of them, it assimilated the gods (and goddesses) and many Pagan deities survived in their reincarnated state as Christian Saints. Where the Church could not find any use for them, the cults were either ruthlessly suppressed or were simply allowed to fade away. (The latter fate seems to have befallen the cult of the Arval Brothers). There remained, however, a Pagan party in the state up to the end of the fourth century, and the Temple of Hercules at Ostia (the Port of Rome) was actually reopened as late as 394, during the revolt, supported by the Pagans against the fanatical Christian emperor, Theodosius, who—as I have noted before—was, far more truly than Constantine, really the first Christian emperor. Paganism may have lingered on a century or more after the end of the decisive fourth century before fading away during the Dark Ages.

This Believing World

The "Sunday Times" has discovered "the Bible in bondage", which simply means that the average "layman" is not reading it. It quotes Dom A. Morris as saying that "a spirit of scepticism is still stalking the Western World"—which only shows that Dom Morris is more or less out of touch with people, for it is far more than "a spirit of scepticism," it is downright unbelief. In fact, the Bishops at the last Lambeth Conference deplored the fact that "the Bible and the modern world seem very far apart." And the reason? "The Bible" they sorrowfully complained, "contains the story of a very ancient people with a primitive culture and a pre-scientific view of the universe."

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All this is very pathetic—for bishops and priests for over 1,500 years have insisted that the Bible is a revelation from God, and how can God give us a "pre-scientific" view of the universe? It should always be right in every particular—and now Christians are literally throwing the Precious Word overboard as completely unscientific. The writer of the *Sunday Times* article, Mr. W. R. Todd, won't have this at any price and unctuously asks whether it is we who have not understood the texts, and that therefore properly understood, they may all be all right after all? Of course, the Bible is true in every comma and full stop. How can it be wrong when God Almighty is the author?

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Lively Sarah Jenkins of the "News Chronicle" told us recently that she usually enjoyed nothing more than "a brush between psychiatrists and theologians"—though we can assure her she would enjoy a brush between theologians and Freethinkers far more. However, she heard a Catholic priest and a top Freudian discuss "The Problem of Guilt" before an audience of 120 clergymen and "had a feeling of guilt at not being able to understand Fr. Gilbey on guilt." We are not surprised. In any case when she "counted the number of sleeping clergymen" she felt much happier. The psychiatrists also went to sleep. Fr. Huddleston, did not like a psychiatrist's statement that "one of the most dangerous men in the world is the guilt-ridden social reformer". But what about the "guilt-ridden" or "sin-ridden" religious reformer? Is he not still more dangerous?

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So the Free Churchmen have in Parliament tamely surrendered the fort they have—more or less—held for so long. "Unity" over religious schools has made Tories and Labour joyfully agree that church schools should be now heavily subsidised by the taxpayer so that Roman Catholicism and Anglo-Catholicism can both be taught in State schools, though both sects teach dogmas which can be shown to be nonsense, and a kind of history and science which are constantly blown to pieces in other schools.

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Undenominational Bible teaching was harmful enough because it placed the Bible on a pedestal almost, if not quite, as high as the more credulous and ignorant sects put it; but nothing whatever can be said in favour of the State allowing the fantastic verbiage put out by Rome and the Church of England to be taught as truth in an age of science and discovery. However, Rome has now won its hard fight for cash to teach what they like—and it is difficult to believe that in this it has the full support of both sides of the House. No wonder the same two sides will never, never if they can help it, abolish the archaic Blasphemy Laws—indeed, they cannot now even if they would.

Bing Crosby, one of the most famous actors on the screen and, as a singer, one of the most popular, always loves to portray a priest; and he certainly made a huge success in the film "Going My Way" some years ago. The critics dealing with his latest one, "Say One For Me" in which he again portrays a priest have mostly condemned it not only as rubbish, but as offensive, and in bad taste. We doubt if the popular Bing has ever received such scathing criticism against him. But all the same, it is not against religion that the critics have passed judgment, but against depicting a priest who shouldn't do the things shown on the screen even if they are done in the name of religion. In other words, religion is still "top dog."

Science Front

MARTIAN MOONS

According to a recent report in *The Times*, a Russian scientist, Dr. L. Shklovsky, is advancing the theory that the two moons of Mars are not natural satellites but were put into space by intelligent beings in the distant past.

The speculation that these are artificial moons was, however, put forward some years ago in this country, in fact by none other than Mr. Avro Manhattan in an article, "The Bewildering Mystery of Mars," which appeared in the *Rationalist Annual* of 1953, pages 67-74. This, moreover, was at a time when the idea of artificial satellites would have been scouted by 99% of the people of any civilised country. I regret to say I have not seen any correction in *The Times*, which gave the impression that such a theory was original, and this in spite of the correction having been sent to it.

THE "RADIOACTIVE COCKTAIL"

This is a new form of iodine detector in diagnosing thyroid diseases. The amount of iodine taken up by the gland may give a clue to a cancerous condition or to exophthalmic goitre, thyroid over-activity. In the case of a cancer larger doses of radioactive iodine may destroy the cancer cells. The Americans, incidentally, are experimenting with the "Gamma-ray Scanner," a machine used to trace malignant areas in the body to which cancerous tissue has spread; a photographic film record is taken.

RADIOACTIVE INSECTICIDES

The migrations of flies and other insect pests have been brought under closer study by making the flies radioactive, thus to trace their reappearances. It is now even possible to sterilise some insect pests by radiation. They are then released in an infested area, where their sterility is passed on by mating.

G.H.T.

PENITENTS!

We throw cold ashes on the stair,
We cross the brow, we tell the bead,
We greet the night with Lenten fare,
With bitter beer and bitter bread.

We grist our grain with bloody hands,
We turn our mill with sweat and breath:
We are the men that virtue brands;
In youth we build the house of Death.

We knead our bread with salt and earth;
And deck the cup with bitter herbs;
We crouch above our empty hearth;
We skin our shanks on altar kerbs.

We chant to Holy Misery,
In tone full nasal and devout.
We weep like children when we see
New green upon the alder-shoot.

NEIL TRACY (Canada).

THE FREETHINKER

Hon. Editorial Committee:

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

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

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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.

Inquiries regarding Secular Funeral Services should also be made to the General Secretary, N.S.S.

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.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every weekday, 1 p.m.: G. WOODCOCK. Sunday, 8 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, MILLS and WOOD.

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.

INDOOR

Orpington Humanist Group (Sherry's Restaurant).—Sunday, July 12th, 5.30 p.m.: Miss G. TODD, "Homicide Act, 1957."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, July 12th, 7 p.m.: Professor A. HADDON, "Bacteriological and Central Warfare: its Implications."

Notes and News

MR. G. W. WARNER, Hon. Secretary of Dagenham Branch of the National Secular Society reports another very interesting meeting at his own home (214 Fitzstephen Road, Dagenham) the other week, when Mr. Len Ebury spoke on "Thomas Paine and Secularism." Mr. Ebury in turn reports the enthusiasm of Mr. and Mrs. Warner and their fellow members. As in the neighbouring West Ham and District Branch—whose Hon. Secretary, incidentally, is Mr. F. G. Warner, brother of the above—the friendly atmosphere of a member's home has proved conducive to discussion. And, again as at West Ham, Dagenham Branch has lately attracted Christians to the meetings.

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THE two West Indian branches of the National Secular Society, Fyzabad and San Juan, combine most effectively for pleasure as well as propaganda, and they held their second annual joint outing on Sunday, June 14th. This year the excursion was to Los Iros beach, where the bathing conditions were ideal. We look forward to receiving some promised snaps from our colleagues in Trinidad.

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £233 14s. 5d.; O. Gassman (U.S.A.), £1 1s.; C. Kennard, 2s. 10d.; K. J. Beck, 2s. 6d.; J. Buchanan, 10s.; W.H.D., 2s. 6d.; Anon. 1s.—Total to date, July 3rd, 1959, £235 14s. 3d.

FROM a Singapore colleague, Mr. E. S. Moorthy, come two interesting prospectures of Further Education Courses arranged by the Singapore Council for Adult Education. Both comprise six lectures, the first on "Darwin's Theory of Evolution" by Dr. R. D. Purchon, Professor of Zoology at the University of Malaya, the second on "Religion and Philosophy" by Mr. E. Kamenka, Lecturer in the Department of Philosophy at the same University. Mr. Kamenka's recommended reading list has a noticeable Freethought content, including two works by Bertrand Russell, one by Archibald Robertson, John M. Robertson's *Short History of Freethought*, J. B. Bury's *History of Freedom of Thought* and Freud's *Future of an Illusion*. Dr. Purchon's list, of course, couldn't avoid being Freethinking in tendency.

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A LETTER from a Northwich (Cheshire) reader, Mr. D. Skelton, reminds us that the primitive practice of churching still lingers on. A young married woman he knows, told him that after her son was born, she took him along to see his grandmother. The elderly lady asked if the mother had been churched and when told no, would not allow her to enter the house. So the mother went to the parson, "decently apparelled"—as the Prayer Book demands—gave "humble thanks" to God, paid her 7/6d., and was able to enter the grandmother's house without let or hindrance.

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AS A NUMBER of our eagle-eyed readers were not slow to point out, there was an error in Dr. J. V. Duhig's article, "The Sputnik God" (3/7/59). The Gospels of Matthew and Luke both give the birthplace of Jesus as Bethlehem; neither gives Nazareth as Dr. Duhig suggested. Matthew does, however, say of the wise men, "And when they were come into the house" (2.11) not stable.

Circumstances Alter Cases!

SANDY MAC TAVISH, the proud father of 23 bonnie children, was resting one evening in his armchair, and dreaming of the past, when he heard a knock at the front door. Answering it, Sandy was surprised to see a large Roman Catholic priest, beaming and smiling, and carrying a large package. Before Sandy had time to say "Not today thank you" and close the door, the priest had grabbed his hand and begun to congratulate him on being the father of so many budding Catholics.

He explained to Sandy that he had come from London at the express wish of the Archbishop to present him with a specially-blessed image of the Virgin Mary in recognition of his achievement. Sandy looked puzzled and said he didn't understand, as he was not a Roman Catholic, had never been a Roman Catholic, and did not want to be a Roman Catholic. Slowly, very slowly, it dawned on the priest that Sandy was not one of the faithful.

Realising, then, that his journey had been futile, the priest picked up the bits and pieces of the Blessed Virgin which he had dropped on the ground in his amazement at the terrible news. Recovering, he uttered a "Holy Mary Mother of mine." And remarking "to think I have come all this way from London to visit a sex maniac," slowly made his way back home.

G.A.L.

Catholic Action in Ceylon

By COLIN McCALL

THE APRIL, 1959, issue of *Buddhist Opinion* (161 Galle Road, Colombo 3) provides some authenticated information on the activities of Catholic Action in Ceylon, as well as giving an encouraging indication that Buddhism is not unaware of the menace of Roman Catholicism and is even prepared to fight it. Incidentally it confirms our view that this fight is the primary one in the intellectual arena. Early in 1957, the Venerable Narada Maha Thero wrote to the Prime Minister of Ceylon, drawing attention to the "insidious and anti-national activities" of Catholic Action, referring specifically to its infiltration into "the Army, Navy and the Police on the one side, and into the Daily Press on the other." Subsequently, we learn, a delegation comprising representatives from the leading Buddhist associations on the island, and led by the Venerable Narada Maha Thero, met the Prime Minister and asked him to appoint an impartial commission to investigate the "extra-religious activities of the Catholic Church, and particularly . . . the activities of the Catholic Action movement." The Prime Minister thought nothing would be gained by setting up such a commission, but gave assurance that "he would not allow any individual or organisation to use the Government machinery to discriminate against the Buddhists or to indulge in any anti-national activities."

Despite this assurance—says *Buddhist Opinion*—the activities of Catholic Action continue unabated. Buddhists recently had occasion to protest to the Minister of Labour against a Catholic Actionist Staff Officer in the Government Employment Exchange who for "quite a long time . . . had been using his office for the purpose of discriminating against Buddhist applicants for posts to provide employment for those sent by the Employment Section of the Petition Bureau of the All Saints' Church, Borella." Moreover, he was acting as principal officer in the Catholic Employment Bureau at the same time as being in charge of the Government Employment Exchange. The Minister of Labour, the Hon. T. B. Ilangaratne, said that "This Actionist had flouted every regulation of the Government Employment Exchange and discriminated in favour of those belonging to his faith and against those who did not belong to that faith." When called upon to explain his behaviour, the officer resigned.

Nearly eighty per cent of Army Staff posts in Ceylon are held by Roman Catholics and, in an attempt to gain full control, a Catholic has been put in charge of recruiting. In addition, all five doctors supervising medical examinations of applicants are Catholics. Fortunately, some Government Ministers are not afraid to speak openly against the Vatican threat, and Mr. Philip Gunawardane, Minister of Agriculture and Food, has accused the Roman Catholic hierarchy of indulging in political activities under the cloak of religion and of using the pulpit to whip up Catholic lay opinion against progressive legislation initiated by the Government. Mr. Gunawardane has now made specific allegations against the hierarchy in the magazine, *Apey Lanka*, which, if true—says *Buddhist Opinion*—show that the hierarchy is "certainly guilty of treachery against the people of this country." It hopes that the article will induce the Government to set up an impartial commission to investigate the charges.

Turning to housing: it was found that "about sixty-seven per cent of the allottees" of the first set of Government

flats at Bambalapitiya were Roman Catholics. Most of these lucky people, it was said in "explanation" had "submitted petitions to Our Lady at All Saints' Church, Borella, asking her to obtain housing accommodation for them," and that they had "attended the Novenas regularly." But, as *Buddhist Opinion* puts it, two facts "created the suspicion . . . that it was not purely divine intervention" that was at work. A good many of the lucky Catholics—anxious no doubt to lighten the Virgin's task—had "given false information in their applications and had misled the Housing Department." What is more, it was found that a nun "had acted as the intermediary between the Petition Bureau attached to the All Saints' Church at Borella and certain officers in the Housing Department." "Immediately after this disclosure a Roman Catholic High Official of the Housing Department resigned his post."

As for the Press; preferential treatment for Catholics is exemplified by the *Ceylon Observer*, which published a letter from Mr. C. D. G. de Mel, Honorary Secretary of the Colombo Catholic Diocesan Union in its January 29th issue. Mr. de Mel criticised the Presidential speech of Mr. P. de S. Kularatne to the All-Ceylon Buddhist Congress held in December last year, when the latter reiterated Buddhist demands for a unified system of education. Fair enough! Free criticism is an essential part of a free Press, and *Buddhist Opinion* makes no complaint on that score. It does, however, protest when the *Ceylon Observer* refuses to print a letter in reply to Mr. de Mel. The writer, Mr. H. B. Herat (Editor, I think, of *Buddhist Opinion*) sent the reply on January 29th, and enclosed a stamped-addressed envelope. The letter has neither been printed nor returned, despite reminders.

It is easy to see why. Mr. Herat recalls that Mr. de Mel's plea, "Let us not make guinea pigs of our poor children," was put forward in the early part of the last decade when the Catholic hierarchy opposed the introduction of free education into Ceylon. Yet, thanks to the free education scheme, there is greater literacy in the country, and the Vice-Chancellor of Ceylon University recently stated that thirty-nine per cent of the University students nowadays come from rural areas. The Catholic Church's policy in education, writes Mr. Herat, is "determined by the dictates of the Vatican and not by the larger interests of the country." "A Catholic is first a subject of the Pope and next a citizen of the State," he quotes from the Jesuit *La Civiltà Catholica*; according to one of the Popes, Pius XI, the Church claims divine authority to teach "every nation without exception." Mr. Herat asks Mr. de Mel outright if the education policy of Ceylon should "be shaped to accommodate the doctrines and policies of a foreign power, the Vatican," or if it should "be shaped to serve the needs of the majority of the people of this country?" The censorship of this letter by the *Ceylon Observer* might, of course, have deprived us of a devastating rejoinder from Mr. de Mel, though I beg leave to doubt it. Anyway, there is nothing to stop him writing to his friends on the *Observer* urging them to print Mr. Herat's criticism so that the rejoinder may appear. But that, we know, is not the Catholic way.

Ceylon, alas, is having to learn for itself the Catholic way. It is good to know that at least some Buddhists are

alive to the danger and are urging their fellows to awake. The fight against Rome is an international one; that is why I am pleased to publicise the work of *Buddhist Opinion*, its Editor, and its supporters.

Christian Peace

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

(concluded from page 211)

MOST OF THE more active Christian opposition of peace comes from the Roman and Eastern Orthodox sects and a few equally primitive Protestant groups. Among Christians, the peacemakers are a small minority, and they weaken their case by claiming that their work for peace is inspired by the same religion that inspires the majority to factious moral judgments and crusades; for this tends to create the dangerous delusion that even the Christianity of the Roman hierarchy and the hillbilly fundamentalists has a peacemaking potential.

In general, the peace Christianity offers is a limited peace to be confined within the Christian communion or at most to be extended only to those who are willing to give the Church a position of special privilege in the social order: it is the "peace on earth to men of good will" which the late Pope used to proclaim in his much publicised "pleas for peace." Even the most peace-loving Christian is likely to assume that the only way to get world-wide peace is to convert all the world to Christianity; the idea of a world in which people of many religions and people of no religion live together in peace and harmony and enjoy equal rights and privileges is foreign to Christian thought.

Christians contend that the Christian god is not only their god, but is the god of all the people in the world, even of those who do not particularly want a god. They insist, therefore, that anyone who refuses to worship their god is not merely being different, he is being bad, and so they divide humanity into two potentially hostile groups, the sinners and the saints. This segmentation of mankind is of itself a source of contention, and it makes it impossible for Christianity to exert a consistent influence for peace and harmony among men; for the criteria which distinguish the saint from the sinner have no relevance to human relations on earth. One becomes a Christian only by formal acceptance of the sacrificial mediation of the eponymous Christ, not by promising to be a more peaceful citizen of the world, not by renouncing war. So one can be intolerant and quarrelsome and be a good Christian or one may spend one's life promoting peace and harmony in the family of man and remain a sinner. As a matter of fact, it is rather easier for the warmonger than for the peacemaker to be a Christian, for the latter, in order to justify his pacifism, must ignore or reject much of the holy scriptures and traditions of his religion; that is, he must become more or less heretical—which in older times might have got him hanged and in these times may get him investigated by a Congressional committee of more orthodox Christians.

So on the whole, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the influence of Christianity is rather more likely to create dissension and strife than to promote peace and harmony in the world. And there seems to be little hope that this situation will change much; for the followers of the "Prince of Peace" are inclined to picture human existence as a continuous battle between the saints and the sinners, a struggle in which there can be no "appeasement" of the sinners by the saints. The Church, therefore, has never had a practical programme for the attainment of peace in this world; it promises individual, not social salvation; peace

and happiness in another world, not on earth. So most Christians do not concern themselves about getting peace in the here and now; they rely almost exclusively on hope—and frequent prayers—that their god will somehow do this job for them.

Paradoxically, the more exacting Christians do not apprehend that the methods their god will use in establishing peace will be particularly peaceful, or will require any conciliatory efforts or any increase in tolerance on their part. Rather they conceive that peace will come only when those who refuse to worship that god will be eliminated, perhaps as some freely predict, in one colossal Armageddon which only the most meticulous Christians will survive.

So, on the whole, one can hardly avoid the conclusion that one of the more formidable obstacles to the establishment of international peace is the divisive influence of Christianity.

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CORRESPONDENCE

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Dr. J. V. DUHIG recently received the following letter from a young lady:

"Being a zoology student and having read your article entitled 'The Character of God,' I should be interested to know what improvements you would make on the human body to increase its efficiency." Dr. Duhig replied:

"In reply to your request, I have to say that a complete reply could be found only in the 20-volume encyclopædias of Medicine, Surgery, Pathology and Diseases of the special senses, which would take you ten years to read. World-wide illness, though, is patent proof of human inefficiency. I can mention only a few of the obvious defects.

"The embryological development of the four-chambered heart and the connection of the systemic and pulmonary circulations are very frequently defective: a Toronto lady pathologist, whose name I forget, has written the standard work on this and lists 93 possible congenital malformations of the heart and great vessels. An engine with 93 possible breakdowns in construction does not strike me as efficient. The coronary and intracranial circulations are very poorly designed. The monthly female sex cycle is not only disgusting; it is always breaking down. Parturition, until recently, resulted in an appalling death rate of mothers and babies, and still does in theocracies like Quebec and Spain, in India, and so on. Decalcification of bones in advancing age very often results in fractured hips, needing up to nine months of immobilisation in a frame: no engineer would build a bridge as bad as that to take stresses. The notoriously poor resistance of humans to viruses, bacteria, protozoan and metaxoan, ecto- and endo-parasites does not suggest to me efficient planning of the R.E. System or of body tissues generally. In this city [Brisbane] today there are probably 5,000 acutely ill people and as many as 10,000 uselessly senile and mental defectives, and thousands of incurables: bodies as poor as that do not seem to me to be well-designed. Human skill, not only without divine help but in face of obstruction of its agents, is responsible for protection against Poliomyelitis, Typhoid, Cholera, Yellow Fever, Diphtheria, Pertussis, Tetanus, Tuberculosis, Influenza, without which millions would die or be ill for long periods. Formerly human bodies were hopelessly inefficient in respect of primary resistance against all this.

"I hope I have said enough to convince you that a complete answer to your request for the improvements I would make in the human body would be like asking me to rebuild a bombed-out 10-story building. Such a request would involve at least a précis of all that has been written on embryological, general and special Pathology. The number of doctors in your country is surely sufficient evidence that the human body is a very ramshackle affair, and 15,000 autopsies have convinced me of that truth. If you are still not convinced and want more information, I can supply it, provided you do not overstep the bounds of reasonable proportion; being busy, I cannot engage in an unlimited (and dreary) correspondence or waste time on idle

—NEXT WEEK—

THE NEED FOR FREETHOUGHT

By Dr. J. V. DUHIG

inquirers; I answer you solely because you are a science student and likely therefore to make a good atheist. J. V. DUHIG."

MR. CUTNER ON "RECORDS IN CLAY"

Mr. Cutner's reactions to Mr. J. A. Thompson's pamphlet illustrate the limitations of his archaeological knowledge and his bias for illogical dogmatism in support of his prejudices. One is not obliged to follow Mr. Thompson's Fundamentalism. Abraham may be wholly mythical, or he may, as I think, be a historical figure, or a fusion of two historical figures, in largely mythical contexts. But if the social life of Palestine 1500—1400 B.C. is described in the Nazu tablets, this fact surely argues that the story of Abraham we read in Genesis is, at least in its basic features, a product of approximately the same age as that of the tablet-writers. We must not forget that social customs may persist for centuries in the same environment—this should make us cautious in dating. The Nazu tablets neither prove nor disprove the historicity of Abraham.

But Mr. Cutner's thesis is fantastic. He holds, though no critic of any importance would support him, that Genesis was composed about 300 B.C., and the rest of the Old Testament then or still later. Incidentally, we may note that nearly all critics have dissected Genesis into at least three documents, separated in origin by centuries, the earliest written long before 300 B.C. This date is subsequent to the death of Alexander the Great, whose conquests so greatly transformed the Middle East. Had the Abraham saga been first shaped as late as this, it would have been coloured by the social life of post-Alexandrine times. But Mr. Cutner imagines rummaging about for ancient tablets hardly accessible, even if known to exist at all, in order to pen a plausible forgery.

If Mr. Cutner has guessed rightly the forger's secret, this very remarkable Jew must have had readers well acquainted with the Nazu tablets, and presumably other antique records, who were alert to detect anachronisms. The original tablets must have long disappeared. If copies of them had been made before and after the foundation of the kingdoms of Samaria and Jerusalem, and during their existence, the Hebrews must have been for centuries a highly literate people, capable of producing histories as well as collections of folklore.

The "blessing" of Jacob is addressed to tribes, not men, as a careful study of the text shows. A Zodiacal interpretation might be forced on a few details. But the "blessing" as a whole cannot be given such an interpretation. Simeon and Levi are cursed for massacring the inhabitants of a town. Therefore God will "divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel." This is said to explain the dispersal of two tribes. There is no sign of the Zodiac here.

Mr. Cutner thinks that until a very late period all writings of the Palestinians were cut in stone or clay. Has he ever heard of the Samaritan and Lachish potsherds, which were pen-inscribed? The Dead Sea Scrolls, written mostly on prepared skins, belong to a period extending from a century, or a little more, before the Christian era to a century, or less, later. But Allegro, in his work on these scrolls, mentions a fragment of inscribed papyrus, which experts attribute to the 8th century B.C., or at any rate, earlier than the Lachish potsherds (6th century B.C.).

Mr. Cutner's pet fancy, not accepted by any Semitic scholar, is that Hebrew is an artificial language, concocted (why?) by mystery-mongering priests. But whatever their motives, the use of Aramaic Targum in synagogues to explain the meaning of the Hebrew scriptures to the many Jews who no longer spoke Hebrew would seem to have rendered the alleged mystifying procedure vain. Does Mr. Cutner know that the Hebrew of the Old Testament is essentially the same as the Hebrew of the Samaritan and Lachish potsherds, of the Siloam inscription, of a number of seals (one found at Megitto reads "Shema, servant of Jeroboam"), and of the Moabite Stone (Moabite was as like Hebrew as one English dialect is like another). These objects carry no priestly texts, but were inscribed to be read by all who could read.

Several of the Ras Shamra tablets show a language so closely resembling Hebrew that a Jewish friend of mine was able to understand them simply from his great knowledge of Hebrew. That tables produced so far to the north of Syria do not mention Moses and Joshua is not surprising; there was no motive for mentioning them. Moses is said to have died outside Palestine, and the date of Joshua's campaigns is quite uncertain. The Ras Shamra tablets are irrelevant to the historicity question.

A. D. HOWELL SMITH.

RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION

Your correspondent D. Penketh (issued June 5th) misuses words when he calls me an "extremist." In my view the latter are willing to go beyond the Parliamentary law in pursuit of their aims. Nothing that I have suggested can surely be construed as coming into that category and if anyone has so construed

it they can forget it immediately because I have nothing of that kind in mind at all.

I neither wish to "ignore" nor to "ban" any religious influence which is prepared to observe the rules of free democracy and to abstain from trying to operate some form of monopolistic propagandist influence.

The point is that I myself am a teacher and I see firsthand how the ministers of religion are trying to invade the schools as they have never been invaded before. As the churches empty of parents so the frustrated propagandists of religion are turning their questing attentions more and more to the rising generations. Thus we have special weekly services, now in being, at which a minister officiates by praying and giving a little sermon—where before there was only the usual daily routine of saying the "Lord's Prayer" and singing two verses of a hymn or psalm.

The thing to realise is that whilst Mr. Penketh is quietly acquiescing to what goes on in schools the religious people are just as quietly but ever so much more surely tightening their grip on the official means of reaching the minds of the citizens of the future. The end is obvious enough. They want a religious totalitarianism in which it will be illegal to question or criticise the dogmas of the Christian outlook.

Now if we believe that the promotion of a truly scientific outlook is necessary for the future welfare of the human race it is for us to act to prevent their plans succeeding. All I ask is that each one of us uses each opportunity which comes along to lodge protests at what is happening in the schools and to demonstrate whatever objections we have to what is going on. After all we cannot expect people to know what is in our minds unless we act so that they know we have something there.

E. G. MACFARLANE.

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