

The Freethinker

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(The opening address of the Public Meeting held on Saturday, September 5th, at the Brussels International Freethought Congress, 1959.)

I AM, PARTICULARLY SINCE YESTERDAY EVENING, somewhat nervous . . . apprehensive. When a year ago, our esteemed, genial and witty President invited me to speak at this Congress, I accepted with enthusiasm. Such an acceptance is so easy, when the affair is remote. In April, a brief, but compact letter inquired whether I would open the session devoted to "The Urgency of Freethinking in the light of Modern Science" — a formidable theme. My anxiety diminished as I saw that I was not the only one to bear this burden, that the number and quality of the speakers would lighten the task of showing how scientific knowledge today and Freethinking are related; for I am only a poor doctor, and one at that who has perhaps "gone rather wrong" since entering the Senate — you heard yesterday what our friend Paul Braun had to say concerning Members of Parliament. Then, on August 1st, came a third letter from the President, full of matter and of humour, announcing that Dr. Brock Chisholm would not be able to be present, that his message, very brief, was that mankind is now confronted with a most perilous situation; to avoid disaster, man must see his way clearly and live in harmony with his neighbour; religions are the greatest obstacle to this; they give rise to feelings of anxiety, fear and sin, which are most likely to produce the worst catastrophes; Freethinkers have in the past relied on the spread of education, particularly in universal schooling, but they have adopted towards education too much of a policy of *laissez-faire*. No doubt scientific knowledge is becoming more general, but the habit of scientific thinking is still too rare.

"Impertinents"

This letter, in my opinion, sums up perfectly the substance of this Congress; and I propose to concentrate on what our President terms very correctly the *laissez-faire* of Freethinkers.

As I listened to the words of the President, to those of the Rector of the University, Dr. Janne, which last went perhaps too far for some of us in drawing fine distinctions, and those of the daughter and granddaughter of Francisco Ferrer, I relived the days when I was a student in the University where we are gathered today with emotions of reverence, of faith in freedom of thought and of a timid wish to try not to be unworthy of the teaching we received. I do not know what you think; to me it seems not so rare to be intelligent, but really rare to remain so. So many yield to mystification of some sort or other. For example, the official Te Deum. I will not be present at it; I have no objection to going inside a church, but never at the celebration of a national fête, which should be secular in a country such as ours where there is no State religion.

What we require is Impertinence. Consider the necessary and valuable virtues of Impertinence. Just now, I said I

had no objection to going inside a church, provided, that is, when it is empty and old and beautiful. I even enjoy fine music and good choral singing. They make me think of all sorts of solemn things; I become most edifying. And I think what a good thing it is that amidst all this splendour and pomp there is a tradition of anti-clericalism, the spirit of Saint-Evremond [note by translator: buried in Westminster Abbey although an outspoken Freethinker]. It is in praise of this spirit, that I wish to speak. The first great "Impertinent," legendary perhaps, who, in his desire to do good to men refused to conform to Jove's laws, was Prometheus. Many of you probably know the story of Vercors in which the "Missing Link"

has been found and its (or his) case is taken up in the British House of Commons as to whether he (or it) can be regarded as a domestic animal, like a cow, or as a member of the community. It is concluded that the distinction between a man and an ape is that the latter, in its natural surroundings, is not dominated by fear, whereas man is; whence his invention of taboos, myths, devils: in short, of religion. What a list of Impertinents we can draw up! Galileo "*e pur si muove*" (if he didn't say it, he should have!) Luther, to whom was said: "My poor friend, you are laying up for yourself a packet of trouble," and who replied: "Ich kann nicht anders"; Descartes, St. Evremond, Diderot who wrote, and do not forget it: "In this darkness I have to light me and guide my steps only a little lamp, my reason, and you wish to extinguish it!" And Proudhon, who declared: "Insurrection against an unjust power is the first duty of man." And I wish to mention, particularly in this University Hall, how, in 1890, or thereabouts, the then President of the Council of Administration of the University, among whom were many liberals, said to the young Emile Vandervelde: "The doors of this University will be to you, as you are a Socialist and a militant, ever shut." To which Vandervelde replied: "Very good, I shall come in by the window." It took him time, but he came in, and there are some of you present today who, even as I did, attended his lectures on Social History in this University.

Non-Conformism

Recently, when in the Congo, I had cause to recall Anatole France. Our Commission had heard many witnesses, among them several chiefs, splendid in plumes and superb in gait, who had no objection to being elected to the new parliament. However, they said: "It would lower our prestige if we asked for the votes of the people, even as it would diminish our standing to pay taxes." You remember in the *Penguin Island* of Anatole France, how Krakuk comes before the Assembly with this ultimatum: "I shall not contribute, for to contribute is ignoble."

In this marvellous, yet terrible world in which we find ourselves today, when men produce what seems to go beyond what is human; when science itself appears to extend beyond the limits of logic when we are confronted

VIEWS and OPINIONS

In Praise of Impertinence

By Senator Dr. JEANNE E. VANDERVELDE

by what may be an apocalypse; we need more than ever before, our Freedom of Thought. We must not bow the knee to any mystification; we must not allow ourselves to fancy that we have not understood when we have, or that we know when we are ignorant. We must be impertinent. We must not allow ourselves to submit through weakness, through false "good manners" to a conformism to which we are intellectually opposed. Whoever does so conform is a traitor to his Ideal — Freedom of Thought. Further, we must not submit to whatever retards the advance of our Ideal.

Bear in mind the spirit of reaction which inspired the Spanish general Queipo de Llano, to declare that all Spain's sorrows came from those criminals who wished to teach the people to read. This reminds me that, only a few days

ago, I mentioned Reclus in the presence of a Spaniard. He considered that I had not spoken with sufficient respect, for he said "You know that he was a great and learned man." Then he went on: "My father was a miner, and out of his savings he bought the works of Reclus, which became a sort of Bible for us; we children used to read them and try to understand. One day, when the civil war was over, the falangists came to our house, seized the Reclus volumes and put them on the fire." All that Ferrer combatted in Spain is still alive and in power. Nor is that evil lacking elsewhere.

We Freethinkers must show that among us there exists an élite, ready to strive with the forces of obscurantism, because we believe in Reason and because we believe modestly, quietly, but firmly, in Mankind.

A Priests' Mirror

By WALTER STEINHARDT

WHEN IN 1844 the Catholic hierarchy of Trier exhibited their famous stunt, "the Holy Coat of our Lord," many protests were raised against this further deception of the faithful. Probably the most effective was the publication of Otto von Corvin's (1812-1886) *Pfaffenspiegel*, usually inadequately translated as "Priests' Mirror." (A "Pfaffe" in German is the name given to a Catholic priest in a distinctly derisive and contemptuous sense. It would only be used by outspoken opponents of the papacy. The German Catholic calls his minister respectfully "Herr pfarrer" and "Euer Hochwürden.")

The success of Corvin's work was instantaneous, and it required many reprints. More than a million and a half copies sold of this serious work on "the historic monuments of Christian fanaticism," bear witness to its impact. It was not written for the scholar, nor for the fashionable salon, but for thinking and caring people generally. Though learned, it is spicy and witty, thereby being both instructive and entertaining. It is, in addition, an "angry" book, written by an angry young man of a century ago. And apparently in 1959, when the Cathedral at Trier became once more the focal point of so much that is repugnant, Hubert Freistühler, publisher of the German Freethought paper, *Der Freidenker*, has prepared a new unabridged edition of the *Pfaffenspiegel*. English Freethinkers may like to know something about it.

Corvin begins with a chapter, "How the Pfaffen Happened," in which he traces the origins of Christianity. Modern research has revealed some errors in his account, but they are relatively unimportant. He assumes, for example, that Matthew is the oldest of the gospels, written within 14 years of the founder's death. With the event of Constantine's conversion, thinks Corvin, the poverty and humility of the Church came to an end, for he decreed a part of the state revenue to be handed over to what Goethe called the "Church of the Enormous Stomach."

"The Dear Good Saints," the second chapter, makes excellent reading. The forces that brought saints into being are aptly called "epidemics of the spirit." And though Corvin confesses his inability to explain them adequately, he cites Zeno, Bishop of Verona, who laid the hideous foundation of the sainthood in the 4th century, viz.: "It is the most exalted Christian virtue to crush under our feet all that is natural and of nature."

Example after example shows the utter abomination of body and mind to which paranoiac creatures subjected themselves in efforts to attain "saintliness." Masochism galore! The holy Eusebius allegedly carried 260 lbs. of iron upon his unwashed body, and the fool, St. Thalelaus,

squeezed himself into the rim of a cartwheel and remained thus for 10 years. And so on.

"The Adoration of Relics" forms the third section. In it, Corvin notes that all of us treasure some memento of our affection. This can either be in connection with a person we love or of any deep experience that stirred our emotion or fired our pride. The Church was clever enough to utilise this for her own interest. Her two objects were, says Corvin, to raise money and to fetter still tighter the believing millions. She "invented" the holy relic. Of the many specimens he names, we may note Mary's shifts (big enough to fit persons weighing 20 stones), her precious wedding ring as shown in Perusa, her milk in small bottles, her hair and combs. But alas, not one toothbrush — as yet! Aachen incidentally vied with Trier by procuring the Lord's nappies!

In "Sodom and Gomorrha" we come to the subject of celibacy, and the attitude of priests to sex — in reality and make-believe — is given searching treatment. Corvin had constantly to fight the censor in Leipzig, the learned Professor Hardenberg. Again and again Corvin's manuscripts were returned, and one can imagine how much was objected to in the "Sodom and Gomorrha" chapter. But in most cases the censor was obliged to waive his blue-pencil powers, for Corvin could show that his sources were none other than Catholic *imprimatur* publications. Indeed, he claimed that not one fact had ever been challenged and disproved. Nevertheless, his whole work is most emphatically condemned, of course.

Where he deals with "Monks and Nuns," the Jesuits deservedly receive his most bitter scorn. But he is probably weakest when he concentrates too much upon the many sordid transgressions of members of "holy" orders.

That the "Confessional" played its role in the abnormal sex-life of the *pfaffen* is well known. Already in 428 Pope Colesstin ordered the punishment of father-confessors found abusing their holy office. But not even Alexander VI succeeded in suppressing entirely all hetaerism within the visible body of Christ.

To Otto von Corvin, a hundred years ago, the world seemed a madhouse. And religion was the mud upon which it was built and grew. And although the *Pfaffenspiegel* (as far as I am aware) is not available in an English translation, Freethinkers here will be gratified to know that this powerful condemnation of so many aspects of the Roman Church has now been reprinted by their German colleagues. In a country, moreover, where bigotry greatly increased during the last decade.

Space Travel

By F. A. RIDLEY

In 1492, COLUMBUS, sailing under the flag of Castille, westward towards Asia, happened upon a new continent that barred his way. This continent, the existence of which its initial discoverer refused to recognise to the day of his death, was subsequently named America; though the misleading term "Indians" still ridiculously applied to the aboriginal population of the Americas, still reminds us that the earliest explorers of the American Continent believed that they had actually arrived in India. When, however, the truth about the New World became generally known, the intellectual, as well as economic and geographical impact of the New World beyond the Atlantic, was profound and far-reaching on the denizens of the Old World. New horizons opened up before the inquiring human intellect.

Since September 13th, when the Russian rocket scored a bull's eye on the moon's surface, and now that its reverse side has been photographed, it is evident that in the 20th century, as in the 15th, human thought and human imagination, as well as human astronomical knowledge, are rapidly entering a new era. All recent research indicates that as "appetite comes with eating" it will not be long before more rockets and, in time, rockets with strangely-garbed human crews of space travellers, will land upon their New World, the dried volcanic surface of our satellite. Nor does there appear to be much doubt that, once the moon has been contacted, other much more remote planets will be visited by aerial "Columbuses," or even that to winter in Mars may become, in the course of time, a recognised human pastime! While this last triumph of technical science may still be remote, it now appears to be (in racing parlance) an odds-on bet that another couple of decades will see men on the moon and that rocket, and perhaps human contact, will be made with Mars and Venus, our nearest planetary neighbours, before the end of this century.

The rapidity with which space-travel has evolved from the early fiction of Jules Verne and H. G. Wells to the latest astonishing achievements of Russian and American rocketry, has already produced a profound effect upon the level of human thinking. It is not only a startling astronomical discovery, it is an intellectual revolution with which we are confronted, one similar to, but even more drastic than, that which confronted the contemporaries of Columbus and Copernicus. I was in Germany when the lunar direct hit occurred, and the sensation there was terrific, so much so, that even the inauguration of a new President of the German Federal Republic (on September 15th) was almost crowded out of the headlines by the startling news of Mr. Krushchev's extra-terrestrial *coup*. Indeed, to anyone endowed with imagination, it was an awe-inspiring and fascinating spectacle to stand, as I did, in Hamburg, by the brilliantly lit river Alster, and contemplate the brilliant full moon. For hundreds of thousands of years, men had gazed at the moon in distant admiration and only a few hours previously, *Homo sapiens* had at long last succeeded in making direct contact with it. He had thereby done something to justify his self-chosen designation. No doubt the contemporaries of Columbus felt much the same.

The remarkable series of extra-terrestrial experiments that led up to September 13, represent an astonishing triumph for science and for the spirit of secular civilisation that inspired it. For religion played no part in this astonishing sequence; human invention and ingenuity "rushed in where angels feared to tread." It seems, incidentally, to

constitute a sharp commentary on the lack of scientific interest among the angels that, in the course of their frequent trips to and fro between heaven and earth, they never apparently had enough scientific curiosity even to stay and have a look at the heavenly bodies (the moon, *et al*) which they must have passed *en route*. Think of the astronomical information that they might have passed on! As it was, it was left to the godless Bolsheviks to collect such information. In which connection, and without any reference to its political system, it does not appear to be an accident that Russia, which is officially atheistic and materialistic in its philosophy, was able, despite its much more recent scientific development, to beat America in the final race for the lunar stakes. For though the U.S.A. is still an officially secularist State in the literal sense that there is no recognised connection between Church and State, the stupendous and widely advertised religiosity of the country of Billy Graham and Bishop Fulton Sheen — not to mention God! — must surely exercise a retarding influence upon its scientific culture. In Britain, where we have a still medieval union of Church and State, fantastic resulting contradictions still occur. The regime supports impartially the Astronomer Royal and the giant telescope at Jodrell Bank, and the whole college of state-endowed witch-doctors presided over by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

To take a recent example: Mr. Macmillan appoints a Minister of Science (and Space Travel) one day and himself reads the lessons in church on the next. It is true, of course, that space travel — of a kind — does figure fairly prominently in the Bible, but the aerial voyages of Elijah, Paul, etc., not to mention even more august examples, appear to bear little relation to modern techniques of space travel, or even with elementary modern physics. The kind of "double think" which permits this sloppy thinking, must surely be very deleterious to any scientific advance. How can a belief in these incongruities be combined in a single brain? It is almost certain that the officially materialistic attitude of Russian society towards both religion and science played an important — perhaps even decisive — role in their latest spectacular triumph. In any case, the feat represents an indisputable testimonial to the efficacy of the secularist spirit.

One thing at least is certain; the space age is here to stay. September 13th was — dare we say it? — a much more important event than, say, the General Election a few weeks later. For mankind learns along with his experiences; *Homo* becomes more *sapiens* as he goes along — sometimes! Taking previous terrestrial analogies into account, it may be stated with some confidence that, in changing his material environment by making contact with other planets, man will also change himself.

FROM ST. LOUIS

The financial racket in the Catholic Church is unbelievable. The St. Louis Archbishop issued an edict against gambling some three years ago, but there is never a time in my office when there aren't three or four raffles going, with some Catholic Church as the beneficiary. The edict from the Archbishop wasn't issued until there was an outcry against gambling by the local population, with prosecution against a good many people—except the Catholic Church — and I presume the edict was a compromise between the local police and the Archbishop. There never is a raffle with a Protestant Church as the beneficiary. Besides, the nuns make the rounds every payday (twice a month): they call that soliciting alms. On top of this they get \$3½ million a year (in St. Louis alone) from the Community Chest, a charity drive conducted once a year every fall. The Salvation Army gets a mere \$350,000 per year out of this fund, but they, too, have their collectors around. What a racket!

M.L.

This Believing World

A book published by the Church Information Office, written by Dr. A. Torrie, a psychiatrist, deals with the unhappy experiences of many middle-aged married men who generally — and perhaps understandably — feel that after a wife has given 20 years of loving service a change would be as good as a feast. Dr. Torrie has a simple remedy for this kind of unhappy and “frustrated” husband. It is simply to get the advice of a vicar or a marriage guidance counsellor or, better still, the solution should consist “in a complete commitment to God of himself.” As a good Christian, and writing for the Church Information Office, what other remedy could Dr. Torrie possibly give?

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In any case, have not most of the husbands already committed themselves to God? Is it not a fact that almost all the husbands who are not understood by their wives are good, earnest Christians? Are not many of the most tragic divorce cases one reads about in the papers those of parties who were married in church? The poor chap who has the temerity to *think* about some of the stage and screen glamorous beauties is, notwithstanding his Christianity, already a “co-respondent,” as “our Lord” severely has told him in Matt. 5, 28 — but, of course, this is a wicked, wicked world.

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The Recorder of Nottingham, Mr. C. Shawcross, Q.C., has got into an awful row because he asked a man who admitted possessing explosives for a suspected unlawful purpose whether he was a member of the I.R.A., or an Irishman, or a Roman Catholic. As the man said he was not, the Recorder bound him over; but our (mostly) Irish Roman Catholics hate to be told that so many of the members of the I.R.A. are indeed both Irishmen and good Roman Catholics. In spite of this, Dr. Ellis, the R.C. Bishop of Nottingham, calls it “a general insinuation concerning Irishmen and Catholics” against which he “protests strongly.” But why? Is not the Bishop proud that Irishmen are Catholics? And for that matter, that many at least are also I.R.A.’s?

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The Bishop of Southwark appears to be trying desperately hard to find “young men with guts” to take over various parishes in working-class districts rather than such cushy towns like Cheltenham or Bournemouth. Our young men have “guts” all right, as they proved in two world wars; but many of them would rather charge a galaxy of machine guns than try to explain what Jesus meant in the Gospel of John to a crowd of British working men. There are limits even to courage. We wonder how many “working men” the Bishop himself has converted. We do not mean converting one who is already a Christian, but one who, after examining the credentials of Christianity has given it up as nonsense. We do not expect an answer from the Bishop.

★

Not being able quite to emulate the success of his brother in Christ, the Rev. B. Graham, two American Evangelists, Brother Eldridge Plunkett and his wife, Sister Ruth Plunkett, have established a Rainbow Revival Church in Los Angeles, California, and regularly send out mimeographed circulars of the wonderful work Christ is doing for them all over the world. But though its devoted followers are full of the Holy Spirit, Bro. Plunkett never ceases to remind them of their pious duty in one particular field. As thus: “A pledge of money for the Lord’s work helps a person to be a better Christian . . . A pledge is a more sure way

of giving what you plan to give . . . Increasing an amount of money for God’s work is like replacing a small electric bulb with a larger one . . . Christians who increase the amount of money they give for the Lord’s work have more to look forward to in the life to come.” And so on. We congratulate Bro. and Sis. Plunkett. They sure know their dear, loving followers.

★

A very lively discussion took place between Mr. Malcolm Muggeridge and Dr. John Heenan, the R.C. Bishop of Liverpool, the other Sunday on ITV’s “About Religion.” It was particularly interesting because Mr. Muggeridge, while protesting he was a Christian “outsider,” was not afraid to admit that he had no belief whatever in any of the Christian dogmas for which Dr. Heenan expressed so touching a certainty. In fact, for a Christian “outsider” Mr. Muggeridge might have just as well represented the National Secular Society. The only protest Dr. Heenan could make was that his opponent hadn’t studied the “evidence”! On the contrary, responded Mr. Muggeridge, he had; and the discussion ended in the air, so to speak, as well as off the air.

BOOK REVIEW

RUBAIYAT OF TODAY by Walter E. Holloway.

A DELIGHTFUL BOOK OF VERSE expressing robust atheism has just arrived from America. The tasteful cover design is by Tom Oliphant. Owing to the death of the author in 1946, the book has not yet been marketed. But for this it would have given great pleasure to all Freethinkers (and, I conjecture, many others) who might read it.

There are 155 rubaiyat with a dozen alternative renderings. The author’s preface and copious notes occupy a further 12 pages. It is marked 50c. and would be cheap at treble. (Postage to Britain 23c.) Here follow sample verses: —

— 27 —

When Others spoke of fabled “There and Then”
Wise Omar always asked them “Where and When?”
He dealt in Cash alone, the “Here and Now”
And drove away all muddling Credit-men.

— 29 —

Ah, foolish Man, if thou would’st wisdom win
Do not postpone thy living to begin
When thou art dead! The brute is wiser far
And knows that Life’s postponement is a sin.

— 30 —

Post-dated checks, the meanest sort of fraud.
And this is worse! Where is the Bank of God?
Swindled are they who hope to cash Life’s Checks,
When, Dust, they mingle with the senseless sod.

— 39 —

In looking back across the fear-filled span
Of Time on Earth, since man arose as Man
We see him moulding gods today
As in Old Asia where he first began.

— 40 —

And everywhere the Priests have been aligned
With grants for the Plunder of Mankind.
The King could not have bound the Hands of Man
Had not the Priest put shackles on his Mind.

— 51 —

Why waste the Day in searching for the Key
Of Death’s Dark Door, beyond which none can see,
When we could build, were we a little wise,
A Home on Earth, from Want and Woe made free.

And so say all of us Freethinkers! A veritable feast for “Thinkers and Dreamers,” to whom it is addressed. What a nice gift for Hogmanay! The unsated should contact the author’s widow, Mrs. Letizia J. Holloway, 1154 N. Alexandria Ave., Los Angeles 29, Calif., U.S.A.

W. E. HUXLEY

THE FREETHINKER

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All articles and correspondence should be addressed to THE EDITOR at the above address and not to individuals. THE FREETHINKER can be obtained through any newsagent or will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates: One year, £1 15s.; half-year, 17s. 6d.; three months, 8s. 9d. (In U.S.A. and Canada: One year, \$5.00; half-year, \$2.50; three months, \$1.25.)

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1. Details of membership of the National Secular Society may be obtained from the General Secretary, 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1. Members and visitors are welcome during normal office hours. Inquiries regarding Secular Funeral Services should also be made to the General Secretary, N.S.S.

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 22nd, 6.45 p.m.: T. DAWES SMITH, "God and my Neighbour."
Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics Institute) Sunday, November 22nd, 7 p.m.: J. FIGGESS, "Capital Punishment Examined."
Central London Branch N.S.S. ("The City of Hereford" Blandford Place, W.1.) Sunday, November 22nd, 7.15 p.m.: Mrs. M. RITTER, "The Teen-Age Cult."
Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1.) Tuesday, November 24th, 7.15 p.m.: R. H. PEAR, B.S.C. "The Affluent Society, by Prof. J. K. Galbraith."
Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate,) Sunday, November, 22nd, 6.30 p.m.: R. BARNES, M.A. "On Securing Good Government."
Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Education Centre, Broad Street) Sunday, November 22nd, 2.30 p.m.: Mrs. D. M. WOOD, "Jamaicans at Home."
South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1.) Sunday, November 22nd, 11 a.m.: F. H. A. MICKLEWRIGHT, M.A. "The Abolition of Slavery: A Christian or Humanist Achievement?"
West Ham and District Branch N.S.S. (Wanstead Community Centre, The Green, E.11.) Thursday, November 26th, 7.45 p.m.: COLIN MCCALL, "Aspects of the World Struggle against Religion."

Notes and News

OUR COLLEAGUE, MR. F. A. RIDLEY, regularly receives the Heythrop Jesuit Seminary Bulletin, *To Our Friends*, though his friendliness towards the Society of Jesus has never been particularly marked. Still, it is an interesting and attractively produced booklet in two colours and the October issue celebrates the 1959 Ordination ceremony with all its inanity ("Under the appearance of bread and wine, Christ is now present on the altar.") It also reports that over 7,000 people have seen *A Priest is Made*, the film of the previous year's ceremony. "A remarkable sense of actuality pervades the film," we are told. The commentary gives "a concise but clear explanation of each step," and it is spoken "with characteristic polish" by Eamonn Andrews.

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £293 13s. 2d.; S. Jones, 2s. 6d.; A. Calderwood, (Mrs.) £1; N. Cluett, 1s. 3d.; E.C.R., 2s. 6d.; L. Lloyd, £1; T. V. Everhard, 5s.; Total to date, November 13th, 1959. £296 4s. 5d.

A *Sunday Express* LEADER urged you to "Try it," on October 25th, "it" being going to church. "Have you overlooked the happiest hour?" it asked. Then it seemed a little confused about the better part of churchgoing: whether it was the journey to and fro "under the golden trees," or the spell inside. It must have had its doubts about the attractions of the latter, but it dauntlessly brushed them aside. "No matter if the preacher be dull," it said, "or if the hymn tunes have altered. Just sit in your pew and count your blessings." Then "stroll home afterwards, arm in arm, still marvelling how wonderful life can be." Idyllic indeed.

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WE SOMETIMES AMUSE OURSELVES trying to remember the silliest argument we have ever heard for the existence of God. To date, we think this one has it: "When I wrote to you last week I was merely suggesting that those who say there is no Almighty God should themselves set about the job of making rain in case the present wonderful summer brings a drought crisis." It was written by W. H. Booth of 211 Park Road, Westhoughton, and appeared in the *Bolton Evening News* (14/9/59). We invite readers to submit other examples. Please give full references. There are no prizes.

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WE VERY MUCH REGRET PRESIDENT EISENHOWER'S decision to visit Spain next month. As *Reuter* reported, Madrid circles regard it as a triumph for General Franco.

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THE PRESIDENT AND SECRETARY of the National Secular Society both spoke to religious groups last week. On Friday, November 13th, Mr. F. A. Ridley visited the Christian King Alfred's College, Winchester, to lecture on "A Sceptic looks at Religion." The previous evening Mr. Colin McCall spoke on "Atheism" at the Jewish Maccabi Club, London. We have good reports of both meetings.

ASK AT YOUR LIBRARY

The Humanist Council, at a recent meeting, considered a proposal to build up a central Humanist library. The proposal, from a professional librarian, was rejected as not practicable, but it was agreed to invite the librarian to submit at intervals a short selection of titles, to be printed in our various journals with the suggestion that readers might ask for them at their local libraries or buy them. Here is the first list:—

RUSSELL, Bertrand: *Wisdom of the West*, 1959, Macdonald, 63/-. (A new volume supplementing, though not superseding his *History of Western Philosophy*: By the President of the Rationalist Press Association.)

HOGGIN, Ian: *Social Change*, 1958, Watts, 21/-.

(An important anthropological study by an Australian who has lived for long periods in five native communities.)

READ, Herbert: *Concise History of Modern Painting*, 1959, Thames & Hudson. (A masterly survey by the famous art-critic, poet and humanist, this book is likely to remain standard for two generations.)

COATES, J. B.: *Challenge to Christianity*, 1958, Watts 15/-.

(An intelligent claim for a substitute for our established religion.)

—NEXT WEEK—

MR. CUTNER
ANSWERS MR. ASHE

Village Atheism?

By COLIN McCALL

OCCASIONAL INCONSISTENCIES occur in all magazines, THE FREETHINKER included: editors are only human. But when a magazine tries to be up to date and to advance Christianity at the same time, inconsistency is inevitable. So it is with the American *Time*. Usually it can get away with it; news items are grouped under various separate heads — "Art," "Books," "Business," etc. — and most readers will take the sections in their own, rather than *Time's* order. Still, few could miss the glaring disparity in the issue of November 9th.

Pages 36 and 37 are devoted to "Religion," where we read in Typical *Time* journalese that, "A brand-new magazine is on sale this week on Russia's newsstands. Title: *Science and Religion*. Editorial slant: religion ridiculed in village-atheist terms, scientists chided for any signs of backsliding from faithlessness." We are told (in parenthesis) that an American astronomer, Harlow Shapley, is accused of attempting to reconcile God and the expanding universe, and is advised: "Your hopes are vain, Professor Shapley." We are told, too, that *Science and Religion's* "lead article" is by Bertrand Russell, who asks if religion has made a useful contribution to civilisation, and answers no, except for helping to establish the calendar and inducing the "Egyptian priests to prepare such careful chronology of eclipses that in time they could predict them."

Both these items sound interesting, but *Time* shrugs them off. It has its own standard of values. "The importance of *Science and Religion*," it says in weak ironic tones, "lies not in its contents but in its appearance at this late date after God's official demise in the U.S.S.R." Once started on this favourite, though hopeless theme, *Time's* evangelists take some stopping. Other "evidence" is found that religion in Russia "is far from limited to dying-off old folks." Found even in *Izvestia*, which is apparently devoting "column after indignant column to the 'subversive' doings of Russian Baptists," who have grown from 100,000 before the Revolution to 500,000 now. An example is given of *Izvestia's* — I would say, righteous — wrath: its reaction to a letter "telling how one Lukeria Sevchuk was converted by Baptists and began to bring pressure on her daughters, Nina and Natasha, to join her in the faith." Nina "valiantly held out," but "ailing" Natasha committed suicide, leaving a note to her mother: "You are a serpent. You can now bring your revivalists here. Nobody will bother you."

This sort of domestic tragedy is, as we all know, part of the great human tragedy of religion, and more especially of Christianity. For Christianity, self-appointed defender of family life, has been the most terrible wrecker of families, in conformity with Jesus's precept (Matthew 10, 34-38). Well might *Izvestia* condemn the Baptists for misleading people with "high-flown words" and trying "to divert them from industrious life, from the enlightened happenings of our great era": even for trying "to disrupt Soviet morality," though I am not sure what this last means. But whatever our views on Soviet morality, we can have no doubts about the Baptist kind: it is hateful.

Time finds further evidence that religion is alive in Russia from one of the latest Soviet novels to reach the West — via the now established channel of an Italian translation. *The Miraculous Icon* is described as a "19th century moral tale in reverse." The hero "sinks down and down into the depths of Christianity, and is saved in the nick of time by conversion to clear-eyed atheism." Villains of the piece, continues *Time*, "are mostly peasant oldsters

who launch a religious revival when young Hero Rodka finds a buried icon of St. Nicholas near an abandoned church." And Father Dmitry arrives from a neighbouring village to read the Bible, but "in every face it was plain to read that they understood not one word."

As *Time* presents it, *The Miraculous Icon* is assuredly no masterpiece. But then, I am sure no translator would describe Rodka as being "finally hooked by religion." This is the elegant language of Mr. Henry R. Luce and his editorial tribe of three score and more. Still, I gather that Rodka hears "awesome reverberations" just before midnight each night in the church tower and thinks they are supernatural. He becomes convinced that God exists, and he declares, "No more future, no more happiness, all finished." Then *Time* tells us that the noises in the church tower "turn out to be echoes from the 11.50 express." Put in such a way, and enclosed in the much-favoured parenthesis, this sounds silly, of course. And it may be in the novel. I don't know. But the *idea* is far from silly. Many supernatural notions could be traced to such sources, and Spiritualism is very largely an expression of them.

Fortunately for Rodka — and for *Time's* ironists — he finds a "rescuer" in "his faithfully unbelieving schoolmarm, Paraskovia Petrovna, who hales Father Dmitry before District Agitprop Director Kuchin and argues with him en route on behalf of edifying atheism." The Director, though, "is fed up with staging anti-God lectures ('Nobody comes but atheists!)" and has "his own sophisticated recipe for the conversion of Russia." "We must make it so that the last of the old ones believes no more in the omnipotent, but in us," he says. "And for this we must show what we can do. First, a piece of meat in the soup, good clothes for winter, then — radio, electricity, books, movies. Against this, Mister God can't hold out long."

The translation, I must again suggest, is probably *Time's* own, and might well undergo a little refinement before appearing in an English — or even an American — edition. But never mind that. The novel, you will remember, was adduced in evidence that religion was alive in Russia. That, as far as I know, has never been disputed in enlightened circles. Whether the plot of *The Miraculous Icon*, as presented, bolsters *Time's* theory that religion in the U.S.S.R. is "far from limited to dying-off old folks" may very well be disputed. It is—as quoted above—mostly the "peasant oldsters" who launch the revival. And even in the *Izvestia* letter it was the mother who was converted, not the daughters, though one of the latter was driven to suicide. I am not saying that *Time's* theory is wrong: I am only saying I find it unproven. Nevertheless, *Time* concludes page 37 with the statement that "from all indications, God is doing somewhat better than just holding out." And here endeth the religious section.

Overleaf comes the disparity. For page 38 brings us to the "Science" section, and to the Russian photograph of the far side of the moon. "The Soviet's Lutnik III had performed just as Russian space scientists predicted, in a display of engineering virtuosity that was the greatest achievement yet in man's exploration of space." So does *Time's* tune change with the page. The religious theme is dropped. And if it is "village" atheism that takes its place, that village must include the moon. Russia's atheistic scientists are certainly "clear-eyed" and, with Lutnik III behind them, they might even presume to advise an American Professor of Astronomy.

Readers Reply to Mr Geoffrey Ashe

Geoffrey Ashe states (THE FREETHINKER 30/10/59) that "A miracle, in Christian terms, means a divinely-ordained exception: . . . effected by God for his own purposes, through Christ or otherwise" (i.e., by the Church and its priests) and that "miracles are not magic."

Bernard Shaw defines miracles in the following dialogue from *St. Joan* between the Lord Chamberlain and the Archbishop of the Court of France, 1429 A.D.

L.C.: Come! what is a miracle?

Archbishop (after explaining that "miracles are part of my profession"): A miracle, my friend, is an event which creates faith. That is the purpose and nature of miracles. They may seem very wonderful to the people who witness them, and very simple to those who perform them. That does not matter: if they confirm or create faith they are true miracles.

L.C.: Even when they are frauds, do you mean?

Archbishop: Frauds deceive. An event which creates faith does not deceive: therefore it is not a fraud, but a miracle.

L.C. (scratching his neck in perplexity): Well, I suppose as you are an Archbishop you might be right, but it seems a bit fishy to me . . .

Archbishop: . . . Miracles are not frauds because they are often — I do not say always — very simple and innocent contrivances by which the priest fortifies the faith of his flock.

Can Geoffrey Ashe explain away Bernard Shaw's exposure of miracles as magic, frauds and contrivances?

WALTER RIDLEY.

If the New Testament events did not happen, then what did? asks Mr. Ashe. It is not the Freethinker's place to answer this question, it is up to the Christian to prove that the events described did happen. The Christian has to prove that God exists and that Jesus Christ existed. Not only that, but that Jesus was born of a virgin, died on the cross, rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. He has to prove these are not fairy stories, and he must do so from outside evidence. There is not one historian who wrote about these wonders described in the Gospels. I know Tacitus, Pliny the Younger and Josephus mention Jesus and a Christian sect, but no historian confirms an unnatural birth, a resurrection or an ascension, and without these, even if Jesus did exist, he was but a fellow mortal who died and whose dust mingled with that of his followers in Palestine. Mr. Ashe sees "great differences of interest and emphasis but no contradictions," and is unimpressed with "arguments of silence." How convenient! But Matthew and John, who were allegedly there, might have mentioned an important affair like the ascension instead of leaving it to Mark and Luke, who weren't. Who told Luke about the angel Gabriel being sent by God to tell Mary that she would have a child? This is what the Christians call history! As for the resurrection stories, Mr. Ashe passes them off as "scrappy and muddled." Not contradictory, mind you, though perhaps "a startling piece of fiction." What *did* happen? he asks. It is very doubtful if this answer will ever be known, but it must be obvious that the events described in the New Testament did not take place.

E. MILLS.

Mr. Ashe says: "We are confronted with the unique historical incarnation of God — not a god, and not just one fairy-tale saviour among many." This is a glaring example of what Mr. Gregory S. Smelters calls the categorical error. There are not Mr. Ashe, Mr. Smelters, Mr. Brown, Mr. Jones, the other millions of men on this planet and, then, "Man" in addition. There are not all the tigers on this planet and then "Tiger." Likewise there are not the gods of all the different religions (Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Hindu, etc.) and then "God." "Man," "Tiger," "God" are convenient nouns to designate a type — a species. The first two are the English equivalents of *Homo sapiens* and *Felis tigris*. True, these have a more factual existence than does the third, but its mythical nature does not affect the argument. There are not Oberon, Titania, Puck, Cobweb, Moth, etc., and then "Fairy."

ROBERT DENT.

If Mr. Ashe requires the production of "a Christ before Christ" I would advise him to read Prof. A. Dupont-Sommer's *The Dead Sea Scrolls: a Preliminary Survey*, which discloses an Essene writer of the first century B.C. speaking of a dead leader in terms "indistinguishable from those in which the early Christians spoke of Jesus. Two possibilities arise, neither of which can be comfortable for Mr. Ashe: (a) the Gospel story has been postdated by about a century or (b) the thing happened twice!

Mr. Ashe, in mentioning Tacitus "and others," fails to state that Tacitus was only writing from hearsay and that the important years A.D. 29-31 during the life and death of Jesus are missing from the *Annals*. Also the stranger fact that Pliny the elder, Philo and Justus of Tiberius — all contemporaries of Jesus —

make no mention whatever of him.

As Mr. Ashe well knows, any anti-Christian writing that may have existed in the early days of the religion would not have been allowed by the Christians to survive. However, perhaps he has never heard of the Gnostics.

In checking the historical (and presumably truthful) Pauline Epistles against Acts, may I suggest that Acts 9, 24-28 be compared with Galatians 1, 15-20 (both of which purport to record Paul's movements after his conversion) And I should like to see Mr. Ashe harmonise the four stories of the Resurrection. He evidently thinks he can do better than other Christians who have tried.

The anti-Christian case as I see it (always assuming that Jesus existed) is that if even one of the actions, teachings, statements or prophecies of Jesus can be shown to be immoral or false this would be fatal both to his claim to deity and to the alleged Divine origin of Christianity. To assume the contrary would be to suppose God liable to mistake or falsity and prove him imperfect. Can Mr. Ashe accept this?

For ample proof of such false and immoral acts and prophecies, may I refer Mr. Ashe to the four gospels? (References and reasons if required.)

C. STANLEY.

Why Mr. Ashe should criticise Freethinkers for having differences of opinion I do not know; indeed his generalisation could quite easily be turned round to read "One does not find a case building up, but a number of (Christians) contradicting each other" on the question, for instance, of which is the true Church.

His distinction between the miraculous and magic also leaves me unconvinced. In which category do the miracles of the fig tree, the marriage of Cana and Gadarene Swine fall? Regarding the last, surely medical science has proved it to be sheer nonsense. Amongst primitive people, no religion without a god who could raise himself and others from the dead would stand a chance of being adopted or of surviving. Perhaps this is why Christianity has what every other religion has; and I do not think we are being dogmatic in supposing that the Christians copied. Mr. Ashe says that he does not know of any story B.C. of an historical person being born of a virgin. What about the royal families of ancient Egypt? Are their claims any more or less valid than that of Jesus? In any case liberal Christians no longer believe in the virgin birth.

I think that the anti-Christians (I would prefer the term "Non-Christians") should reject Christianity on the following grounds: (1) that certain positive statements regarding the Christian story have been made; (2) they have not been substantiated; and (3) it is therefore logical to reject them until such time as proof is forthcoming.

It is not up to us to prove that the Christians are wrong, but rather up to them to prove that they are right. This they have failed to do.

C. H. HAMMERSLEY.

It seems that Mr. Geoffrey Ashe has read so many books about the Bible that he has forgotten the Bible narrative itself.

I invite him to consider the following from *The Age of Reason*: "The history of Jesus Christ is contained in the four books ascribed to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The first chapter of Matthew begins with giving a genealogy of Jesus Christ; and in the third chapter of Luke there is also given a genealogy of Jesus Christ. Did these two agree, it would not prove the genealogy to be true, because it might nevertheless be a fabrication; but if they contradict each other in every particular it proves falsehood completely. If Matthew speak truth, Luke speaks falsehood; and if Luke speak truth, Matthew speaks falsehood; and as there is no authority for believing one more than the other, there is no authority for believing either . . ." (page 106 Pioneer Press edition).

I invite Mr. Ashe to reply to Paine.

G. DICKINSON.

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CORRESPONDENCE

ZIONISM

I read with interest F. A. Ridley's article "Jehovah and Modern Zionism." He is, of course, quite right to show the inconsistency of the "secular-Zionist" claims to Israel as the Land of the Jews. I myself am a Jew, and have listened to all the pros and cons in the Zionist controversy. Mainly pros, it must be said. The only logical argument for the Jews going back to Israel is a religious one, a Biblical one. Since 80 per cent. of the Jews in Israel are not religious, the majority of the population has no "legitimate" claim to Palestine.

This is not to say that there is any point in denying that the State of Israel exists, as the Arab States do. The only hope for the Middle East is for Israel to bind herself closer to the Arab world with the establishment of a Federation of States as a realisable goal.

It is not strictly accurate, I might add, to say that the Rabbis rule Israel. They represent a small and very discredited section of the ruling group. And even amongst the Jewish "clergy" there is dissension. The death of the late Chief Rabbi, Isaac Herzog, has led to a controversy between two wings within the Orthodox Jewish community. A controversy not entirely dissimilar, and for similar reasons, which followed the death of Pope Pius. One wing, a "liberal" or "modernist" wing, want the young Rabbi Goren, the Chaplain to the Israeli Army, to be the new Chief Rabbi. The Conservative wing want an American Rabbi, Soloveyichik, to succeed.

Even religion has to try to move with the times!

AKIBA.

Mr. F. A. Ridley's argument re Zionism but underlines the New Morality between nations that we hope has come to stay, that right by conquest is obsolete. Isn't it too late now to give back Israel to the Arabs; Canada, U.S.A., Central and South America to the Red Indians; New Zealand to the Maoris, and so on? Perhaps Israel will be unique in being the last State to exist by right of conquest. It is "racial" unity, more than religious unity, that holds both Jews and Zionists together today.

Israel is ably shouldering her share of that most pressing problem, the care of refugees. They are pouring into her from Central Europe, Asia and North Africa. She must absorb them all, the diseased, the criminals, the insane. Surely the dispossessed Arabs should not be beyond the resources of the wealthy West. I have a map of the world before me and can hardly find Israel, and wish it were a richer strip of land. It is the problem today that matters, here and now. 1948 is past, 1914-17 is past, and the unknown period probably in the second Millennium B.C. is past.

May Israel ever be able to maintain herself, and make her contribution to World Unity.

DORIS MCCONNOCHIE.

Mr. Ridley writes as if almost every Jew believes in the Chosen Race myth. Actually a tiny majority of fanatics take it at all seriously. I do not know the case of Mr. George Maranz but, if anyone should get the impression that every Anti-Zionist is expelled from Israel at the point of a revolver I would remind them that there are several Anti-Zionist members of the Knesset (Parliament).

J. R.

[This correspondence is now closed—Editor.]

WORKER-PRIESTS

Il Quotidiano, the paper of Catholic Action, in a series of articles tries to explain that the banning of the worker-priests' movement in France by the "modern" Pope was only to be expected. When still Archbishop of Venice, Mgr. Roncalli had close connections with the French hierarchy and therefore some opinion was formed that, once installed on St. Peter's throne, he would reinstate the worker-priests. In point of fact, however, the development of this movement had even then been a source of disquiet and apprehension to him.

In a second instalment, the journal makes these pertinent remarks: "Work in a factory is utterly incompatible with the life and the obligations of a priest . . . When working, a priest finds himself in an environment highly uncondusive to his spiritual life and greatly fatal to his chastity; moreover, whether he likes it or not, his thoughts follow the trend of thoughts of his fellow-workmen in both the social and industrial fields. He becomes so involved in their way of life that in no time he is also taking part in their class struggle which for a priest is inadmissible."

While freely admitting the zealous efforts of the French Church in search of new ways to transform the apostolic work according to modern needs, the intervention of the Vatican had become necessary "for the protection of eternal values which, therefore, are and must remain the same always and everywhere."

P. G. ROY.

"ALL MY DAYS"

I have just finished reading a novel which I have enjoyed immensely. I think details might be useful. THE FREETHINKER would bring it to many more people who would enjoy it.

The book is *All My Days* by Neil Bell, published by Eyre and Spottiswoode in 1956. It is an autobiography of a journalist-cum-writer-cum-publisher, who apparently lives a most full life without any belief in the Almighty. This point is emphasised throughout the book, which starts with quotations from Voltaire and others.

The copy I have is in Essex County Library, and by the look of the date sheet has been read 39 times in the past three years — quite good for a library book in a rural area.

JOHN DOWDING.

[We are very pleased to say that Mr. Neil Bell is a subscriber to THE FREETHINKER.—Editor.]

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

A correspondent, who claims to be a "Freethinker," having discarded certain Fundamentalist notions such as "Heaven and Hell," says: "The Kingdom of Heaven is within." Others have used it. I deny this, and consider it is a misnomer, misleading and pernicious, a gross superstition, and a delusive subterfuge.

Of course, we have feelings of gladness, of sadness, joy and sorrow, in common, in degree, with all sentient creatures, but no "Kingdom of Heaven." I ask anyone, who so believes, to produce evidence, if any there be. If not, the statement should be ruthlessly exposed as being fallacious.

Speaking personally, I'm quite as happy and contented as when I prayed "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth, as it is in Heaven."

This hardly accords with the Kingdom of Heaven within.

C. E. RATCLIFFE.

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