

The Freethinker

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WHAT IS, PERHAPS, the most interesting and significant admission made in recent years by any organised Christian Church, has just been made by a Commission of Enquiry set up by the Church of England. For this Commission has officially recommended that suicide, hitherto regarded as a "sin" by Christian theology and as a "crime" by English Law, shall cease to be a crime in the eyes of the law though, we presume it will still remain a "sin" in the eyes of God — or the Church! However, this notable, if belated, decision certainly represents an improvement upon the previous ecclesiastical attitude, and rationalists can only welcome it. It is true that suicide will still remain a "sin," but since the punishment for "sin" (unlike crime) is hypothetical and in any case *post mortem*, it falls outside the terms of reference of this paper. In which connection, one recalls the weighty observation of a once-famous Oxford don (The Rev. Jowett of Balliol College) to the effect that the legal punishment for crime is actually more to be feared than the theological punishment for a "sin." Because, as Jowett (himself a clergyman of the Church of England) phrased it: "Whilst a bishop can only say 'you be damned,' when a judge says 'hang him,' he is hanged."

Suicide and the Law

It was, I think, the late Belfort Bax who once defined the English criminal law as 50% religious superstition and 50% naked class interest — a definition which, whatever its present relevancy, was quite to the point at the time it was first uttered. Actually, the English law respecting suicide, affords as good an example as any of the "religious superstition" of which he complained; for the still current legal theory on this particular subject represents, surely, one of the most "Alice in Wonderland" bits of legal casuistry to be found anywhere. Under the existing English law, suicide is only a crime if it fails; if it succeeds, it becomes the action of a lunatic. Though why it should be criminal to fail and insane to succeed in suicide (or in anything else) only the Lord — or the Lord Chancellor — knows. The famous Dickensian formula "The law is a ass," appears still to be quite relevant in, at least, that department of our criminal jurisprudence.

Christianity and Suicide

As Lecky was perhaps the first historian of ideas to indicate in any detail, the victory of Christianity in the 4th century led directly to vast, indeed revolutionary, changes in not only the celestial sphere of theology, but more concretely in the terrestrial sphere of morals and, in close connection therewith, legal theory and practice. The famous advice given by a Christian bishop of this period to a barbarian king whom he was baptising ("Worship everything that you have burnt, and burn everything that you have worshipped") was also true in the closely related moral and legal spheres. A host of practices which, whether endorsed or not by classical ethics in its Pagan hey-day, were at least tolerated by the public law of the Roman

Empire prior to the victory of Christianity at the end of the 4th Century, were henceforth peremptorily forbidden by the Christian Empire. Forbidden also by its Christian German successors under the influence of the new Oriental faith.

This ethical transformation has remained substantially unaltered down to recent times. Divorce and homosexuality for example, both legal in Pagan Rome, were forthwith made illegal, as they have remained ever since. In most of such cases, Christian ethics were reflected in the criminal law of Christian states; such social practices as abortion and homosexuality still remain listed as criminal acts in most modern states where Chris-

tian influence is still potent. Suicide, the legal *felo de se*, represents a leading example of this class of newly created "crime" transposed into such solely by the epoch-making Christian revolution (or more accurately, counter-revolution) of the 4th century — beyond any question the most decisive era in European history prior to the Industrial Revolution. For, in Pagan society, suicide was not only perfectly legal, but was, it would appear, regarded in some cases at least, as a meritorious act of high moral courage. Many famous characters in classical annals eventually died by their own hand. One can find details of quite a number, gravely recorded in such famous classical Greek and Roman authors as Tacitus, Plutarch and the like. There appears to be overwhelming evidence that classical Pagan ethics saw nothing either socially harmful or personally criminal in a voluntary self-chosen death. And there is no record that the minutely defined Greek and Roman criminal law ever took any official cognisance of it as a crime or even as a reprehensible anti-social action. In Pagan ethics, a man's life began at the will of his parents and could be ended at the will of the individual concerned. Modern Secularist ethics increasingly tend toward this point of view in respect to both planned birth and death.

Sin and Crime

Christianity regarded the whole matter very differently. For Christianity was theocentric; what ultimately counted was what God thought about any particular habit. Hence, wherever Christianity became and remained powerful, the legal concept of *crime* became effectively subordinated to the theological concept of *sin*. A sin in the eyes of God — or the Church — became in time a legal crime, to be enforced, where necessary, with the full rigour of the criminal law. The supreme example of such, lay in the conversion of free opinion on religious matters (hitherto universally recognised and practised in the Pagan Roman Empire) into the inexpiable crime of heresy. This remained, for the duration of the Dark and Middle Ages, the most appalling of all sins and the most savagely punished of all crimes. Homosexuality represents another example of the same process. As regards suicide, even the Inquisition could not burn alive the successful suicide! That had to be left to Hellfire! But it could and did

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

Christianity and Suicide

By F. A. RIDLEY

declare suicide to be the act of a criminal lunatic, who was to be buried outside consecrated ground with, in the Ages of Faith, actions of revolting barbarity such as driving a stake through the corpse. In short, for 15 centuries, suicide has been a major sin in the eyes of the Church and, accordingly, a crime in the eyes of the law wherever Christian influence prevailed. Belfort Bax's dictum of 50% religious superstition, seems to be an understatement in the case of the existing English law towards suicide; the only criminal act that a lunatic can apparently commit.

We must, we repeat, congratulate the Church of England

Commission on a decision in accord with secularist principles. For here, secularist principles, which are those fundamental to modern civilisation, obviously demand the complete separation of sin from crime. Sin is a matter solely for the believer. Unlike crime, it has no relevance to the community at large. We hope to see the law on suicide soon amended, to remove this imaginary crime from the statute book. And the sooner the Church of England — and the criminal law — extend the same principle to other sins (e.g., homosexuality and blasphemy) the better we, as Secularists, shall be pleased.

Religion and Politics in Eastern Nigeria

By A. N. EZEABASILI

ELECTIONS TO THE Federal House of Representatives in Eastern Nigeria are more than a contest between two rival political parties—the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons, and the Action Group; they are a battle between Roman Catholics and Protestants. It is not that the religious groups put up candidates to contest on their platforms. It works simply like this: If the N.C.N.C. puts up a Protestant candidate in a constituency in which the Catholics exert greater influence, that party is sure to lose the seat since, almost invariably, the Catholic members of the party will either vote for a Catholic candidate or refrain from voting altogether.

Onitsha is the seat of religious politics in Eastern Nigeria. It is also the headquarters of both the Catholic and Anglican Primates. The Catholics under Archbishop Heerey are very confident of their massive numbers, whilst the Protestants, mostly Anglicans, fight under the banner of the Anglican Archbishop on the Niger, Bishop Patterson, backed by their wealthy professional men.

Religious politics started as far back as 1951 mainly with the Catholic Church, the Protestants joining only comparatively recently. In that year, Mazi Mbonu Ojike, M.Sc., a militant Rationalist, was defeated in a general election through Catholic propaganda. In his "Week-end Catechism" appearing regularly in the influential *West African Pilot*, he had devoted himself to stinging lampoons against the Catholic mission; exposing the hypocrisy of clerical celibacy. He even cited instances of scandal for which, most surprisingly enough, no libel actions ensued! But, Irish priests invaded Mazi Ojike's constituency begging the support of even pagans; threatening Catholics with instant excommunication if they voted for Mazi Ojike. As a result of this, the Mazi was defeated by a single vote cast in favour of a pagan chieftain who stood as an independent and who did not even know how to spell his name. This was acclaimed in Catholic circles as a victory for the Holy Ghost.

Then the government became alarmed at the increasing application for grants for more schools and colleges from the Roman Catholics whilst comparatively little went to other denominations and, rather than encourage one denomination at the expense of the others, it sought to grant financial aid to clan authorities to build community schools where there would be no religious discrimination. Hitherto, the British authorities had handed over education to missionaries (voluntary agencies).

Bishop Heerey somehow got to know how the wind was blowing in the Cabinet. Once more Irish priests swarmed into the countryside like an army of locusts descending on a rice field, and it was alleged that the Minister of Education, Mr. I. Umo Akpabio, being a Protestant was seeking to use his position to advance the Protestant cause. It

worked miraculously, and any Catholic legislator who was worthy of his salt rallied to Bishop Heerey's aid; even Mr. B. C. Okwu, who was supposed to be the Government Chief Whip, rose in the House to declare that he owed loyalty to his Catholic religion before any other earthly organisation. Then, to the utter surprise of the Government, he opposed the Bill.

Chaos and confusion reigned in the region. The Free Primary Education Scheme collapsed, the county schools flopped, the pagans had been persuaded not to ask for Godless education. Earlier, Bishop Heerey had declared that education was the sole responsibility of the Church, meaning, of course, the Catholic Church.

Then the Regional Premier, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, in a speech over the regional transmitter, succeeded in cooling people's tempers. At this same period he was harrassed from all sides, from the river chiefs who sent delegations over their treaty with Queen Victoria; from Onitsha his home town, where the struggle for supremacy between Onitsha-Ibos and non-Onitsha Ibos was getting out of hand — to support the claim by non-Onitsha Ibos to equal representation in the Town Council would mean incurring the wrath of the traditional *Ndichies* (elderly nobles) who had conferred on him the much coveted title of "*Ogbuefi nnanyelugo, onyeogadlilima*." ("the great man whose father gave the plumes of glory and for whom things will always be good") from the Parliamentary Opposition who were demanding a Royal Commission on his African Continental Bank. The Foster-Sutton Commission which was set up resulted in something like disgrace for the Premier and, as a face-saving device, his dissolution of the House of Assembly at Enugu.

His party being returned to power and he himself smarting from the Foster-Sutton Commission, he was the last person on earth to face another crisis. Accordingly, in order to appease the Catholics, he appointed a Catholic as his Minister of Education and removed the Protestant (and protesting) Umo Akpabio to another ministry. Archbishop Heerey must have been chanting "Nunc Dimitis" when the news came that his militant Mr. B. C. Okwu had been appointed Education Minister. (It is sad to reflect Mazi Ojike died just before all this.)

The pagans who constitute the greater bulk of the electorate choose to remain neutral unless one party steps on them, as when at Umuchu the Catholics, after a priest had preached about juju, rushed to the shrine of the great *Uchu*, handled him in a most disrespectful manner in which they broke his neck, and carried him triumphantly to "the house of the white man's god." On hearing this account from the high priest, the pagans were enraged and their first impulse was to march into the Church that Sunday

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Ring-a-Ring-a-Rosary

By COLIN McCALL

THAT STAUNCH, BUT RATHER NAIVE Maltese monthly so aptly named, *The Faith*, reminds me what I was in grave peril of forgetting, that October was "Rosary Month." I trust that all our Catholic readers remembered what I did not, that they are bound to say the rosary every day. If they forgot, too, they had better get along smartly to confession and accept their penance of "Hail Marys" with a good grace. Now, back to *The Faith*. "There have been three principal revelations of the Blessed Mother which, more than all others, have influenced the daily life of the Faithful," it tells us. The first was the revelation of the rosary to St. Dominic; the second — a "series" this — to St. Bernadette at Lourdes; and the third to Lucy at Fatima. The rosary featured in the last two, as in the first revelation which, with disarming frankness, *The Faith* admits is "historically obscure."

"Today," it goes on, "the faithful do not know what the heresy of Albigensianism was, but they all carry rosaries with them wherever they go. The rosary triumphed over that heresy and can triumph over all heresies." And so, farewell to frankness! Joseph McCabe remarked on the absence of a work in English on "this most shameful chapter in the Middle Ages" and "the incredible meanness with which Catholic writers defend it" (*A Rationalist Encyclopaedia*). The Church makes sure that "the faithful do not know what the heresy of Albigensianism was," but I can't believe that the author of the article in *The Faith*, Father James J. Lynch, S.J., is quite so ignorant. And his assertion that "The rosary triumphed over that heresy," cannot be *unconscious* hypocrisy.

Father Lynch can no longer plead lack of a book in English. There is Edmond Holmes's *The Holy Heretics* in the Thinker's Library. Presumably he can read French, too, and the six volumes on *Innocent III* by the liberal Catholic historian, Professor Luchaire, should not have escaped his ken. For lesser mortals, McCabe translated relevant passages from the *Historia Albigensium* in Bouquet's *Receuil*, XIX), and here is the account of the Crusaders' arrival at Béziers:—

They entered the city of Béziers and, in spite of the resistance of the inhabitants, they wrought the greatest slaughter of men and women that was ever known. Neither old nor young were spared, and even the babes in arms were killed. All who could had taken refuge in the Church of St. Mary Magdalene, and they were all slaughtered.

(*The Testament of Christian Civilization*, p.163)

Whether or not they were slaughtered with rosary beads, I cannot say with certainty, but I personally rather doubt it. So, too, did Gibbon when he referred to "the bloody crusade against the Albigeois." I cannot prevent Father Lynch from believing in a rosary conversion if he likes — and probably he would like to, particularly as the crusade was ordered by "the greatest of the Popes" — but I don't think my scepticism will surprise him.

If it does, I can always retort that *he* surprises *me*. Explicitly aware that "the faithful do not know what the Albigensianism heresy was," he yet misses this opportunity for enlightening them. He could at least have told them that, while the great bulk of the population of the principality of Toulouse lived ordinary lives, the initiated were essentially ascetic, practising celibacy and fasting. He could have pointed out that asceticism followed naturally from their dualistic belief that the body was the creation of the Devil, not God. He might even have mentioned their rejection of the Incarnation. I realise, of course, that this would have prompted questions, but I cannot

doubt Father Lynch's Jesuitical ability to deal with them all — to the greater glory of God.

Now to Father Lynch's second revelation — perhaps to his relief also, for he is on *slightly* stronger ground. At least Bernadette had a rosary, even if it is "historically obscure" whether the Blessed Mother did! Not that the Father doubts this for one moment. She definitely must have had one because Bernadette said so: "As Bernadette said the rosary, the Blessed Mother passed her own beads through her fingers." Father Lynch then quotes at some length from Leo XIII's observations on the rosary, including the rather arrogant assumption (even for a Pope) that, "It is impossible to say how pleasing and gratifying to her [i.e., the B.V.M.] it is when we greet her with the angelic salutation, 'full of grace'; and, in repeating it, fashion these words of praise into ritual crowns for her."

Thirdly, Fatima; "where Our Lady made two requests: do penance, and say the rosary." Where, in the absurdly calculated Catholic way, she told Lucy: "I promise to help at the hour of death, with the graces needed for salvation, whoever, on the First Saturday of five consecutive months, shall confess and receive Holy Communion, recite five decades of the rosary and keep me company for 15 minutes while meditating on the mysteries of the rosary . . ."

I know it is impossible to convince Father Lynch and the faithful (whether or not they know what the Albigensian heresy was!) that these words just don't ring true, even assuming that the Queen of Heaven would make a special landing at Fatima in the first place. If this type of message qualifies as a revelation, Father Lynch doesn't set his standards very high. "Will Francisco go to Heaven?" Lucy asked the B.V.M. "Yes, he, too, will go to heaven, but first he must recite many rosaries," was the breathtaking reply. Of course, as long as the Mother of God limits her earthly social life to the company of neurotics and ignoramuses, I don't suppose we should really expect stimulating dialogue, but Father Lynch might give us something a little more civilised than this, even if it means leaving out Our Lady as well as Lucy.

Some compensation for the reader does, however, come later, in the form of humour. And it is none the worse for being unconscious. "How is it that a simple prayer, the Hail Mary, repeated over and over again, has such power?" asks Father Lynch. To explain (I use the word loosely) he recounts the first time this "angelic salutation" was spoken — by the Archangel Gabriel. The world was then "about to be changed because something was about to happen," he was sagely informed, and "A moment later Mary became the Mother of God. Jesus was within her. Her destiny was fulfilled." This delicate situation is Father Lynch's cue for a typical Catholic trill that bears repetition: "A most pure vessel of election, because of the Immaculate Conception, a plentitude of grace filled her being, forming the Divine Child within her and making her the perfect image of the Divine Child; she was the Mirror of Justice. She became the Tower of David, housing within herself the Son of David, the King of Kings. She became the Tower of Ivory, exquisitely wrought, and sealed within her was the heavenly perfume that would overcome the corruption and stench of the universe. She was the Mystical Rose, given to the world by God as a sign of his love. She was the Seat of Wisdom, the throne of the Word."

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This Believing World

According to the "Daily Express" a ghost went off the other day quite disgusted. Nobody took any notice of it though, dressed all in white, it appeared in full view in Cambridge. The spook was actually "organised" by a "psychic researcher," and at least 80 people saw it on each of six evenings. That it was so completely ignored can only be explained by the fact that it was not a real ghost. Real ghosts *always* are noticed because they can draw attention to themselves. So we suggest to Cambridge's psychical expert that he obtains a real spook at once, and tries his experiments again. Any of our psychic journals can call up a spirit from the mighty deep by a wave of the hand — or can they?

★

In an interview reported in the "Daily Mail," the Archbishop of Canterbury gleefully admitted that the Church of England, under its No. 1 share buyer, Sir M. T. Eve, "increased its income by many millions of pounds" — in striking contrast to its Founder who had nowhere to lay his head (sometimes). In five years, successful share-pushing had made £8,000,000 go up to £13,217,000 — not at all a bad deal. When the Archbishop was asked where he drew the line — "gambling" with shares or "gambling" say, with Premium Bonds, he said he didn't know, as "Nobody tells me anything." He could not even explain why a line was drawn against buying or gambling with, Brewery shares.

★

Eventually, however, Dr. Fisher said that perhaps it was because Brewery shares were not a very good buy. But is not the real reason because the Church has always frowned on "drinking," on the "theatre," on "card-playing," and the like? Is it not a fact that there are still good earnest Christians who look upon a pack of cards as something belonging to the Devil, who would never go to a theatre, or sing anything else but a hymn on a Sunday?

★

Only the other day a vicar was advising his flock to boycott any shop that had the blasphemy to keep open on a Sunday — though he must have known that according to the Bible, Sunday is the *first* day of the week, and certainly was not considered holy. All the same, we cannot help wondering whether the Church would *give away* all its Brewery shares if they had any, when they were making a handsome profit.

★

The Rev. Donald Soper must have been most uncomfortable when, in a discussion with a Roman- and an Anglo-Catholic, he had to say what he thought of the Virgin Mary. This discussion was in the "About Religion" programme on ITV the other Sunday, and Dr. Soper found it very difficult to follow his fellow Christians in their almost complete belief in miracles and the supernatural. The Roman Catholic priest, no doubt supported by the Anglican, insisted that Mary was the *centre* of Christian faith, while Dr. Soper claimed the centre was "our Lord." All three, however, seemed quite sure that the Virgin was still in Heaven, probably filling up her spare time interceding for sinners. The discussion was a beautiful example, not only of sheer fatuity, but of sheer credulity.

★

Attempts are always being made to bring Christians together in what is facetiously called "Unity" which, in England, only means getting Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, and the rest to come into the fold of the Church of England which, in turn, is hopelessly divided into almost as many sects as the Nonconformists. How can a stern

and gloomy Calvinist, for example believe in a Church which is divided — is it "Low" or "High" or fully Catholic except for a belief in the Pope? And apart from these, there are members of the C. of E. who do not believe in miracles or the Virgin Birth, or even in the Resurrection.

★

At the moment, we are informed that talks between the Free Churches and the Church of England "have lost momentum," and "immediately to attempt corporate union at the present juncture would not be timely." As a matter of fact, it never was "timely" at any time in the history of Christianity. The early history of the Church is packed with schisms and downright feuds blessed even with murder. There is only one way in which the Christian Church can become unified. It is to kill off all heretics, disbelievers, and nonconformists. There is no other way.

RELIGION & POLITICS IN E. NIGERIA

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morning and take revenge. Later, wiser counsel prevailed, and they decided to allow *Uchu* to take vengeance on the Christians for their sacrilege; they expected that the Catholics would die to the last person. Two weeks passed with nothing happening and they went to court with the Christians. The presiding magistrate allowed heavy damages against the Christians. The priest denied instigating the Catholics into this outrageous act: he had asked the Catholics to remove the juju inside *their own* houses and *not* the juju belonging to other people.

The Protestants, seeing their influential ministers repelled by Catholics, have launched counter-strokes. The other day I had a letter from home complaining of a "savage Anglican onslaught" and calling on me to join the crusade on the Catholic side. (I, however, no longer follow the faith into which I was born). In one Catholic stronghold, the catechist was accused by the church committee of (1) selling Catholic plans for the election to the Anglicans (2) eating "night dogs," that is, of going about in the middle of the night when no one would see him to accept roasted dogs and money from Anglican candidates in order to help them catch as many votes as possible from Catholics.

The N.C.N.C. secretary at Onitsha, Mr. Amechi, strongly condemned religious politics within the party. There is only one Catholic politician who is trying to bring sanity to both Catholics and Protestants. He is Hon. F. U. Mbakogu of the House of Representatives in Lagos. He appealed to both sides to remember that their religious affiliations were not so much from conviction as from (1) the first mission to establish in their village (2) chances of economic progress. Heavy bribery, accusations and counter-accusations of witchcraft and poisoning go on amidst exhortations of the Faithful to "vote for honest and God-fearing men."

RING-A-RING-A-ROSARY

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I don't expect you to understand all that, but you will get the idea that Father Lynch thinks the Virgin Mary was quite a woman. And you will be right. To be sure, the imagery is rather confusing. Mary is successively a vessel (tonnage not specified), an image of her own child, a mirror, two towers (one of David, one of Ivory), a rose, a seat and a throne. And inside one or all of these was housed the Son of David, and was sealed "the heavenly perfume." etc. Rather anticlimactically — and rather unnecessarily, surely — Father Lynch then tells us, "She was different . . ."

THE FREETHINKER

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Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (The Mound).—Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. CRONAN and MURRAY.

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.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, CORSAIR, SMITH, etc. Sunday, 8 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, MILLS, SMITH, etc.

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.: Sunday, 6.30 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Marble Arch).—Meetings every Sunday, from 4 p.m.: Messrs. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER, C. E. WOOD and D. TRIBE.

INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Midland Institute Cinema, Paradise Street) Sunday, November 8th, 6.45 p.m.: ROY POWE, "Determinism — its Strength and Weaknesses."

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics Institute) Lectures every Sunday, 7 p.m.

Central London Branch N.S.S. ("The City of Hereford" Blandford Place, W.1.) Sunday, November 8th, 7.15 p.m.: F. MCKAY, "The Problem of Population."

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1.) Tuesday, November 10th, 7.15 p.m.: G. MCALLISTER, "A World Parliament — A Way to Permanent Peace?"

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate,) Sunday, November 8th, 6.30 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, "Jesus: Man or Myth?"

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Education Centre, Broad Street) Sunday, November 8th, 2.30 p.m.: J. H. MOORE, "Social Credit — the Hinge of the Future."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1.) Sunday, November 8th, 11 a.m. (Armistice Remembrance): J. HUTTON HYND, "Sacramental Self-Sacrifice."

Notes and News

PERHAPS THERE IS HOPE for humanity after all. The Archbishop of Canterbury welcomed Mr. Krushchev's disarmament plan and declared: "This is what we have been praying for for years—total disarmament and full control" (*Daily Express*, 22/10/59). "No Christian could possibly have put forward a better programme," said Dr. Fisher: which is praise indeed. What surprised him was that no Christian body had come out and said so. A possible explanation occurs to us: they could still be pondering the Archbishop's previous suggestion that an H-bomb war might be part of God's plan. *

READERS WILL HAVE NOTICED the latest Press advertisement in the series "The Truth about the Catholic Church." Bearing a portrait of the Pope, it begins: "Perhaps you admire, as many do, Pope John XXIII and would like to know more about the Church of which he is head. Or you may be impressed by a Catholic friend and wish to

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £289 18s. 8d.; H. G. Kemp, 2s. 6d.; Mrs. A. Calderwood, 5s.; A. W. Coleman, £1 7s.; D. Wright, 5s.; Total to date, October 30th, 1959. £291 18s. 2d.

learn more about the Faith he values so much." But, "Whatever your reason for wanting to know more, the Catholic Enquiry Centre can help you," etc., etc. It sounds all sweet reasonableness. The difficulties come later: inserting "infallible" before "head" is one of them. *

THE REV. H. W. FAIRBROTHER, of St. Matthias's Episcopal Church, Baltimore, U.S.A., refused to entertain a suggestion by Rabbi Hertzberg for "peaceful theological co-existence between Christians and Jews." The Rabbi, said Mr. Fairbrother (in a letter to *Time*, 26/10/59) — "apparently does not understand Christianity, as regrettably many Christians do not." "There can never be any proper relaxation of missionary zeal for the church," he continued. "For the Christian, Christ comes first and martyrdom is preferable to compromise." In that case, we can't help feeling thankful that many Christians do not understand their own religion. *

SPEAKING AT A THANKSGIVING SERVICE "for our health" at St. Paul's Church, Cheltenham on Sunday, October 11th, Dr. Trowell, O.B.E., M.D., M.R.C.P., denied that there was a conflict between religion and medicine (*Cheltenham Echo*, 12/10/59). After 20 years he had "come to full belief in the miracles of the New Testament" by "considering the greatest miracle of all, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." It is hard to know what to say in face of this. Dr. Trowell's condition may be explicable medically, it certainly isn't logically. Perhaps it is best just to say that Dr. Trowell has chosen the right course: he is now training to be ordained. *

WE LIKED MR. OSBERT LANCASTER'S *Daily Express* "Pocket Cartoon" on the new Roman Catholic "sin." Showing a nun in a bubble car who had knocked down a pedestrian and run into a lamp-post, while two other nuns looked on, it had the caption: "My, my! Sister Theresa's certainly going to have a lot to tell her confessor this week!" *

THE SWEDISH MAGAZINE, *Arbetaren* (September 23-29) gave excellent publicity to the Brussels Congress of the World Union of Freethinkers. A picture of the Ferrer memorial appeared on the cover; inside a portrait of Ferrer, a photograph of the procession on September and a facsimile of a greeting from Ferrer's daughter and granddaughter illustrated a full page article by the Swedish delegate, Ture Nerman. *

A WELL-KNOWN FIGURE at International Freethought gatherings is Mr. J. Meester of Amsterdam, an amateur astronomer. Last year, Mr. Meester opened a Planetarium in beautiful surroundings on an island in the Loosdrecht Lakes, near Hilversum. The ground is 600 metres long, and provided with attractive spots for relaxation, sunbathing and swimming, and the Planetarium enables one to appreciate the "true relationships of the bodies within our Universe" in a way that "figures with many noughts cannot hope" to do. One may also get a better idea of the recent Russian and American satellite achievements. If any readers intend to holiday in Holland next year they can get details from Mr. J. Meester, Alb. Cuystraat 195, Amsterdam - Z. The Planetarium is easily reached from Amsterdam, Utrecht and Arnhem.

R.P.A. Diamond Jubilee Dinner

THE DIAMOND JUBILEE DINNER of the Rationalist Press Association Ltd., took place at the House of Commons on Saturday, October 24th, at the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Joseph Reeves, who recently resigned as M.P. for Greenwich. Most appropriately, the menu included *Cérisse Diamond Jubilé*.

The after-dinner programme began impressively with a silent toast "To the immortal memory of the men and women, known and unknown, who by their vigilance, their service and their sufferings have won for us the liberty of thought and utterance we now enjoy." Then Mr. Reeves read letters of apology from Earl Russell, Sir Julian Huxley, Professor Heath and others, and reminded us that in this "august dining room of the Palace of Westminster, distinguished stalwarts like Charles Bradlaugh John M. Robertson and Ernest Thurtle had dined before us."

Mr. Reeves sketched the history of the R.P.A. and its outstanding figures — Charles A. Watts, G. J. Holyoake, Joseph McCabe, F. J. Gould, Robertson, A. Gowans Whyte. With its famous sixpenny reprints it had pioneered cheap paperback publishing; it had pioneered book clubs in order to beat trade boycotts. Its own success had rebounded upon it: other publishers now printed unorthodox works. We had witnessed a secularisation of life in its wider aspects, though battles for secular education and the like had yet to be won. And it was interesting to note that the old reprints still sold and were in demand in former colonies. Conditions had changed enormously in the last 60 years, but the R.P.A. principle of a rational approach to human problems provided the basis on which the Association could face the future.

Dr. J. Bronowski said he was filled with profound emotion at being chosen to propose the toast, "Prosperity to the Rationalist Press Association." We were at the close of an epoch. In a sense the great battles had all been won. This was "a kind of wake, pleasantly decked-out but a wake nevertheless, over a corpse of battles won." He felt like a "genteel, angry old man." The churches were empty. The BBC received protests against rationalism on the Brains Trust, but they couldn't find a churchman to stand up against it on Sunday afternoons. They had now turned to Sergeant Bilko instead, and had put the Brains Trust on late on Thursdays.

"What are we looking for?" Dr. Bronowski asked. Scientific truth had triumphed; yet there was an uneasy state where scientific fact was accepted but the scientific method was pushed out of the back door. We faced disaster if we thought that by becoming more knowledgeable we had transformed ourselves into rational beings. In 1899, when the R.P.A. was founded, you either believed in the Bible or in science. The lines were not so clear today: people might accept scientific facts but refuse to connect them with the moral and ethical judgments that went with them. "We have to show we are not people who, when we leave the laboratory at 5 o'clock, say 'this is the end of truth'." Darwin, Huxley, and the R.P.A. founders were undeviating in their search for what they believed to be true. And, said Dr. Bronowski, the search for truth underlying science is a profoundly moral search. The rationalist seeks for what is true, rejects compromises, and rejects formulae as substitutes for conviction. "After 60 years of triumph, we have to show that scientific man is rational man."

Responding to the toast, Lord Chorley of Kendal (Director of the R.P.A.) referred to his nervousness, and a curious habit of rationalists on such occasions to "revert

to type and pray for strength." He did so now; then went on admirably to mix the light and the serious. He was not quite so sure as Dr. Bronowski that the battle was secure. He couldn't help thinking what would have happened to the Doctor a few hundred years ago, and he expressed gratitude to the men in all walks of life who had suffered for science and rationalism in the past. Today? Well, take the BBC: a deputation was very well received; the governors were very sympathetic; they saw our point about rationalist broadcasts; they asked us to come back in six months' time. It was a different technique we had to face, but we had to face it.

Mr. Francis Williams was not sure why he had been chosen to propose the toast to the Chairman. "The Press I deal with in the *New Statesman* and elsewhere, is not really rationalist and rarely rational," he said. Indeed, it had not a lot to do with the higher reaches of the intellect. But Mr. Williams had known Joe Reeves for more years than one would think, to look at him, and he had always been busy on all kinds of work for human happiness; he was always trying to improve people's chances of learning, their chances of happiness. Joseph Reeves could look back on a very noble satisfying life; we all hoped he could look forward to it, too.

Mr. Williams, like Lord Chorley, was not so sure as Dr. Bronowski that the battles had all been won. He recalled escorting the former Bishop of London to a TV "Press Conference." My job, as the Chairman, said Mr. Williams, was to fill the victim with false confidence. "What do you feel about broadcasting and television, my Lord Bishop?" he had asked; and then a bevy of scantily clad TV "Toppers" dashed out of a door in front of them, looked at the Bishop's gaiters and giggled. The tide swept by, leaving the Bishop leaning against a wall. "You were saying, my Lord Bishop, about TV?" "It opens your eyes!" replied the Bishop.

Well, continued Mr. Williams, the R.P.A. was trying to open the eyes of bishops. But don't let us deceive ourselves that bishops' eyes are open very wide yet. Don't deceive ourselves that we are all rationalists now. Some of the hardest battles lay ahead. Real battles begin when everybody assures you they are on your side. Many people still considered it the "right thing" to be a Christian, and anti-rationalist forces were moving on many fronts. Half-belief was an enemy; we had to concern ourselves with the dead weight of inertia. We had to present the excitement and stimulus of inquiry; the satisfaction of looking at facts and trying to assess them at their true value. That was our task, and it was not easy. We were toasting Joseph Reeves, a man who had set an example; "who had never allowed the shutters of prejudice to come down before his mind."

And, after a few impromptu words from Mr. Hector Hawton, Managing Director of the Rationalist Press Association Ltd., it was Joseph Reeves who fittingly closed a notable occasion by thanking all present.

WITHOUT COMMENT

The overriding task of the Church of England is the re-Christianisation of the country. In all our plans, policies and debates we must never forget the elementary fact that Christians in this country are in a minority. — BISHOP OF SOUTHWELL.

(Daily Express, 26/10/59.)

NEXT WEEK

THE HOLY ALLIANCE—20th CENTURY STYLE

By F. A. RIDLEY

What is the Anti-Christian Case

By GEOFFREY ASHE

(Concluded from page 348)

The Gospels themselves cannot, of course, be dated with exactitude, but the attempt to push them definitely into the second century has collapsed.

The John Rylands Library fragment and other clues place the Fourth Gospel, most probably, between 90 and 120. The Synoptics are generally held to be some decades earlier. Their less articulate doctrine; their millennial hope, which has waned in John; the texts conveying it (e.g. Matthew xvi.27-28), which would scarcely have been written thus after events could be said to have falsified them; the supplementary character of the Fourth Gospel, in its geographical bias and eucharistic passages; the apparent quotations from the Synoptics in such works as the Didache — these considerations can only be countered by speculative arguments which, as I have said before, are a species of self-invalidating special pleading.

Hence the Synoptics probably take us back into the lifetime of eye-witnesses, and their presumed source-documents even further back, to a period when falsehood could easily have been exposed. I know of nothing in any canonical Gospel to demand a date seriously later than 90. True, we get no list before about 180. But why should we expect to get lists before there was a defined concept of canonicity? Such things have no weight against the positive evidence that the Gospels existed long before. Incidentally, my critic Mr. Cutner can hardly expect me to accept arguments from silence in this instance ("Justin has obviously never heard of the Gospels" and so forth) when he and I both know the invalidity of such reasoning as applied recently by him to myself!

He has also asked how, according to "Christian history," unlearned Jews translated "nearly all Jesus said" into correct Greek for the benefit of Romans who spoke Latin. Christian history asserts no such thing. We are explicitly informed (John xxi.25) that only a small part of the story has been told, and all the attributed sayings can be read in an hour or two — this, out of a ministry lasting years. As for the unlearned Jews, we gather from "Christian history" — the New Testament itself plus early tradition — that Matthew was a civil servant of sorts, who would at least have been literate; that Mark was a linguist, Peter's interpreter; that Luke was a doctor and a Greek-speaking Antiochene. As for John, there is nothing un-Christian in the view that the Fourth Gospel is a working-up of his reminiscences by an unknown hand. This, then, is what "Christian history" rightly or wrongly asserts. Greek was the lingua franca of the area where most of the primitive Christians lived, and many papyri attest the close relationship of New Testament Greek to the current medium of communication.

What then is the case against the New Testament as history? The manuscript authority is far better than it is for most books of the classical age. There are two or three doubtful passages (only doubtful, not proved spurious) and of course many minor variant readings, but no traces of the long process of interpolation which some critics have envisaged. Attempts to prove the writers historically wrong have also failed. Luke and Acts, in particular, came off creditably from the scrutiny of Sir William Ramsay; the difficulty over Quirinius (Luke ii.2) has long since been disposed of. Attempts to prove internal contradictions have failed likewise. There are great differences of interest and emphasis, but no contradictions. The arguments from silence — "Matthew says so-and-so but Mark doesn't" — are unlikely to impress

anyone who has done much historical research. The Evangelists nowhere profess to be writing biographies in the modern sense.

Lastly, one episode must be mentioned, even in a brief sketch: the Resurrection. Here all the lines of attack converge. What I would stress is the circumstantial evidence that something exceptional did take place. Granted even an atom of truth in the Christian story, even Tacitus's bare minimum, we are dealing with an unparalleled event. There is no other instance of a religious founder whose career ended in ignominious death, yet whose followers promptly came together again with fanatical devotion. If the Resurrection did not happen, what did?

We are told that the disciples expected Jesus to rise from the dead, and were easily persuaded to accept someone's hallucinations as factual. Or that the tale was made up from earlier myths and prophecies. Both theories depend on the claim that such a resurrection can be traced as a theme in pre-Christian thought. Out once more comes the parade of parallels that are not parallel: gods who "died" and "rose" symbolically every year, but were never regarded, least of all by Jews, as historical personages; and men like Nero and Arthur, who were expected to return solely and precisely because they were supposed never to have died. It won't do.

The four Resurrection stories, or five, counting Paul's in I Corinthians xv, are a favourite field of the contradiction-hunter. They are scrappy and muddled, but it is possible to construct a single narrative that fits everything in. If the thing is invented or spun out of some pathetic delusion (including the scrappiness, the near-incompatibilities, the disciples' incredulous bewilderment, the queer concrete details), then it is a startling piece of fiction, somehow produced by nobody in particular in an age almost devoid of talent for fiction.

It is also a fraud, the mechanics of which I cannot picture. There is no sign, *pace* J. M. Robertson, that the story was meant to be understood merely as a myth or "morale-boosting drama"; and if it ever was, the misguided transition to literal belief could not have been made without protest or comment — a difficulty indeed which applies to all forms of the Christ-Myth theory. It was meant to be understood as truth; it was preached as truth, under Nero and Domitian, by people who suffered greatly through doing so; and some of these — namely the alleged witnesses and probably their immediate circle — would have known it was a lie. Dupes might have embraced martyrdom in the hope of salvation through Christ; but what about those whose Christ was a known fake?

I do not expect to alter the views of any reader of THE FREETHINKER, and I have no doubt at all that Mr. Cutner can urge contrary considerations against anything said here. My aim will have been accomplished if I have managed to convey that the objections are less convincing than is often supposed, and that if somebody sees the balance of probabilities as tipping toward the Christian side, he is not therefore, necessarily, a fool.

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CORRESPONDENCE

PRACTISING AND PREACHING

"We must be fair and present all viewpoints. The voice of the agnostic must be heard with that of the firmest believer," said Mr. Michael Redington, producer of A.T.V.'s programme "About Religion" at a conference last week in San Francisco. (*Church Times*, October 2nd). All Freethinkers, Secularists, Humanists, etc., should continually urge Mr. Redington to bear this statement in mind.

T. C. OWEN.

CATHOLIC ACCEPTANCE

In the course of his article "Darwin's Year," Mr. Cutner draws attention to the acceptance by the Roman Catholic Church of the "truth of Evolution." An interesting example of this came my way recently and as I have seen no note of it in *THE FREETHINKER*, feel you may be interested. Dr. P. G. Fothergill, Senior Lecturer, Department of Botany, King's College, Newcastle — who is a Roman Catholic — writes in his *Life and its Origin*: "But the evolutionist, as long as he remains scientific and continues to examine life from the scientific point of view, must avoid invoking special creation as an answer to his problems, for the whole point of his science is the search for a natural explanation of things." Some turn-round for a member of an organisation that once gave an official award to a doctor who wrote a work which "scientifically" refuted Darwin. Dr. Fothergill's booklet was published in 1958 by Sheed and Ward under the auspices of the Newman Association (Philosophy of Science Group).

ROBERT MORRELL.

REPUBLICANISM

Mr. Christopher Brunel is wrong in thinking that public opinion clamoured for the beheading of Louis XVI. It was the young capitalists of France who clamoured for the King's death. The King was the head of the aristocratic government which was resisting the industrial development of France, and it was the industrial capitalists and lawyers, frustrated by the landed aristocracy, who revolted against this dominance, just as the rising industrialists had risen under Cromwell in England, a century before. The English and the French revolutions were not caused by public opinion, and it is unfortunate that Mr. Brunel should, like large numbers of people, believe that a revolution brought about by cliques is public opinion's voice. The Russian revolution was not brought about by public opinion, either. Indeed, public opinion was against it. The revolution was engineered by a small minority, just as all revolutions are.

It seems that Mr. Brunel would have liked Thomas Paine to have been an opportunist, and to have fallen in with the views of the government. Had he done so, he would have had no future admirers.

Paine did not underestimate the reaction to his *Rights of Man*, in Britain, as Mr. Brunel says. The people were with Paine, and his book had the biggest sale of that period. He knew that the government hated him and were crying for his blood. It was the government that hated Paine and not the people.

Mr. Brunel was unfair in saying Thomas Paine had an anti-English complex. Thomas Paine was one of the greatest patriots that England has ever produced but, like Charles Bradlaugh, another great republican, he would make no compromise with a government of privilege. Mr. Brunel should never make the mistake of thinking that men opposed to a government are anti-English. They are anti-government, which is a different thing.

PAUL VARNEY.

VIVISECTION & VACCINATION

Animal experimentation is only one line of research and I admitted that its results can be misinterpreted; that it is not applicable to all problems met with in biological research. If a better method of investigation is available, then by all means it will be used, but the onus of providing one rests with the anti-vivisectionists.

Furthermore, the correspondent should realise that his remarks on sentiment and its relationships to reason are little but word-play and that scientists must be objective in seeking knowledge. He condemns vaccination, and I presume this includes all forms of sero-therapy. Vaccination has its hazards, but these are overplayed. It is largely a prophylactic, as opposed to a direct form of treatment such as surgery, where the hazards are conveniently overlooked on account of the urgency of many cases. Factors such as housing, nutrition, heredity and lately chemotherapy have played a part in determining the incidence and distribution of infectious diseases and sero-therapy is of little value in some diseases, for example the venereal diseases.

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But this does not rule out its value in diseases such as diphtheria, rabies, smallpox, tetanus, etc., and the best example of its efficacy is a consideration of the results obtained from two Paris Hospitals in 1894, namely the Hospital Trousseau which did not use antitoxin and had a mortality rate of 60% of diphtheria deaths as opposed to a 25.4 mortality rate at the Hospital Enfants Malades which treated their cases with antitoxin. I would like finally to pose the following questions: (a) Would you allow yourself or a relative to be given a prophylactic injection of antitetanus toxin after receiving a cut in a farmyard on the 1 in 100,000 chance that there may be an anaphylactic reaction? (b) Do you realise how many drugs of protein constitution, such as hormones, diagnostic sera and cardiac glycosides, to state a few, can only be standardised by animal methods? (c) Are you prepared to provide the capital that many drug firms spend on research in order to provide alternative methods of treatment of those diseases, namely those of viral origin, not amenable to chemotherapy. Please remember research is a costly business conducted by fallible human beings.

N. MACIVER.

GEORGE MOORE'S RELIGIOUS OPINIONS

Several weeks ago *The Spectator* published a number of speculations on the religious views of George Moore, the novelist; some people stating that he was a Protestant, others alleging that he was a Roman Catholic. I sent in the following quotation from his writings suggesting that it showed that George Moore had no religious faith at all: "No theologian has yet decided that the damned do not continue to commit the sins in hell which they were damned for committing on earth." The letter was not published. The quotation should be better known.

C. H. NORMAN.

[We have to hold over a number of letters replying to Mr. W. E. Huxley (23/10/59)—Ed.]

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