

The Freethinker

Volume LXXX—No. 21

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Sixpence

THIS MONTH French Freethinkers are commemorating the centenary of Joseph Turmel, "priest and historian of dogmas", as he always signed himself. He was born in Rennes in 1859 and died in that Breton town in 1943 during the Nazi occupation of France. Joseph Turmel's long life was devoted to study and resulted in an enormous literary output. Since however, practically the whole of this gigantic literary output was concentrated in learned, mostly ecclesiastical publications, and dealt almost exclusively with highly specialised branches of Roman Catholic theology and Church history, his work attracted little attention among the general, or even the literary public. "Prior to mid-November, 1939", wrote his also ex-clerical biographer, M. Felix Sartiaux, "Joseph Turmel was almost totally unknown to the world at large". His long life—he was already 71 by 1930—had been spent in erudite but obscure study in the quiet rural town of Rennes, confined to a narrow circle of specialists in ecclesiastical studies. In 1930 however, a spectacular announcement from Rome enveloped the learned recluse amid a blaze of international publicity: for on November 8th of that year, the Holy Office pronounced the priest Joseph Turmel, to be excommunicated, with the traditional bell, book and candle. This sentence which was officially confirmed by the Pope a few days later, made the heretic who was its object, internationally famous overnight. Turmel himself was, later on, to acknowledge this free advertisement by dedicating his six volume *Histoire des Dogmes*—1931-36, to the authorities of the Holy Office, whose unsolicited publicity had enabled him to find a publisher for so encyclopaedic and highly specialised a work of learning.

In — And Out of the Church

Joseph Turmel was born of poor, but pious parents—a not uncommon combination particularly in so devoutly Catholic a land as Brittany. He was soon destined for the priesthood, like his illustrious compatriot, Ernest Renan had been a generation earlier. Unlike Renan, however, he completed his ecclesiastical studies and (also unlike Renan) actually took holy orders. It does not appear that Turmel ever worked as a parish priest; his remarkable scholarship seems to have been noted from the start. After having been ordained priest on June 3rd, 1882, he devoted himself to the life of study and reflection which he continued to the end.

However, this life of study was destined to undergo some sharp interruptions, for the young cleric had not only a passion for learning, but also a highly developed critical faculty which he fearlessly applied to the sacrosanct authorities and dogmas of his Church. From about 1886 onwards, he became increasingly sceptical, first of the documents, then of the dogmas deduced arbitrarily from the "inspired Scriptures" by the Catholic Church. Presently, his heresies leaked out among his ecclesiastical colleagues. Turmel was incontinently deprived of his pro-

fessorship, his MSS were seized and mostly destroyed. For 18 months the young cleric lived in enforced solitude, did penance and was submitted to a rigorous discipline. He stated later, that he would then have quitted the priesthood but for the fact that his widowed mother was destitute, while his own highly-specialised studies were not only entirely useless for any economic purpose, but also entirely unfitted him for any commercial livelihood.

Accordingly, he resolved to submit and, in December 1893, was re-admitted to his former ecclesiastical rank. In connection with which harsh ordeal, Turmel's biographer informs us that such an ordeal befell many of the more intellectual of the younger clergy during this

period, when the impact of modern scientific and historical studies was undermining the medieval dogmas of the Roman Catholic Church; an upsurge which culminated in the rise of the modernist movement, the headquarters of which incidentally, were amongst the French clergy, the most learned in the Catholic Church. (In his ecclesiastical autobiography *Twelve Years in a Monastery*, Joseph McCabe has described his own very similar mental struggle in the 1890's.)

Fourteen Pseudonyms

Unlike McCabe, Joseph Turmel did not leave the Church. Contrarily he remained within it until November 1930 when it was the Church that left him (by the path of the greater excommunication as indicated above). However, during this long period of nearly forty years, his mental activity was intense and his literary output was prodigious, chiefly in the form of innumerable articles mostly in ecclesiastical reviews. Many, perhaps most of these, were more or less heretical, some very much so indeed. (It must be remembered that after the suppression of Modernism in 1908 by Pius X and his Jesuit entourage, a sharp reaction set in against all modern critical scholarship.) Turmel however, succeeded in accomplishing the truly remarkable diplomatic feat of simultaneously avoiding an open breach with the Vatican, whilst continuing to pour out a non-stop stream of critical scholarship. He even took the anti-modernist oath imposed (after the excommunication of Alfred Loisy and his modernist colleagues) on all Catholic clerics after 1908. The technique by means of which Turmel achieved this "double-think", was a highly ingenious one. During this period he wrote under various pseudonyms—fourteen in all—who between them literally "explored every avenue" of the vast *corpus* of Catholic theology, from the Trinity to the Devil upon whose varied theological adventures Turmel wrote some of the most penetrating pages ever penned—and from the Papacy to the Higher Criticism of the New Testament. Naturally the feat of simultaneously carrying on an ecclesiastical routine while keeping fourteen pseudonyms going, involved this most learned of heretics in much equivocation, some of which can perhaps hardly be morally justified except by the plea of sheer necessity. (Turmel's biographer lists his

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

Joseph Turmel— Historian of Dogmas

By F. A. RIDLEY

pseudonyms as follows:—Coulange, Delafosse, Dulac, Dupin, Gallerand, Herzog, Lagarde, Lawson, Lenain, Letourneur, Lezourec, Perrin, Vanbeck, and, of course he often wrote under his own name.

The History of Dogmas

However, this intellectual game of hide and seek, eventually came to an end and the "infallible" sleuth-hounds of Rome traced a whole congeries of heretical utterances uttered by one or other of Turmel's pen-names to the learned priest at Rennes. Excommunication duly followed; but it did not finish the great scholar whose *magnum opus*, the six volume *Histoire des Dogmes* appeared sequentially between 1930 and 1936 under his now famous and invariable signature, Joseph Turmel, Priest and Historian of Dogmas. Particularly the second! For, if I do not presume to comment upon this monumental (and still alas, untranslated) work, it is only because in the opinion of one reader at least, Turmel's *Histoire des Dogmes* (the synthesis of his life-work begun when he was over 70) is to the critical history of Catholic Christianity what Hamlet is to drama, or Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* is to secular history. All superlatives are superfluous, for there is nothing adequate to say. One can only comment that it appears to be absolutely incredible how so much critically absorbed knowledge could have been contained in a single brain. (I seem to remember that our own great Rationalist scholar, John M. Robertson, once pronounced Turmel to have been the greatest scholar since the Renaissance and

in his own field at least, no doubt he was—incidentally it constitutes a lurid commentary upon the present degree of civilisation at which we have arrived, that this encyclopaedic scholar should have had to resort to such humiliating shifts in order to work, or even live!)

A Notable Centenary

Turmel's last work (published in 1938), was a monograph upon the Apocalypse apparently unknown here, in which he advanced the intriguing theory that the Christ of "John's Nightmare" was not Jesus, but the Jewish Messiah, Bar Cochba "the bright, the morning star". (The name Bar Cochba, means "Son of the Star".) Turmel appears to have regarded the Gospel Jesus as a composite character based partly, at least, upon another contemporary Messianic aspirant, Judas the Gaulonite (who also revolted unsuccessfully against Rome.) Soon after, the war and the resulting German occupation cut Turmel off from the outside world. He did not survive to see the liberation of France from the Nazi hordes, but died in his birth place Rennes, whence he had spent his long life, in 1943 in his 84th year. The conventional books of reference (e.g. the Encyclopaedia Britannica) still ignore the great heretic, but we hope that this month's centenary celebrations sponsored by the World Union of Freethinkers, will do something to popularise the memory of perhaps the greatest scholar of whom the modern International Freethought movement can boast—of Joseph Turmel—priest and historian of Dogmas.

Strange Company

By LESLIE HANGER

CHRISTIANITY IS SO INTERWOVEN with Paganism that it is well nigh impossible to disentangle the one from the other. Its doctrines, both mystical and ethical, are all paralleled in the philosophies and religions of Greece and the Middle East, confounding its claim to be unique and a religion distinct from all others. An interesting sidelight is thrown on this by the story of the Sibyls. The Sibyls were the prophetesses of Greek Mythology who in the Middle Ages were considered to have been to the Pagans what the Hebrew prophets were to the Jews and like them to have foretold the coming of Christ. Unlike the Delphic oracles, they did not answer chance inquirers, but only prophesied when inspired.

In an early period of Greek history, about 800-600 BC, inspired prophets of Asian origin were numerous and included Sibylla of Morpessus, a village near Troy. Her inspiration derived from Apollo who granted her the boon of perpetual life, but Sibylla forgot to ask for perpetual youth also, so the gift proved of little value. Another famous story is of Sibylla offering her nine books of prophecies to Tarquinius Superbus, an early Roman ruler. On his refusing to pay her price, she burnt three and offered the remaining six for the same price. On meeting with a second refusal she destroyed three more and again demanded the same price. By this time the curiosity of Jarquinius was so aroused that he bought the remaining three at Sibylla's price. This should make her the patron saint of salesmen!

So famous did these prophecies become, that at one time they were slavishly copied by Christian and Jewish writers, anxious that their religions should obtain a veneration of Greek culture. As this fame grew, so did the number of Sibyls. In 50 BC Varro listed ten, each with their name and attributes.

The original prophecies, which were written on palm leaves, were accidentally destroyed by fire in Rome in

83 BC, and envoys were sent to the cities of Greece and the Middle East to secure a new collection. In the fifth century, Christian zeal, anxious to wipe out the remains of Paganism, caused them to be destroyed by fire, though by that time few people took any interest in them and they were dying from neglect.

In the 13th century, the Sibyls were revitalised by Filippo Barbieri, a Dominican Friar of southern Italy, who set them alongside the prophets, each proclaiming the coming of the Redeemer. As a knowledge of the Pagan world, slight as it was, at that time tended to create scepticism, the Friar's preaching was apparently a counter-blast to this: an effort to enlist the old religion as an ally of the new.

It is a mistake to think of the Pagan Greeks and Romans as all Stoics, Sceptics or Epicureans. The vast mass of the people were steeped in superstition. Had it been otherwise, Christianity would never have risen to the top. It is this superstition that Lucius Apuleius satirised in *The Golden Ass* and Epicurus and his followers did so much to combat. And it was this superstition that Barbieri appealed to through the Sibyls.

The Sibyls, however, have never played any great part in Christian mythology though they frequently appear in Christian art, usually being depicted as women holding books. They may be found in paintings and carvings, side by side with Christian Saints and Hebrew prophets. How surprised the poor girls must be to find themselves in such strange company!

Many great artists have painted Sibyls, but perhaps the outstanding one is Van Eyck, who put them on the outer doors of his altar-piece in Ghent. Another good representation is in Ulm Cathedral. In 1425, Cardinal Giordano Orsini had 12 Sibyls painted in his palace in Rome. In this country the great chamber of Chastleton House, Oxfordshire, has a frieze of painting showing Sibyls in one half of the room and prophets in the other. Of the several representations in churches, that at Bradninch in Devon, where Sibyls appear on the magnificent altar screen, is best known.

The Kennedy Candidacy

By WALTER L. ARNSTEIN

AS INFORMED ENGLISH READERS will be aware, there is going on in the United States today a vigorous contest for the presidential nomination of the Democratic party. The leading contender, and victor thus far in three contested state primary elections, is John F. Kennedy, Senator from the state of Massachusetts and by religious profession a Roman Catholic. For the first time since 1928, and for the second time in American history, it thus appears likely—though by no means certain—that one of the two major parties will nominate a Roman Catholic as candidate for the Presidency of the United States. This prospect has raised a number of controversial questions. One of these is the purely political question as to whether Senator Kennedy's nomination would aid or injure his party's chance for victory. His candidacy would obviously attract some voters and alienate others, but which group would, on balance, constitute the greater number?

It seems to me that the question a freethinker must ask himself is somewhat different. Can he, under any circumstances, feel justified in voting for a Roman Catholic as President? Presumably if the question were asked about a member of almost any other religious body, the answer would be "yes," since if the freethinker were to confine himself only to candidates sharing his own attitudes toward religion, he would hardly ever find himself participating in any election. The number of John Stuart Mills—or Charles Bradlaugh—among Members of Parliament or among American Presidents has always been a tiny minority. The only man ever to be elected President of the United States who was not formally affiliated with a religious body was Thomas Jefferson, who professed himself a deist. But that was long ago. This means that the freethinker must customarily choose on the basis of political differences between candidates rather than on the basis of their religious professions. In any case, as recent British history illustrates, differences on such subjects as the wisdom of nationalising basic industries or the desirability of banning nuclear weapons tests often span religious lines.

Two questions may then be legitimately raised in connection with the Kennedy candidacy: Would Senator Kennedy as President be in any sense a pawn of the Vatican? On what questions of public policy, if any, would his Catholicism sway his actions? While an occasional Baptist clergyman has raised the spectre of papal domination, it seems fairly obvious that the Pope would in no literal sense move to Washington, D.C. as a fourteenth century predecessor once moved to Avignon. Senator Kennedy, moreover, has on a number of occasions asserted his independence of the Roman Catholic Church in terms which caused the Jesuit weekly *America* to deplore "the earnest senator's efforts to appease bigots." Yet in an address to the American Society of Newspaper Editors on April 21st, Senator Kennedy voluntarily raised the issue again:

There is only one legitimate question underlying all the rest: Would you, as President of the United States, be responsive in any way to ecclesiastical pressures or obligations of any kind that might in any fashion influence or interfere with your conduct of that office in the national interest? I have answered that question many times. My answer was—and is—"No." Senator Kennedy went on to insist that he was not "the Catholic candidate for President," he was a candidate for the Presidency who happened to be a Catholic. Bishop Campbell of West Virginia, as Episcopalian [i.e. associated with the Anglican Communion] has questioned the signifi-

cance of such assurances. Does Kennedy subscribe to the Syllabus of Errors of 1864 or to the dogma of papal infallibility. It is unlikely that Senator Kennedy will embark upon a doctrinal dispute with his Church, but even on this point he has gone far to answer the bishop, and he recently declared: "Do not expect me to explain or defend every act or statement of every Pope or priest, in this country or some other, in this century or the last. . . ."

Even a freethinker, it seems to me, cannot but sympathise somewhat with Senator Kennedy's problem, for despite the widespread contemporary American injunction to "attend the Church of your choice," it is obvious that Senator Kennedy has not chosen his religion any more than have the majority of people at any time. Indeed, as a recent biography makes clear [James McGregor Burns, *John Kennedy: A Political Profile*], the Senator's association with his Church, while formally correct, has been somewhat tenuous. His entire education, for example, with the exception of a period of less than a year, took place in non-Catholic institutions, including several years at a private academy under Episcopalian auspices. He may be a product of the Harvard Law School, but he is not a product of the Jesuits.

What about the particular questions with which he might have to deal as President? There are a number of such questions in which religion plays a role: Should the Federal Government give aid to private Catholic schools? Senator Kennedy has voted against this in the Senate, regarding such financial assistance as irreconcilable with the American constitutional doctrine of separation of Church and State. Should the United States send an ambassador to the Vatican? Ex-President Truman proposed this unsuccessfully some years ago. Senator Kennedy is opposed. What of the issue of birth control? Should the United States provide information on birth control measures to those "underdeveloped countries" which request it? Senator Kennedy has stated that under given circumstances he would sign such a measure if he considered it to be in the national interest though he doubts that the issue is as significant a one as has been suggested. Freethinkers may well take issue with Senator Kennedy on this point, though his position differs little from that of the other announced candidates. What about relations with Russia? Senator Kennedy seems unlikely to be as self-righteous or dogmatic on that question as was, for example, the late Secretary of State Dulles, a Presbyterian. He has in any case approved American aid to Communist Yugoslavia, and he is perhaps the leading senatorial advocate of greater assistance for and understanding of "neutralist" India. His chief advisor on foreign policy is a liberal former ambassador to India, Chester Bowles.

The foregoing appraisal makes clear, I believe, that Senator Kennedy as President would not be a tool of the Catholic hierarchy, and—with the possible exception of aspects of the birth control controversy—would not permit his religious preconceptions to influence him in carrying out public policy. All this does not of course make Kennedy the best of possible candidates on political grounds. Yet he is obviously an intelligent and attractive politician. He has shown considerable courage and administrative skill in steering a bill dealing with labour union reform—an explosive issue in its own right—through the United States Senate. In a world filled with elderly

(Continued on next page)

This Believing World

In a Buddhist "explanatory" Handbook we have just received, we are told that "the Buddha analysed man's nature and found a physical body, the instrument whereby he gains experience". This surely is a wonderful "analysis", and we could add that we also have "analysed man's nature" and discovered that he is able to speak, and hear, and see, among many other activities. However, we are pleased to note that "beyond" the "reaction to the senses", there lie "the Sankharas"—though we confess this leaves us "stumped". Some of us at least have never been able to enthuse over Buddhism, and this kind of "explanatory" exposition leaves us just cold.

★

We always imagined that the real reason behind the change from the Biblical Sabbath Day to the Mithraic Sunday (the day of the Sun) as "the Lord's Day" was due to the impossibility of the early Christians inducing their Gentile converts to give up their Sun-God who was worshipped on the first day of the week; but we note another explanation given by the pious writer in a recent number of the London *Evening News*. He says that the change can "only" be explained by the Resurrection. But in that case, why do we still call the day *Sunday*? And needless to add, he does not tell us. As the "risen" Jesus is as mythical as the numerous other risen "Saviours", the Mithraic explanation is the only true one.

★

The "up and coming" new Messiah in Ghana, Dr. Nkrumah, has banned all prayers for our Queen—insisting that instead, the prayers should be only for himself and his government. We think this ought to be most helpful—and in this connection we note that the Rev V. King, Vicar of St. Mary's Peckham, wants all churchgoers regularly to pray for their borough councils—mayors, alderman and councillors. Whether councils must be prayed for may be another question, but it might be a good idea for Mr. King to invite Billy Graham to initiate the pious work, and begin a real orgy of prayer all over the country.

★

For this purpose we might borrow that superb idea inherent in Islam—a well-paid Muezzin to call the faithful at least five times a day to prayer. All Christian Muezzins should have more power than a Communist shop steward, and be backed not only by Parliament, but also by powerful vicars like Mr. King. And what about a few heavy fines for dissentients or backsliders?

★

A World Brotherhood has been established which specialises in photographing *thoughts*, and solving, quite simply, such infantile problems as "space travel". The secret of this, according to the Founder, Mr. J. Williamson, is not *speed* but *time*. When we—perhaps under Mr. Williamson's expert direction—can control time we can go to New York in a few seconds. An investigator from the *Sunday Dispatch* sampled the W.B.'s production of "auras" with a special kind of goggles but, alas, the particular "fluence" which produced these appears not to work with hard-headed and sceptical newspapermen. It didn't this time. He should have tried a little "Faith".

★

Our old friends Sodom and Gomorrah may or may not have actually existed as very ordinary little towns overwhelmed by a flood or an earthquake just like so many other towns which have disappeared in our Divinely-Ordered world. But apart from the impossible account of them in Holy Writ, there is not a particle of evidence

that they ever existed. However, an American archaeologist, Dr. Baney, who is quite convinced that they did, decided to explore the Dead Sea, and now claims that he "located" them there. Unfortunately, the Department of Antiquities in Amman considers his claim "unconvincing". Perhaps the "discovery" is as true as that of the discovery of Noah's Ark on top of Mt. Sinai by two Russian airman, or the discovery of 1,947,386 pieces of the Holy Cross of Christ all over the world. These at least can be all vouched for by the Roman Church.

★

The appalling "judicial" execution of Caryl Chessman must have angered even those people who believe in capital punishment—but we wonder whether his "unrepentant Agnosticism" had anything to do with all the appeals for clemency to be refused. Would he have been reprieved had he shown the least sign of contrite and passionate belief in Christ Jesus as his Saviour? In any case, the utter disregard for Chessman's fate—as far as we can judge—by President Eisenhower, puts him far below Abraham Lincoln whose humanity and clemency were so great a part of his remarkable career. Can anyone imagine Lincoln ignoring the world appeals for the unfortunate Chessman?

★

An article in "The New Daily", by the Rev. C. O. Rhodes claims that now "all the Church needs is a victory" and he is quite right. Not one victory, of course, but a long succession of them. But how is this to be achieved? So far, against the "infidel" army, the Church has constantly retreated, and is now always on the defensive. But it may win handsomely if it can substantiate its Devils, Angels, and Miracles, as well as its Heaven and Hell, and above all, prove the existence of its God. Can it?

THE KENNEDY CANDIDACY

(Concluded from page 163)

statesmen such as Adenauer of Germany and (until recently) Rhee of South Korea, his youth may also be termed an asset. He may not be *the* ablest candidate on the scene, but he certainly is one of the ablest.

When all this is said, it remains none the less true that his election to the American Presidency would in one sense be a misfortune for the freethought movement, in that it would everywhere be interpreted as a great victory for the Roman Catholic Church. It would raise the prestige of that Church—even if it would not increase its power—and it would consequently increase rather than decrease the influence of pernicious Church teachings on subjects such as birth control, censorship, and education. The Catholic Church may not be a monolith—Kennedy has contended that it is not—but it remains perhaps more of a monolith than he concedes, even if, as Mr. Ridley has often demonstrated, it is a flexible monolith.

Should Senator Kennedy be nominated for the Presidency, a freethinker might still decide to vote for him—regarding his Catholic affiliations as ultimately less dangerous than his prospective opponent's longtime advocacy of the tenets of McCarthyism—though the dilemma remains. In the meantime, it would be very much in the interest of freethinkers to stress the idea that Senator Kennedy has himself been emphasising, that he is not "the Catholic candidate," that he is running for political office and not for theological perferment. Then, should it happen that he is both nominated and elected President of the United States, the resultant propaganda value of this victory for the Roman Catholic Church may be kept to a minimum.

THE FREETHINKER

103 BOROUGH HIGH STREET, LONDON, S.E.1.

TELEPHONE: HOP 2717.

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, 103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1.

Details of membership of the National Secular Society may be obtained from the General Secretary, 103 Borough High Street, S.E.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 week-day, 1 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, CORSAIR, SMITH, etc. Sunday, 8 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, MILLS, SMITH, etc.

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

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Every Sunday, noon: Messrs. L. EBURY and A. ARTHUR.

INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Midland Institute Cinema, Paradise Street) Sunday, May 22nd, 6.45 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, "The Vatican and the Summit".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1.) Sunday, May 22nd, 11 a.m.: Prof. T. H. PEAR, M.A., "The Social Function of Religion Today".

Notes and News

MOST CANDIDATES for the American Presidential nomination have been piously declaring of late that the religious issue raised by Senator Kennedy's Roman Catholicism has no valid place in political debate. Vice-President Nixon, however, introduced a gratuitous barb aimed at Free-thinkers. There was only one way in which religion might become an issue, he said. That would be "if a candidate had no religion at all". (*The Guardian* 3/5/60.) The Constitution, he admitted, did not require a religious test before a man could run for or hold office, "but only a President with a belief in God could lead the United States and the free world in the contest against communism".

SIXTY-NINE-YEAR-OLD Cardinal Alfonso Castaldo of Naples, considers it "unseemly" for a ballerina to dance the title role in the ballet, "The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian," and when Russian-born Ludmilla Tcherina was scheduled to appear at Naples Opera House he urged Neopolitans to stay away and "say prayers of atonement to the Lord" (*Daily Express*, 18/4/60). The Opera House's reaction was to drop Miss Tcherina and present an oratorio version of the work, but the ballerina herself was angry. "I have danced Saint Sebastian more than 50 times in France and abroad," she said, and "I have never received anything but compliments from the clergy — including Cardinal Tisserant." She was taking the matter up with her lawyer, she declared, and she didn't rule out "the possibility of suing the cardinal."

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY ACKNOWLEDGED, £97 4s.; R. Reader, 2s. 6d.; L. R. Hitchcock, 5s.; Mrs. A. Calderwood, £1; W. L. Scarlett, Jr., £1 5s.; F. Muston, 5s.; Mrs. A. Vallance, 5s.; P. G. & A. Bamford, £1 10s.; Mrs. N. Henson, £25. Total to date May 13th, 1960. £126 16s. 6d.

ITALY AGAIN! *The Universe* (23/4/60) reported a solemn condemnation by bishops of a "new secularist spirit in Italy which may infiltrate even the clergy and which opposes every effort by the Church to guide the people on moral issues arising in public life." Those affected by this laicism were guilty of "deviations of thought and conduct which lead them into 'systematic and alarmist' opposition to the intervention of the Church in public affairs," the bishops themselves being the chief target of attack. Typical of the new trend are: "Spiteful criticisms against every intervention by the ecclesiastical authorities on issues arising in public life; intolerance towards Catholic thought and life; publicity to so-called clerical scandals; support for attempts to introduce divorce; efforts to reopen consideration of the 1929 Concordat . . . ; attacks on the legitimate freedom of schools; opposition to public authorities taking part in religious ceremonies; inability to understand the right of the Church and individual bishops to intervene when it is a question of guarding Catholics in the moral conduct of public affairs." "The atheistic side of laicism is found in Marxism," it continues; "the more bland form admits the existence of God but denies the supernatural order."

★

THE SAME ISSUE of *The Universe* gave details of a relic which it received in Assisi and which it will hand to Bishop Parker of Northampton "to be placed in Our Lady's shrine at Walsingham and there receive public veneration." It is "part of a veil worn by Our Lady as a head-dress and which she used to swaddle the Infant Jesus." There could be no doubt about the authenticity of the relic said Fr. Laurence Bernadini, O.F.M. CONV., custodian of the shrine of St. Francis, when he handed it over in a silver reliquary. "It was kept lovingly by first Christians and passed into the keeping of the princely Orsini family, who in 1414 gave it to the Assisi shrine." Moreover, many miracles had been worked in its presence.

★

"ARE THEIR ANY WITCHES left in Dorset?" asked the Bournemouth *Evening News* a few months ago (12/3/60). "I doubt it," it answered, but it found quite a lot of evidence of belief in "spells and spooks," among the unsophisticated. Such beliefs are not, however, confined to the Dorset countryside. The *Daily Express* (19/4/60) reported the first of a series of experiments by the Cambridge University Society for Psychical Research "to find out if the mind can transmit thought on to photographic plates without using a camera." And Tony Cornell, "chief researcher", as the *Express* called him, was "astonished" by the results. "In a darkened room a medical student lay holding a photographic plate to his head. He was thinking of a circle. And when the plate was developed, it was said yesterday, there was a picture of a circle." Another man thought of an oak tree and produced a picture, not of an oak tree, alas, but "rather like a picture you might get of the moon." No doubt Mr. Cornell and his fellow "researchers" would pity the poor simple folk of Dorset, who have never had the advantage of a University education!

—NEXT WEEK—

RELIGIOUS NEUROSIS

By COLIN McCALL

More Light on the New Testament—4

By H. CUTNER

MR. BRUCE in his *Are the New Testament Documents Reliable?* devotes only four pages to Paul, but naturally Paul's "evidence" is of supreme "importance". The famous Epistles are, we are told, "the earliest of New Testament writings", but no proof whatever of this is offered. It cannot be too strongly maintained therefore that, as far as we have them in their present form, they are, as Prof. Van Manen maintained in the *Encyclopedia Biblica*, all "pseudographia" of the *second* century. He does not even agree with the "Tubingen" school that Romans, Corinthians, and Galatians, are "genuine"—whatever that means.

But who was Paul? It is claimed that Paul was once called Saul, a bitter enemy of the early Christians, responsible with his fellow Jews for the murder of Stephen. For this is the story we get in Acts and, as Paul's Epistles and Acts are both called God's Precious Word, they must be true. What complete nonsense all this is can be seen by anybody who cares to examine the two accounts of Paul in Acts and in the Epistles. They contradict each other in almost every particular.

There is no evidence whatever that even if there had been somebody called Saul, that this Saul was Paul. Saul became Paul quite easily in Acts—"Then Saul (who also is called Paul) . . ." And that is how it was done. There is no evidence of any kind that Saul ever wrote any Epistles to anybody.

Mr. Bruce believes every word of Acts as he does the Gospels, but that must be expected of him. He actually believes that Paul—and Peter of course—spoke to the Jews in their synagogues in favour of Jesus Christ. The Jews themselves have literally no records either of Peter or Paul. Their great historian Josephus, who is always appealed to by Christians as proving the existence of Jesus, never mentions the two famous Apostles or anything we find in Acts except where the writer of Acts "pinches" all sorts of things from Josephus. The way in which Josephus was stolen from by the author of Acts has been the subject of many books but one would never guess this from Mr. Bruce and his fellow "apologists".

But he does recognise the paramount importance of proving the authenticity and credibility of Luke for he, like most if not all Christian "authorities", considers that whoever wrote Luke must have written Acts, and therefore Mr. Bruce devotes twelve pages to "the writings of Luke".

And who was Luke? Nobody knows. Everything written about him is pure, unadulterated speculation. It is quite easy to write, as Mr. Bruce does, that Luke "inherited the high traditions of Greek historical writing, and had access to various excellent sources of information about the events with which he dealt, besides being present at some of the incidents which he narrated". The only source of information we know he had access to is Josephus, and if he had any other sources it was the duty of Mr. Bruce to tell us what they were with chapter and verse. It is true that he tells us that Luke was acquainted "at a very early date with the Matthean Logia", but he gives us no evidence of any kind that this was so. It is just a statement which most readers will pass without comment. It *may* be true, but as nobody has ever seen the "Matthean Logia", and we know literally nothing about them, this kind of assertion looks like nonsense. Where Mr. Bruce scores, however, is in the brilliant way in which

he proves the authenticity and credibility of Luke by going to Luke. It must be so because Luke says so. So Luke *must* be telling the truth.

I am sure that this method of proving that the New Testament Documents are reliable appeals to all good Christians—like Mr. Ashe, for example. But for anybody who takes the Documents and compares them for himself, it is simply hopeless.

For instance, the two accounts of various incidents in the life of Paul as given by Luke in Acts, and as we are told by Paul himself in the Epistles, rule each other completely out. Any reader of Thomas Scott's *English Life of Jesus* will find therein a highly detailed comparison. Let me quote:

The lie is given (for what other can we honestly use?) to almost every statement in the narrative of the Acts . . . Paul at this time did *not* go to Jerusalem; he did *not* make any attempts to introduce himself to the Apostles there; these Apostles did *not* express any fear or suspicion of him; and Barnabas did *not* vouch for the reality of his conversion. Paul did *not* at Jerusalem address himself to the Jews, and the Jews did *not* seek to kill him; he was *not* taken to Caesarea, he did *not* preach throughout the coasts of Judea, he did *not* go from Palestine to Tarsus; he did *not* stay at Tarsus six or seven years . . .

and so on. The pity is that Scott's work is almost unobtainable. It contains some of the most drastic examinations of the Gospels and Epistles ever written; and though the author believed in the actual existence of Jesus as a man, he has made of this man quite as shadowy a figure as he is of a God.

Mr. Bruce quotes Sir William Ramsey's opinion of Luke as an historian—"Luke is a historian of the first rank . . . his statements of facts trustworthy . . . (he) should be placed along with the very greatest historians".

If Luke wrote the Book of Acts, and he is such a great historian, how comes it that almost everything he relates of Paul—and he does so in great detail—Paul himself gives the lie to in his own "trustworthy facts?" *One* of the two writers is a *liar* or completely mistaken.

And what are we to say of the famous story (looked at from an historical standpoint) of an "angel of the Lord" meeting the shepherds when Jesus was born—there is nothing in Luke about the Star of Bethlehem—and the "multitude of the heavenly host" singing hosannas—are these "historical? Or that painfully idiotic story of Jesus rebuking "an unclean devil" in a man and making him come out—is that historical? I have no space to deal fully with Luke as an historian—but let me give one particularly silly specimen of his "facts". In his Gospel, he says that Jesus remained *one* day on earth after the Resurrection. In Acts, he says that Jesus was seen by the Apostles for "forty days".

In any case, as Luke was *not* an eyewitness, how did he "get" the facts in his Gospel? Who were his authorities? The answer is plain. He had *no* authorities, and his "facts" came from floating stories which anyone made up about Jesus, and from various "Gospels" which also supplied the "facts" and the "history" in other Gospels. There is no evidence of any "history" whatever in them except in those parts which he obviously took from Josephus.

Mr. Bruce naturally tries to find some evidence in what he calls "Rabbinical Writings", but he can only go to the Mishna and the Gemara in the Talmud which were at last compiled about the year 500 AD when of course the unfortunate Jews had had Christianity rammed down their

throats for centuries and so were obliged to mention it. And of course, he strenuously tries to prove that the forged passage in Josephus is almost if not quite genuine. Considering that it has long been given up by many prominent Christian writers, I need not go into it here—but I am glad he makes mincemeat of Dr. Robert Eisler and his Slavonic Josephus, and Eisler's own absurd theories. As for Tacitus and all the other Pagan "witnesses" there is not the slightest evidence that Mr. Bruce has even heard of John M. Robertson, the American Prof. W. B. Smith, or the Frenchman M. Hochart, who all played havoc with the pagan "testimony" to Jesus and Christianity. On the other hand, he confidently recommends his readers who want to study the "discredited Christ-myth theories" to consult Conybeare's *Historical Christ*, A. D. Howell Smith's *Jesus Not a Myth*, and Prof. H. G. Wood's *Did Christ Really Live?* Personally, I feel that most Christian readers of these books will always violently throw out the awful

"Myth-theory" of Jesus, and agree with Conybeare that Jesus was *the* "historical" Messiah—Messiahs are always sent by "God"—agree with Mr. Howell Smith that Jesus as a Man really lived, and with Prof. Wood that Jesus was like himself, if not in name, a veritable Quaker. Most Christian readers, if not all, will also agree that the New Testament Documents are absolutely reliable. Few, if any, would dream of giving up the Devils and Angels and Miracles to say nothing of the literal reality of Heaven and Hell as places which distinguish Christianity from so many of the other religions.

For myself, I can only express amazement that the arguments and speculations used by so many modern "authorities" and quoted voluminously by Mr. Bruce could possibly convince anybody who thinks. Such books as his can only prove the truth of Christianity to people who are already convinced believers. And nobody else.

This concludes Mr. Cutner's criticism of Mr. F. F. Bruce.

God and the Plane Crash

By COLIN McCALL

THE *Ottawa Citizen* of January 18th, 1960, contained a "Strictly Personal" article by Sidney J. Harris, in which he quite rightly castigated the single survivor of a plane crash in which twenty-six other people were killed. "The Lord opened my side of the plane", said the survivor, "and I was able to jump out".

Mr. Harris considered that this remark would do "more to confirm disbelievers than to convert them". "That God would directly intervene to help one passenger escape, while the others—perhaps less sinful than he—were permitted to die, does not encourage belief in Divine mercy", he said. "If the Lord aided some children to flee safely from that Chicago school fire a year ago, why did He allow 90 other children to perish in the flames through no fault of their own?" This—added Mr. Harris—"is the question all atheists ask, and the so-called believers can have no answer, if they really are convinced that God opened the plane door. They must take refuge in the shabbiest sort of mysticism".

Where does Mr. Harris himself take refuge? "Does God directly intervene in specific human events?" he asks: and answers: "Except for the class of miracles—which can be neither proved nor disproved—it seems to me verging on the impious to suggest that the Lord has anything at all to do with accidents, catastrophes, natural calamities, or the disastrous results of human folly". And it should be noted, for future reference, that the "specific human events" of the question have been extended in the answer to include natural calamities.

"All living creatures are frail and mortal", Mr. Harris continues. "Life is filled with contingencies. Man has free will—and so has Nature, in its own way. Floods will drown, fires will burn, ice will freeze, trees will fall, volcanoes will erupt." Which strikes me as a mixture of the mysticism that he has previously condemned and the trite and obvious. The mystical conception of Nature with free will "in its own way" is then developed (using that term loosely), viz. "In this order of freedom, where each created thing operates according to the laws of its own essence, even God Himself is powerless to invoke a self-contradiction. The best theologians know this, and respect this".

Unfortunately, I am no theologian. To my rather plain mind, it seems that Mr. Harris has invoked a contradiction. If "each created thing operates according to the laws of

its own essence", freewill is surely ruled out completely. There can be no "freedom" if one operates according to the laws of one's own essence. And Mr. Harris really surrenders when he declares that, "The mystery of the Divine plan of the universe cannot be known to any of us". How then, we must ask, do we know of the existence of such a plan?

The answer is, of course, that we don't. We don't even infer it from the evidence any longer, though our ancestors—with some justification, considering their limited knowledge—did. Today, the Pope, the plane-crash survivor, the Archbishop of Canterbury and Mr. Harris, no longer come to the theistic conclusion from an examination of the facts: they come to the facts with a theistic presumption. That is the root of their trouble—and, incidentally, the root of a good deal of the world's trouble.

Mr. Harris is not as naïve in his beliefs, perhaps, as are the other three. He sees no answer "in human terms" to the problem of evil, and he considers it "nearly blasphemy to suggest that the Lord would open a plane door for one and seal the fate of 26 others". "This kind of pious gratitude", he thinks, "does nothing but engender scepticism among the families and friends of innocent victims". And he concludes: "Whatever God is, He is not a rigged roulette-wheel".

Whether the actual disaster or the "pious gratitude" is more likely to engender the scepticism among relatives of the victims, I cannot argue now. But it will be obvious to the reader that Mr. Harris, though justifiably critical of the plane survivor's egoistical conception of God, provides no substitute conception of his own. God is not a rigged roulette wheel, but is he a random one? Is he a croupier? Or is he an impassive observer? We are given no positive lead. We know only the negative aspects of Mr. Harris's deity. He has nothing at all to do with "accidents, catastrophes, natural calamities, or the disastrous results of human folly". "Floods will drown, fires will burn, ice will freeze, trees will fall, volcanoes will erupt", apparently independently of him. In the peculiar way already referred to, Mr. Harris somehow manages to believe that: Floods will drown, fires will burn, etc. according to the laws of their own essence, but of their own free will. And God is powerless to invoke a self-contradiction, which I take to mean, he can't do anything about it.

It is a pretty hopeless situation—logically, at any rate.

But Mr. Harris, like all theists, is inevitably in a hopeless situation. Presumably he believes God had something to do with "Nature" at one time (he talks of "each created thing", it will be remembered); I take it that he believes there is a "Divine plan of the universe", though nobody can know what it is. What he fails to realise is that, immediately you invoke a Creator and posit a plan (even an unknown one!) you ascribe responsibility. And Mr. Harris's contradiction makes no difference here. A volcano may erupt "according to the laws of its own essence" or of its own "free will". If the former, the Creator must be held responsible for the "essence": if the latter, for granting "free will" to the volcano to erupt! Free will, in short, raises more problems than it solves, for the theist.

Mr. Harris is right to consider the plane survivor's view crude and shabby, but in fact it is more logical than his own. If there is an omnipotent God, the conclusion is inescapable: he must be held responsible for saving the one passenger and killing the others. No question of free will or inner essence arises. Of course this is an intolerable position for anyone of sympathy and sensitivity, and Mr. Harris understandably revolts against it. But his revolt is moral, not logical. Only in atheism could he correlate his morality and his logic.

CORRESPONDENCE

SECULAR MARRIAGES

Leslie Hanger article (6/5/60), struck a cord in my own heart. A few weeks ago I was married in the Birmingham Register Office. I do not know much about the marriage registrations of Soviet Russia, but I do know that in the capital city of the English Midlands, the business of becoming a husband (was in any case, and presumably in other cases), conducted with quiet dignity, great courtesy, and full understanding. My prospective bride, myself and some forty guests were ushered into a large, tastefully furnished apartment by a corporation official. After we were comfortably seated, and within a few minutes, the government registrar and his clerk entered, wished us all good morning and, in a pleasant voice spoke the plain and simple words of the undertaking. The formal questions were then put and answered; the ring soon reached its destined place and, the bargain sealed, the Registrar shook hands expressing his hopes for our happiness and good fortune, and so, with formal good byes, it was over.

There was nothing about procreation, obedience, the surrender of goods or individuality, no swearing, no oaths, no Gods—ours was a simple, straightforward bond between man and woman who have elected to walk hand in hand without superstition or supernaturalism. I believe that register office marriages will continue to expand as the human mind is emancipated from the traditions of the past. Much of the glamour and attractions of church marriages is accounted for by the lovely strains of organ music, a feature missing from register office marriages but, by permitting a short recorded composition (at the choice of those concerned) this handicap could easily be overcome in the register office.

THOS. H. R. JAMES.

A PROFITABLE MONARCHY?

I believed the cost of maintaining the Monarchy was met by the tax payer. An article in the press, however (*Manchester Evening News* 3/5/60), would appear to prove quite the opposite. "Parliament did a very good deal with George II under which the Exchequer received the income from the Crown Estates and provided an income for the sovereign in return." We are further informed that, in 1958/59, the Crown Estates brought in about £3,200,000. Operating costs were about £1,636,700. The Civil List costs about £552,000, "so there is a handsome net gain for the Exchequer". We are ruled by a monarch "who puts more into the national purse than is taken out for salary or expenses". In view of the topicality of the matter I feel sure many of your readers would welcome the views of others.

T. PRESTAGE.

"WHAT CAN WE OFFER?"

Colin McCall's article "What Can we Offer?" is mostly padding until we get to the last paragraph. This is the only one that matters and what he says just is not true. Secularists (just like Idealists) are *not*, repeat *not*, receptive to new ideas. Like

their opponents on the opposite pole, they "don't want to know". They are extremists and so nihilists.

What can Secularists do? They should (but they will not) look for a philosophy that is logical; and this can only mean one that balances one extreme against another and results in eclectic Idealism and Materialism; or Freewill and Determinism; or Individualism and Communism.

FRANK A. WATSON.

THE RISE OF CHRISTIANITY

Reading the leader of your issue of May 4th, I noticed with interest that Mr. Ridley seems, by implication, to contemplate the possibility that Christianity arose in Rome. In an article to this effect, printed in the December 1954 issue of *The Monthly Record* of the South Place Ethical Society (and reprinted abroad in various papers), I stated that the scriptural claim to Galilean ancestry is just as legendary as Virgil's story that the founders of Rome had been Trojan fugitives. (A few copies will still be available from Conway Hall.)

However, religion being a mollifying mirage of the world, it cannot stem from any scientific upsurge. Scientists of antiquity could think up inventions, but they could not have jumped the line of necessary development in their knowledge of metallurgy and mechanics. The Materialist Conception of History gives the logical explanation for the rise of Christianity as a necessary antidote to the despair into which the slaves and proles of Rome had been thrown in a time of a disintegrating society of chattel slavery. However, they expected the deliverer any hour—a mystical Messiah from abroad. It was only when they had given up hope of an early redemption that, during the 1st and 2nd centuries, they set to writing down the gospels and a canon. All these efforts were sorted out at the Council of Nicaea (4th cent.) and, for the first time, put into a settled system.

Christianity's decisive victory over the Romanised form of Mithraism—a creed of oriental antiquity—can only be plausibly explained if we see that Christianity was not another oriental creed, but arose in Europe and has since been periodically revised to suit European conditions.

P. G. ROY.

THE YEAR'S FREETHOUGHT THE FREETHINKER FOR 1959

Limited number only.

Bound Volume 32/- (Post free)

THE PIONEER PRESS, 103 Borough High Street, S.E.1.

IS SPIRITUALISM TRUE? By C. E. Ratcliffe.

Price 1/-; postage 2d.

(Proceeds to THE FREETHINKER Sustentation Fund)

CATHOLIC IMPERIALISM AND WORLD FREEDOM. By Avro Manhattan, 528 pages, paper cover

Price 20/-; postage 1/3d.

LECTURES AND ESSAYS. BY R. G. Ingersoll.

Paper covers, 5/-; Cloth bound, 8/6; postage 10d.

FAMILY PROBLEMS AND THE LAW.

By Robert S. W. Pollard. Price 2/6; postage 6d.

FREEDOM'S FOE: THE VATICAN.

By Adrian Pigott. Price 2/6; postage 6d.

CAN MATERIALISM EXPLAIN MIND? By G. H. Taylor.

Price 3/6; postage 6d.

THE PAPACY IN POLITICS TODAY. By Joseph McCabe.

Price 2/6; postage 5d.

A SHORT HISTORY OF SEX WORSHIP. By H. Cutner.

Price 2/6; postage 6d.

THE DOLLAR AND THE VATICAN: Its Character, Methods and Aims. By Avro Manhattan.

3rd Edition—Revised and Enlarged.

Price 21/-; postage 1/3

ESSAYS IN FREETHINKING. By Chapman Cohen.

Series 1, 2, 3, 4. Cloth bound.

Price 7/6 each series; postage 7d. each.

PRIMITIVE SURVIVALS IN MODERN THOUGHT.

By Chapman Cohen.

Price 3/- (specially reduced price); postage 5d.

BRADLAUGH AND INGERSOLL. By Chapman Cohen.

Well illustrated. Now again available.

Price 6/-; postage 8d.

THE BIBLE HANDBOOK (10th Edition). By G. W. Foote and W. P. Ball.

Price 4/6; postage 6d.

AGE OF REASON. Thomas Paine's masterpiece with 40-pages introduction by Chapman Cohen.

Cloth 4/-; postage 7d.